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**NEITHER HERE, NOR THERE:
A REFLECTION ON ABORIGINAL WOMEN AND IDENTITY**

BY

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**A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of**

Master of Arts

**Department of Native Studies
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba**

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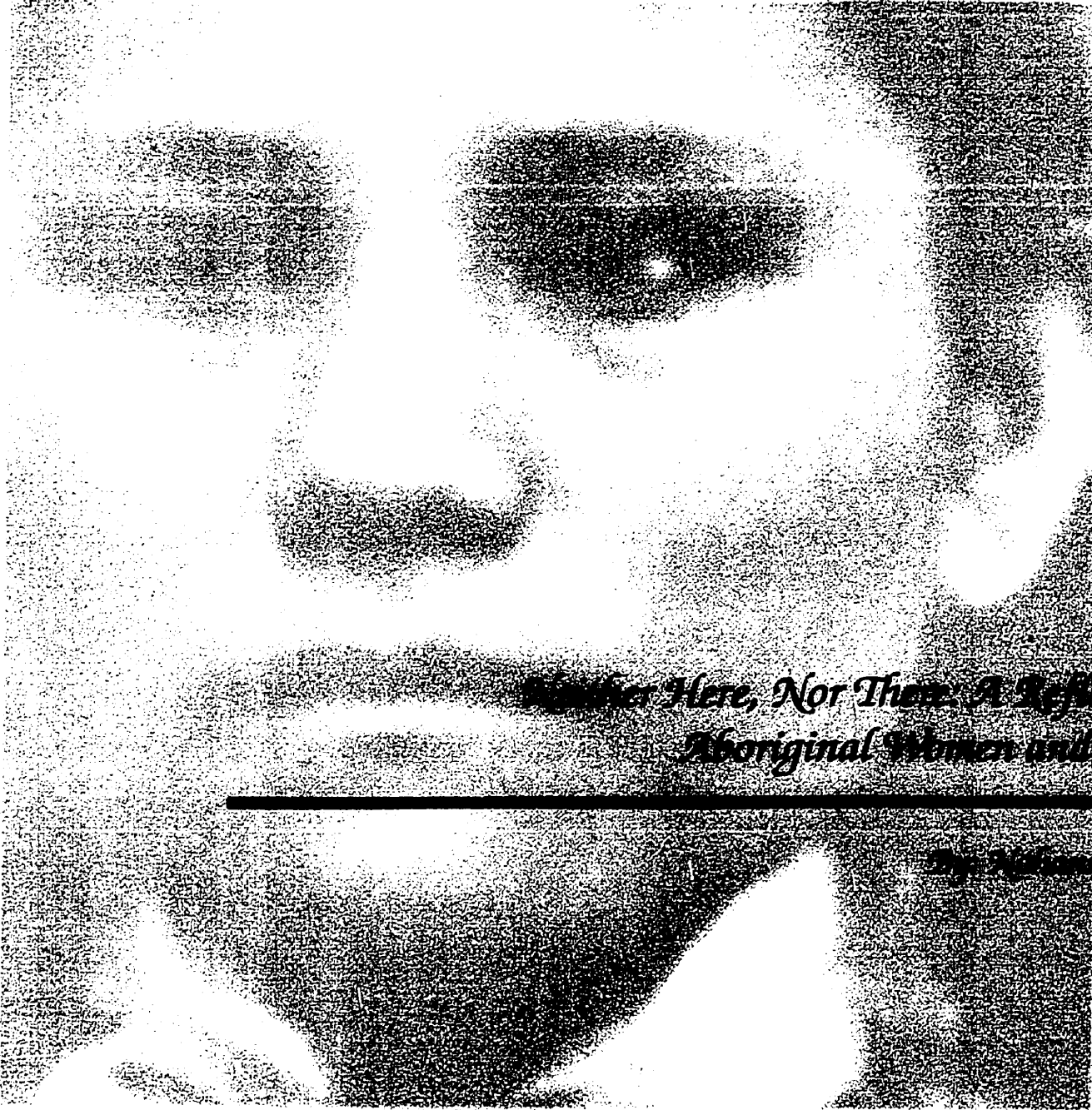
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**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University of
Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree
of
MASTER OF ARTS**

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*Neither Here, Nor There: A Reflection on
Aboriginal Women and Identity*

By Nishani Fontaine

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"Mafik Jchi"

*To our elders who teach us of our creation and our past
so we may preserve Mother Earth for ancestors yet to come.*

We are the land.

*This is dedicated to our relatives before us thousands of years ago and to the one hundred and fifty million who
were exterminated across the Western hemisphere in four hundred years time
starting in 1492.*

*To those who have kept their homelands and the nations extinct due to mass slaughter, slavery, deportation and
disease unknown to them and to the ones who are subjected to the
same treatment today.*

To the ones who survived the relocations and the ones

who die along the way.

*To those who earned on conditions and live strong among
their people.*

To those who left their communities by force or by choice and generations who no longer know who they are.

To those who search and never find.

To those who make it back to live and profit

at the struggle of their people.

To those who give up and those who do not care.

*To those who abuse themselves and all others
and those who repent again.*

*To those who seek strength in our spirituality
and ways of life*

*To those who fall for the lies and join the dividing
lines that keep us fighting amongst each other.*

*To the leaders and prisoners of war, politics, crime
and religion - innocent or guilty.*

To the young, the old, the living and the dead.

*To our brothers and sisters and all living things
across Mother Earth and her beauty we've destroyed
and denied the honour that the Creator
has given each individual -
the truth that lies in our hearts.*

- Ulali

IN MY SACRED CIRCLE

There are many people that I need to acknowledge and honour in my life. These are people who have either pushed or encouraged me to finish this piece of work and without them, would never have been completed. These are people that I truly love and respect and I feel incredibly grateful that Creator put these people in my life.

First and foremost, I must say “meegwetch’ to my Creator and the Grandfathers and Grandmothers. Creator has always been with me, protecting and loving me even in my lowest and most discouraging moments. Truly, without Creator I would not be here and I mean that not in a metaphorical sense but in an absolute physical way. There are many times when life was much too unbearable to take and endure but somehow the whisperings to go on fighting penetrated the deepest parts of my spirit and allowed me to continue on.

Linked with the above is the love and devotion I have to my five and a half year old son Jonah. I say “meegwetch” to my son, who represents everything true and pure in my life. Truly, the gift, spirit and love of my son, provides the very essence of my existence. I say “meegwetch” to my sweet baby who patiently (actually, not really) put up with me spending countless hours working on the computer and/or going to night classes and not having his mommy there to tuck him into bed at night and give him his good-night kisses and hugs. I recognize that in pursuing this research much time and energy has been taken away from my son and poured into my work. My hope is that when my son is older he will recognize how important it is to have educated Anishinabe peoples and that his sacrifice in this process is to the benefit of the collective. *Niin zaagiin Jonah.*

I would like to acknowledge and honour Dave Powell. Over the last several years Dave has proven to be my best friend, as well as the best dad in the entire world to our son. Dave was there for me when my mother died and has always shown support and interest in the pursuit of trying to honour her spirit through this research. Our friendship and parental partnership has been the pivotal component in allowing and giving me the support (economic, social, spiritual) to complete this research.

I would like to say “meegwetch” to members of my committee. Dr. Susan Heald’s teachings and discussions have provided me with a new insight and a deeper in-depth analysis which has carried itself over from academia into the realm of politics and into the socio-cultural realm of my existence. Meegwetch Susan for taking on this research (in spite of your incredibly busy schedule) and providing me with your expertise, patience and friendship. I would like to say “meegwetch” to Dr. Peter Kulchyski for agreeing to be on my committee in spite of his very new position in the Department of Native Studies, in addition to not really knowing me and/or my work. I would like to say “meegwetch” to Dr. Jill Oakes who put up with all of my phone calls and questions over the course of this research and who also helped me to jump through the many different hoops needed to complete the program. I would like to say “meegwetch” to my community member Sandra Funk who teaches me to continue on in the struggle of Aboriginal women. Know that my love and admiration for you, and all of the work you do in the community to address and end the oppression of our people, can not be put into simple words. My life is truly blessed for knowing you. I would like to acknowledge and honour fellow graduate student Jennie Wastasecoot. Jennie and I began the program at the same time and really learned to lean on one another when times were rough and when self-doubting thoughts

would emerge. I want to say “meegwetch’ for all her encouragement and for her friendship which means so much to me.

Finally, I would like to say “meegwetch” to all of the women who participated in this research. Meegwetch for sharing your life stories and spirit with me during our time together and allowing me to share what was discussed with the academic world.

INTRODUCTION

“Who am I?”. *“Where do I belong or relate as a woman part Ojibway and part French Canadian?”*. *“What does it mean to be an Aboriginal woman?”*. The noted above seem to be questions that I have asked and sought answers to on a daily basis throughout the last several years of my life. The quest for the almighty ‘Truth’ in regards to my identity only bestows further alienation and confusion when I am confronted with a space of ever changing multiplicity and ambivalence. Conceivably, this inquiry when indigenous is further abstruse and painful when confronted and experienced from within a Western patriarchal colonial oppressive framework and history. The notion of identity is one of extreme interest and importance to me as I continue to observe and experience the tangible realities of the Canadian colonial context both as individual and as part of an indigenous collective. Moreover, as native women, the idea of identity is crucial to understand and seek out, as Aboriginal women currently are the most disadvantaged group, both socially and economically, within all of Canada. Dr. Emma LaRocque maintains that Aboriginal women have suffered from the effects of racism as well as sexism. Consequently, throughout the colonial process, racism and sexism have “undermined the place and value of women in Aboriginal cultures...[and have] dispossessed us of our inherent rights, lands, identities, and families,” (LaRocque,1996:11). Currently, there appears to be a space in which contemporary Aboriginal women are (re)defining and (re)claiming what it means to them to be Aboriginal and what it means to them to be an Aboriginal woman. This thesis seeks to explore the notion and complexity of identity as it relates to Aboriginal women within the contemporary Canadian colonial context. How do Aboriginal women view and position

themselves within a contemporary context? As well, how do Aboriginal women negotiate their subjectivity within conflicting historical and contemporary discourses? The overall objectives of the research are a) to provide an overview of various theoretical theories on contemporary identity; b) to record Aboriginal women's perspectives and constructions of their identity in their own voice and; c) to provide a theoretical analysis on how Aboriginal women's identity constructions create and open a new post-colonial space in which to (re)claim and (re)define themselves. In simple terms, the purpose of this research is simply to present the multiplicity of voice, place and identity of Aboriginal women within the contemporary Canadian perspective. On a more personal note, the fundamental purpose in pursuing this research is for me a way to honour and acknowledge my mother's struggle and legacy as an Aboriginal woman.

Sandra Kirby and Kate McKenna note in their book *Experience, Research, Social Change: Methods From the Margins* that "researching from the margins is a continuous process that begins with a concern that is rooted in experience" (1989:44). Similarly, this particular research fundamentally derives from my quest for assurance in who I am and in trying to understand those seemingly contradictory subject positions that I occupy as an Aboriginal woman. As well, this research derives from my seeking to understand the context of my mother's tragic life as an Aboriginal woman and how her life and death really shaped the person that I am today.

My mother, Sharon Louise Fontaine, was a beautiful, shy, insecure and ashamed Ojibway woman from the Sagkeeng Anishinabe First Nation. Like generations of my Ojibway family, my mother was born and subsequently buried on the reserve. At the age of thirteen, after being sexually abused countless times, my mother ran away from home.

My mother traveled around the country and when she was sixteen she met my French Canadian father Leopold Longpre in Montreal, Quebec. At the age of seventeen, my mother found out she was pregnant and after much indecision on my father's part, it was decided that she would continue on with the pregnancy. My father's abusive and negative influence towards my mother began soon after she was carrying me. I am told by various family members that when she was about eight months pregnant my father had tried to convince her to inject some heroin to see what might happen to the baby. Luckily, one of my uncles was there and stopped him from convincing my mother to do so. Soon after I was born, my mother was forced into the sex trade by my father as a way to support him and myself. Soon after her introduction into prostitution, my mother began using a variety of drugs, including but not limited to, heroin. Truly, this new relationship with drugs and alcohol in addition to the abusive relationship she shared with my father would be the beginning of the end for my mother. On April 13, 1995 at the age of forty-two, when I was six months pregnant with my son, my mother died of a heroin overdose on the floor of a public bathroom stall. I remember looking down at my mother's lifeless body at her wake and thinking that to the people who found and tried to resuscitate her, she was just another useless Indian like many of the portrayals we see displayed in the media. But to our family and community, she was a daughter, an aunt, a sister and of course a mother. For me, the place of my mother's death is the ultimate symbol of Aboriginal peoples', more specifically Aboriginal women's history and place within Canada. Kim Anderson notes in her book *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood*, our elders believe that "we were always here ... we didn't come from someplace else ... we might have moved around on this continent, but we were always here" (2000:129). Even

though Aboriginal peoples have always been here, we are treated many times with such disdain, disrespect and hate that it ultimately contributes to Aboriginal peoples' disadvantaged position in this country.

Like many Aboriginal people in this country, my mother did not know her history and/or culture and traditions. Or if she did, she tried very hard not to be Indian, even going to the extent of dying her dark brown hair blond in an attempt not to be Indian.

Metis author Joanne Amott notes this same type of behavior in her father. She writes:

I am convinced that my father doesn't "know" that he is Native. I think perhaps one of his brothers, the most visibly Native of the bunch, "knows," but he has never spoken to me about it. My father's sister has been knowing/not knowing it for years, she has told and denied so many times that I get dizzy thinking about it" (quoted in Anderson, 2000:145).

The knowledge among Aboriginal peoples about our true history and what once might have been our culture and traditions was and indeed still is something that is actively repressed by the colonial state so as to ensure its own economic, social and political superiority. When the first European foreigners stepped upon this sacred land, they brought with them a poisonous ideology pertaining to anything and/or anybody that was not of European decent. That is to say that the "Other" (i.e. Aboriginal peoples) was (is) seen as pagan, less than human, evil, savage, etc.. Very early on in the colonial process indigenous peoples on Turtle Island were taught to hate themselves and everything within their culture and tradition. My mother's lack of knowledge and/or pride in who she was as an indigenous woman is the product of this colonial process and legacy (internalized colonialism) across Turtle Island. This internalized colonialism/hatred was passed on to me by my family, more specifically by the women in my family. Not only was I taught

not to be proud and assured in being Anishinabe but I was also bestowed a very dysfunctional ideal on what it meant to be a woman. As a little girl, I remember all of the 'johns' that would come to my mother's apartment and all of the awful 'noise' they would make. There were a couple of occasions when my mother would wake me up and tell me to pretend I was sick or something so that the guy would leave. I can remember walking into her bedroom half awake and asking if she could come and take care of me while this half naked john would be leering at me. I remember both my mother and my grandmother having drunken parties in which 'johns' would come over and they would dance partially naked for these 'men'. Janice Acoose notes how she:

learned to passively accept and internalize the easy squaw, Indian whore, dirty Indian, and drunken stereotypes that subsequently imprisoned me ... I shamefully turned away from my history and cultural roots (quoted in Anderson, 2000:106).

Like Janice Acoose, I internalized the belief that as Indian women we were nothing more than sex objects for men to use and abuse. However, throughout this time I also learned that there was more to being Indian but did not quite know what that might mean or look like. I started to experience this newness or curiosity about being Aboriginal during my high school years when studying Canadian history and when one of my teachers somehow knew that I was Indian and made a big fuss out of it asking all sorts of questions about where I was from and what 'kind' of Indian was I (of course I had no idea about anything). It was really then that I consciously realized there was something interesting and original about being Indian. I just didn't have a clue what that was but I liked the feeling this new knowledge brought me. In addition to the above, I remember going to Sagkeeng to visit my great-grandmother Louise Spence (the mother of eighteen

children), helping her in the yard and listening to her stories about the 'olden days'. So unlike some families that tried to repress being Aboriginal, in my family you always knew you were Indian. My grandmother spoke the language to us, always made us make bannock, we were always going back and forth to Sagkeeng. Other than the above, our family didn't know and/or partake in anything else that would be considered Aboriginal. So you occupied a context where you knew you were Indian but were not really sure what that meant and/or implied. Nevertheless, knowing that I was Indian (whatever that may mean) gave me a beginning from which to forge my Indianness.

It is only in the last ten years as I have begun to get educated about our history and struggle that I feel I understand a little more of what it might mean to be Aboriginal. Moreover, it is only since the death of mother that I have sought to understand what it might mean to be an Aboriginal woman. Both the Anishinabe and Canadian heritage and culture that has been passed on to me has in many ways been a source of internal conflict as I struggle to make sense of different worldviews and cultural practices. I find that I am pulled on a daily basis into many different directions and experiences. In addition, I personally can not begin to examine the concept of identity without including the impact that globalization has on my identity. I have begun to recognize in the last several years that now more than ever globalization has a tremendous impact on all of our identities. By way of illustration, when I think of my spirituality and what I believe to be Creator and our reason or purpose in life, I know that I have been influenced by many different cultures and traditions that I have either come into contact with and/or read about. When I receive teachings from the Elders, those teachings and beliefs get filtered through my own knowledge and then turned into something that encompasses everything that I have

ever heard and/or been taught that I feel is truth. In one sense, my spirituality is not Aboriginal as it is conventionally thought of, however, in another sense I could argue that my spirituality is Aboriginal but just expanded and/or adapted. The above illustrates just one aspect of my identity in which globalization and the influx of many different perceptions, beliefs, lifestyles, and so on have changed the way I see and experience things.

In truth, I see myself as neither Aboriginal nor French Canadian but something new - but something that is still fundamentally indigenous. It is an identity that encompasses everything that was, everything that is and everything that is to be within the human experience. I am neither here, nor there but something new within all collective and individual experiences.

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

2.0 Overview

The following section will provide an overview of the methodology employed throughout the course of this research. This section will be relatively short as the methodology employed is an integral component to both the literature review and the data analysis. As such, the methodology is interwoven into each and every section of the research. In addition, the following section will provide the reader with information on the various methods I employed throughout the research process and those methods particularly important when conducting research within the Aboriginal community.

2.1 Methodology

This research is grounded in Post-Colonial and Feminist Theory. From within these two realms of theory, the following insights have emerged:

- There is no one true identity of Aboriginal women.
- Employing the categories of “Aboriginal” and “woman/women” are highly problematic as it implies a generic and unified set of experiences, place, voice and the cultural and historical specificity of each cultural group.
- There is no possibility of retrieving or knowing absolutely pre-contact era identities.
- Identity is a continual and fluid process, always in transition.
- The post-modern condition has seen the end or destruction of essential and universal notions of truth and Western logocentrism.
- Identity is first and foremost a social construct and not a preordained “thing”.

2.1.1 Post-Colonial Theory

According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin in *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*, “post-colonialism ... deals with effects of colonization on cultures and societies [and] the

term has subsequently been widely used to signify the political, linguistic and cultural experience of societies that were former colonies,” (1998:186). The critique of post-colonialism has been employed to examine:

European territorial conquests, the various institutions of European colonialisms, the discursive operations of empire, the subtleties of subject construction in colonial discourse and the resistance of those subjects, and, most importantly perhaps, the differing responses to such incursions and their contemporary colonial legacies in both pre- and post-independence nations and communities (Ashcroft et al.,1998:187).

Bart Moore-Gilbert notes in *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics* that postcolonial theory has had a long and varied history and development, beginning in the early nineteenth hundreds, ...in the Western academy and British university literature departments,” (1997:5). Moore-Gilbert goes on to note that while postcolonial criticism is a fairly recent development within academia, its impact on the cultural analysis of the “interconnectedness of issues of race, nation, empire, migration and ethnicity,” has been substantial (1997:6). Moore-Gilbert goes on to argue that post-colonialism can be seen as a:

more or less distinct set of reading practices, if it is understood as preoccupied principally with analysis of cultural forms which mediate, challenge or reflect upon the relations of domination and subordination - economic, cultural and political - between (and often within) nations, races or cultures, which characteristically have their *roots in the history of modern European colonialism and imperialism* and which, equally characteristically, continue to be apparent in the present era of neo-colonialism (1997:12).

Particularly important for the purpose of this research is Sara Mill’s assertion in her book *Discourse* that:

post-colonial discourse theory is concerned with that the ‘truth’ of those cultures is not recoverable. We will never know what those cultures were

really like; all we have is our interpretations of a set of heterogeneous texts, which had effects in the real world of the time (1997:120).

2.1.2 Feminist Theory

Joanna de Groot argues in “Anti-colonial Subjects? Post-colonial Subjects? Nationalisms, Ethnocentrism and Feminist Scholarship” that feminists “need to go beyond conventional acknowledgments of existing scholarship and place themselves in a responsive relationship to the critiques of women from outside its traditions and practices” (1996:30). Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parmar reveal in their essay “Challenging Imperial Feminism” that “white, mainstream feminist theory...does not speak to the experiences of Black women and where it attempts to do so it is often from a racist perspective and reasoning” (1984:4). Appropriately, De Groot also argues that Western scholarship needs to acknowledge and include in its analysis those elements such as power and privilege of Western women and begin to “explore the complexities, variations and contradictions in analyses of the gender, race, class and colonial dimensions of women’s lives and of the elements of power and inequality in relations among different women” (1996:31). De Groot goes on to argue that the challenge is to shift our focus away from the traditional practice of adding descriptive material and analysis to feminist scholarship formula and to begin with “Indian, African or Latin American women centrally as focal/starting points for investigations, conceptualizations and analyses of women, as no less typical/normal ‘women’ than their white, Western counterparts, as historic and contemporary majorities of females in the world” (1996:31). In “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues against the practice of “middle-class urban African or Asian

scholars producing scholarship on or about their rural or working-class sisters which assumes their own middle-class cultures as the norm, and codifies working-class histories and cultures as Other” (1991:52).

Feminist writers such as Mohanty, Amos and Prammar argue that any type of scholarship that is produced on third world women, Black, Asian or Aboriginal women must not only investigate and examine women solely based on gender difference between the male and female sex. Post-structural feminist theorists would argue that any analysis on and/or about the category and experience of woman/women must also include various other institutional forces and elements: gender differences between women themselves, race, class, colonial histories and sexuality. More specifically, Devon A. Mihesuah argues in “Commonality of Difference: American Indian Women and History” that Aboriginal women are “multifaceted”; as such feminist researchers and scholars must also examine elements such as “race (or races), tribal social systems, factionalism, culture change, physiological appearance, and personal motivations,” (1998:37). Mihesuah maintains that:

authors can challenge notions of fixed identity among Indian women by investigating their subjects’ allegiances to tribal traditions, their definitions of ethnicity and self, their emotions, and physical appearance. Reconstructions of the intricacies of Indian women’s lives must be specific to time and place, for tribal values, gender roles, appearances, and definitions of Indian identity have not been static (1998:38).

Mihesuah goes on to discuss the existence of “multiheritage” women who add an additional complexity to the study of Aboriginal women. Multiheritage women are those women who may constitute: ‘mixed blood’ women; women who retained their cultural

heritage while appearing white; women who “adopted the ways of their non-Indian parent...but physically appeared to be Indian” (1998:41).

Many times all of the noted above categories/elements/components have traditionally been omitted in the process of Western feminist analysis and scholarship with specific reference to Aboriginal women.

2.1.3 Why these methodologies are important in this research

I choose post-colonial and feminist theory to form the core or the foundation of my research because I believe that for women oppressed by the patriarchal system and for indigenous societies colonized by Western powers they provide a sound mechanism at getting to one’s own historical, social, political, gendered and spiritual truth. It provides researchers (or for anyone who is engaged in critical thought for that matter) the authority to question, challenge and dismiss Western patriarchal hegemonic ideals and legislative policies that seek, in my opinion, to repress alternative views about the condition of contemporary society and its causes. Without the freedom to question and challenge why things are the way they are and how they got this way, I feel that as women and indigenous peoples, we will always be under the oppressive thumb of those in power.

2.2 METHODS

2.2.1 Introduction

Historically research pertaining to Aboriginal women has been conducted and pursued from within a Western Euro-centric, patriarchal, racist and sexist framework. Typically, research has tended to present and examine Aboriginal women as a homogenous group, who because of this homogeneity, inherently experience all of the same colonial struggles and consequences. This traditional Western approach to research intrinsically negates the

historical, social, environmental, geographical, traditional, spiritual and cultural specificities of each Aboriginal woman and has ultimately removed Aboriginal women in the construction of their own identity. As such, I have tried for the most part throughout this research process to record Aboriginal women's understanding of their own identity while ensuring that I honour their own indigenous framework and perspective. However, at the same time I also need to examine how current post-colonial and feminist theory relates to what Aboriginal perceive about themselves and the space in which they see themselves operating.

2.2.2 Participants

Participants for my research were recruited from a close circle of friends. These particular friends and friendships were developed from working within the Aboriginal community, more specifically within the City of Winnipeg. The topic of Aboriginal women's identity, either traditional and/or contemporary, has also been an issue continuously discussed among this particular circle of friends in a variety of forums and contexts. This issue appears to be an area of inquiry that these particular women are actively seeking to explore, understand and (re)construct within the dominant Canadian society.

I interviewed a total of eleven Aboriginal women for this research. These participants, while living in the city, represent a variety First Nation and Metis communities, including, but not limited to Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation, Brokenhead Ojibway First Nation, Long Plain First Nation, Sandy Bay First Nation, Opaskwayak Cree Nation and the Sagkeeng Anishinabe Nation. These participants also represented a wide range of socio-economic and educational backgrounds as well as differing age categories (16-52 years of age).

2.2.3 Research Methods and Frameworks

The fundamental research method employed throughout my research was semi-structured interviewing. In the book *Feminist Methods in Social Research*, author Shulamit Reinharz notes that “the use of semi-structured interviews has become the principal means by which feminists have sought to achieve the active involvement of their respondents in the construction of data about their lives” (1992:18). Reinharz goes on to note “open-ended interview research produces nonstandardized information that allows researchers to make full use of differences among people” (1992:19). Moreover, the interview process employed what Kirby and McKenna term intersubjectivity, “an authentic dialogue between all participants ... in which all are respected as equally knowing subjects” (1989:129). Another research method I employed throughout the interviewing process was self-disclosure. As Reinharz notes “researcher self-disclosure during interviews is good feminist practice” (1992:32). Even though I was considered a friend to the women I interviewed, I found the research method of self-disclosure to be a fundamental variable in creating a safe and trusting environment between the participant and myself. I could not conduct a discussion about a topic so intimate and sacred as one’s own identity without equally sharing some of my own thoughts and experiences in the process. In this way, the interviewing process becomes a two-way interaction of sharing and learning and helps to undermine any perceived positions of authority that I might employ as ‘researcher’. In addition, I would argue that the method of self-disclosure is especially important when conducting research within the Aboriginal community because of Western research methods that have been traditionally employed (i.e. being an object of research and investigation rather than an active participant in the creation of

knowledge). As a result of the above, trust, respect and security between researchers and the Aboriginal community are seriously lacking. Indeed, many times I myself have heard members of the Aboriginal community note their absolute disdain for western researchers and say that they are quite frankly sick and tired of being researched. I am not arguing that self-disclosure is the contemporary remedy for decades of research methods that have seriously negated and discredited Aboriginal peoples' views and frameworks. I am simply noting my belief that to conduct research in the Aboriginal community, a person must be willing to give as much of himself or herself to process as they would expect from the person being interviewed – in this way research inherently becomes reciprocal between all parties.

Interviews were conducted on a one to one basis so as to ensure trust and ease between the participant and myself during the process. They were usually conducted in a restaurant and on a couple of occasions at a participant's home. With the participant's permission, all of the interviews were taped with a tape recorder. Once the interviews were conducted, I transcribed all of the tapes and printed out each of the files. Each of the interviews were then cut and pasted onto several pieces of bristle board according to various themes. While this exercise helped in the overall organization of the data, I also found this process to be a tad difficult. I found that much of what the women discussed could not adequately be separated from one another. Nevertheless, after hours of wrestling with the data I managed to organize it into several overlapping themes (as is well documented in the data section).

In one sense, perhaps the most important component in this research process involved the offering of tobacco – one of the four sacred medicines within some

Aboriginal cultures, particularly First Nation. It is of the utmost importance within Aboriginal protocol to offer tobacco to a person when he or she is sharing a part of themselves with you. Offering tobacco wrapped in cloth is a way of acknowledging the sacredness of such an exchange. As such, I offered tobacco to each of the women who were interviewed to ensure that throughout this particular research Aboriginal tradition and spirituality was an integral component to the process. In honouring and adhering to this Aboriginal custom this research becomes not only an academic exercise but more importantly, a spiritual journey for myself, the participant and hopefully for the reader.

THEORY

3.0 Introduction

How does one begin to think about Aboriginal women's identity within the contemporary 'post-colonial' era (if indeed it is *post-colonial*)? Is it at all possible to formulate and singularly describe Aboriginal women's identity within the contemporary 'post-colonial' era when we begin to recognize and acknowledge the influence and devastating impact the invasion of European foreigners had on the First Peoples of this land? Moreover, is it even possible or applicable to theorize about a singular identity when living within a global transitional era? Existence and experience, as it plays itself out in our daily lives, is no longer just made up of the local or the regional, isolated from all other influences.

Human beings currently live within an actuality where images, cultures, economies and perceptions seem to be both inescapably out of our control, but at the same time at our very finger tips through the medium and culture of technology. It is becoming seemingly more difficult to separate specific nations, and by extension oneself, emotionally, culturally and physically, from daily world occurrences, as what transpires in one part of the world inevitably impacts on the other. These variables form endless possibilities of cultural interaction and influence. The emergence, collision and intertwined experience of people from all across the globe converging in one geographical area (with its own colonial history and foundation), makes the notion of one generic Aboriginal women's identity extremely complex, and highly problematic.

3.1 Theoretical Analysis of Identity

Contrary to popular belief, identity is not something that is pre-given, nor has it ever been. One's identity, historically and contemporarily is constantly in a state of fluidity

and process, always changing and adapting. However, there seems to be a tendency to regard identity as something that belongs only to “us” as a right of genetics, ancestral blood and/or our God(s). Not so very long ago, one could go throughout the course of one’s life never coming into contact with anything (culture, traditions) and/or anyone that differed from their perceived norms and mores. A community, a village, a city and a country’s identity for the most part was a *relatively* stable, secure and unchanging entity - or so it seemed. Contemporarily, people from across the globe, be it in metropolitan areas or in the deepest parts of tropical jungles, have begun to recognize and feel the daily effects of Western induced globalization. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin define globalization in their book *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* as:

the process whereby individual lives and local communities are affected by economic and cultural forces that operate world-wide. In effect it is the process of the world becoming a *single place* ... the rapidly increasing interest in globalization reflects a changing organization of world-wide social relations in this century, one in which the ‘nation’ has begun to have a decreasing importance as individuals and communities gain access to globally disseminated knowledge and culture ... This does not mean that globalization is a simple, unidirectional movement from the powerful to the weak, from the central to the peripheral, because globalism is transcultural (1998: 110-112).

Obviously several questions and critical issues emerge from the above description. While the theory and practice of globalization is not the purpose of this research, I feel it necessary to note just a couple of concerns and issues of globalization, as they fundamentally impact and relate to the subject of identity. The process or journey towards a single place or space for the globe, leads one to ask, ‘whose place, whose economics and whose culture’ will and are being deployed? Surely, not people who dwell within the

socially, politically and economically marginally constructed sphere of the “Third World”. Or is it? In the process of moving towards *one place*, how do nations and/or peoples gain equal access to and/or contribute to those disseminating knowledges that would fundamentally constitute this new space? As Jean-Francois Lyotard notes in his book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, “Knowledge in the form of an informational commodity to productive power is already, and will continue to be, a major - perhaps *the* major - stake in the worldwide competition for power,” (1979:5 emphasis in original). I would have to interpret ‘power’ to also intrinsically mean culture because whoever has the power, also has the capacity to deploy its culture. While I maintain that it is not feasible to talk about absolute and isolated identities within a technological era of globalization, the truth of the matter is that some interactions between cultures have more power to permeate and influence global identity than others.

Contemporary identity is kind of like an ambiguous relationship. We can no longer negate the fact that the interaction between various peoples, cultures, traditions, economics, politics and technology imparts something on all of us, as a human species - a transcultural process of give and take. But at the same time, it still is those nations/cultures that possess ‘knowledge’ that create our global reality utilizing itself as its own referent. As Stuart Hall notes in his article “What is this ‘black’ in popular culture?” three fundamental shifts that have occurred in ‘culture’, which subsequently problematize the notion of identity. The first, according to Hall is the end of Europe as the epitome of and referent for ‘culture’. The second is the United States’ rise as a “world power and ... the centre of global cultural production and circulation,” (Hall,1996:465). The third and final shift is the emergence of the post-colonial voice from

Third World nations. Out of these shifts has come the need to examine what contemporary culture is, or if culture is truly reflective of these 'New Times'. In the article "Who Needs 'Identity'?", Hall notes that the deconstruction of the notions and beliefs of identity is unlike:

those forms of critique which aim to supplant inadequate concepts with 'truer' ones, or which aspire to the production of positive knowledge, the deconstructive approach puts key concepts 'under erasure' (1996:1).

Within the realm of modernity, the goal was to seek out Truth - Western Truth - on identity. Truths about identity were made stringent and absolute and allowed no room for maneuver and/or contradiction. In the above, Hall notes that these absolute concepts - which I would argue contributed to the process of justifying imperialism - are now 'under erasure' and are currently being challenged and problematized. That is to say, if one is to live within the global era, with its influx of technology and culture, one can no longer speak of an "integral, originary and unified identity" (Hall,1996:1). While still noting its conceptual difficulties, Hall argues in favour of the concept of "identification" which is:

constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation ... [this] discursive approach sees identification as a construction, a process never completed - always in process (1996:2).

Identification means that one can 'identify' with many peoples, communities, ideologies and/or any material external realities - one can fit or belong anywhere and everywhere. And because, as Hall notes, the concept of identification is constructed and is always in process, it allows one's identity more fluidity and flexibility to change and adapt to external and internal determinates. As Hall notes, identification, based on the foundation

of recognition, also leads to solidarity - an entity very much needed in an era of political and social upheaval, environmental degradation, etc. However, I would argue that the power and beauty of 'identification' fundamentally rests on the capacity of the individual and/or collective to recognize identifiable components as constructed and not as pre-given, otherwise identification could also be taken as an absolute notion of identity, and the solidarity created would be exclusive and rigid - available only to a select few. As such, people's recognition would intrinsically understand that:

identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions (Hall, 1996:4).

The question remains "How should identity be examined?". Hall argues that identities need to utilize the:

resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves" (Hall, 1996:4).

Arguably, now more than ever, cultures and societies around the globe need to examine this process of becoming, while at the same time not forgetting our pasts. It would seem the collective 'we' would want to examine identity from the standpoint of where we are going, how we are represented around the globe, and whether or not that image or identity is truly representative of the way we are or want to be. In one *extreme* sense, *who we were* or *where we came from* are questions truly irrelevant in this global era. We no longer occupy those same spaces and face those same realities.

Iain Chambers notes in his book *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*, the notion and complexities of migrancy and its impact and relation to identity - with both the individual

and host nation/community. As I noted in the introduction, we can no longer talk about a 'them' and/or an 'us' because of technology and global interaction. Chambers also alludes to this phenomenon in the following:

When the 'Third World' is no longer maintained at a distance 'out there' but begins to appear 'in here', when the encounter between diverse cultures, histories, religions and languages no longer occurs along the peripheries ... but emerges at the centre of our daily lives, in the cities and cultures of the so-called 'advanced', or 'First', world, then we can perhaps begin to talk of a 'significant interruption in the preceding sense of our own lives, cultures, languages and futures (Chambers,1994:2).

In this sense, there are no more first or third divisionary worlds, but one global space in which we all interact and converge (however, with differing degrees of power and influence). While migrancy is not a new phenomenon (peoples have always migrated to neighboring areas), the rate of occurrences, numbers of people and variety of geographical distances that the practice of migrancy now occupies, is a fairly recent event. As such, global migrancy is truly a force in which nations, communities, traditions, peoples, etc. come face to face with the truth about identity - that is to say, it is all socially constructed.

Chambers goes on to argue that migrancy, or the experience of interaction within new geographical and cultural areas, leaves newcomers and domestics within a context of constant questioning and reasoning. The newcomer is caught within in the realm of belonging to an initial home, the space of departure, and a new and culturally different home, the space of arrival. In Alan Lawson's article "Australian and Canadian Literature" the author notes this ambivalent state when he suggests that national identities are a fundamental problem and a:

structural, colonial one. 'Who am I when I am transported?' is an inevitable colonial question and in countries where the climate, the landscape and the native inhabitants did little to foster any sense of continuity, where the sense of distance, both within and without was so great, the feeling that a new definition of self - was needed, was, and is, overwhelming persuasive (Lawson,1995:168).

As well, Homi Bhabha quotes T.S. Eliot as asserting that:

people have taken with them only a part of the total culture ... The culture which develops on the new soil must therefore be bafflingly alike and different from the parent culture: it will be complicated sometimes by whatever relations are established with some native race and further by immigration from other than the original source (quoted in Bhabha,1996:54).

Thus, individuals from within both spaces - native and foreigner - are forced to confront and break "barriers of thought and experience," (Chambers,1994:2). This space of breakage demands that we:

recognise the need for a mode of thinking that is neither fixed nor stable, but is one that is open to the prospect of a continual return to events, to their re-elaboration and revision (Chambers,1994:3).

Canada represents an excellent example of the need for new forms of thinking when addressing and/or revisiting the past, present and future notions of identity. For generations, Canada has tried (unsuccessfully) to disregard and assimilate the Aboriginal population and negate its colonial history. As Margery Fee notes in her article "Who Can Write as Other?":

The majority culture has either actively caused or passively allowed the loss of traditional indigenous languages and cultures world-wide. For example, Native children in Canada were frequently either sent to boarding schools with White teachers who often punished them for speaking their native languages, or taken away from their parents and communities (Fee,1995:243).

At the same time, Canadians have refused to acknowledge or work through their own ambivalent state of being, both as the foreigner and as the *apparent* native. Arun Mukherjee argues in her book *Postcolonialism: My Living*, that Canadian nationalism is a racist ideology and that only “its proponents determined what is Canadian culture” (1998:79). So it would appear as though historically, the underlying probe seemed to be “who or what is Canadian; who doesn’t fit within this category and how can we protect this identity from the ‘Other’?”. Slavoj Zizek addresses this paranoid fear in his book *Tarrying With The Negative*, when he notes the dominant culture assertion that this ‘Thing’ is:

accessible only to us, as something “they,” the others, cannot grasp; nonetheless it is something constantly menaced by “them.” ... The national Thing exists as long as members of community believe in it; it is literally an effect of this belief in itself (Zizek,1993:201-202).

However, a fundamental question arises from within the Canadian context: “who are “they”?”. At its essence, Canadians themselves are the “they” and it would appear as though, this national Canadian Thing is really not their Thing at all, but simply bits and pieces of everyone and everything that ever was. So really, contemporary conceptions and questions of identity would demand that we *experience* the hazy realm of constructed boundaries, and acknowledge that the above inquiries are no longer relevant, as there is no one absolute identity in which one can or must fit. As such, we begin to see assumptions and ideals that have gone unchallenged be re-addressed and deconstructed, thus inherently calling upon the ‘Canadian’ population to readjust their thinking. For example, as more and more Aboriginal peoples migrate from various First Nation communities into metropolitan areas, and their demographics continue to increase, their

mere presence of difference forces the breakage of borders, thought and experience - the traditional 'Canadian' space. Monture-Okanee believes that the First Nation notion and conception of borders do not necessarily fit with the Canadian idea:

What needs to be understood is who has done the defining. It has not been First Nations. Many of us do not accept this great lie any longer. We understand the solution lies in our inalienable right to define ourselves, our nations, our governments ... (quoted in Mukherjee, 1998:71).

All of the above really puts into question what is contemporary identity? For me personally, Homi Bhabha's notion of the third space really allows room for maneuver, adaptation and ambivalence. Homi Bhabha presents his theory of the 'in-between' or 'third space' in the article "Culture's In-Between". Bhabha's very difficult concept of the third space truly notes the contemporary reality of identity between newcomers, natives, post-colonial peoples and the ever increasing presence of globalization. Perhaps, the first term in need of definition is Bhabha's notion of "hybridity". Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin define hybridity as meaning:

the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization. As used in horticulture, the term refers to the cross-breeding of two species ... to form a third, 'hybrid' species. Hybridization takes many forms: linguistics, cultural, political, racial, etc. Bhabha contends that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in a space that he calls the Third Space of enunciation [and that] cultural identity always emerges in this contradictory and ambivalent space (1998: 118).

For Bhabha, out of colonial and colonized relations comes a new and unique identity, one that is intrinsically constructed within the subjectivity of the other, and which upon analysis, breaks down traditional notions and/or practices of holding onto or maintaining our "Thing". Within this third space, what was deemed our "Thing" (our identity) can also be designated *their* Thing as well and at its core create a brand new Thing. In Lawrence

Grossberg's article "Identity and Cultural Studies: Is That All There Is?" the author notes that Bhabha's third space means:

the subaltern is neither one nor the other but is defined by its location in a unique spatial condition which constitutes it as different from either alternative. Neither colonizer nor precolonial subject, the post-colonial subject exists as a unique hybrid which may, by definition, constitute the other two as well...People who inhabit both realities ... are forced to live in the interface between the two (1996:91-92).

Homi Bhabha's theory of the in-between or third space is available and applicable to everyone on the globe as each community, nation and individual lives and experiences a reality next to an "Other". However, for the purpose of this particular research the fundamental question seems to be does Homi Bhabha's theory of a third space, or any of the above theorists notions for that matter, reflect what Aboriginal women currently believe and perceive about their own identity?

THE WOMEN'S VOICES

4.0 Introduction

Each of the interviews I conducted began with the very broad and generic question "What does it mean for you to be an Aboriginal woman?". From this question, there emerged a discussion of how the participants saw themselves from within both the historical and contemporary context. A variety of themes developed from the interviews related to the women's identity. These themes ranged from the spiritual and physical spheres of their reality, to the men within our community. In this chapter, I shall present what the women discussed with me according to various themes as they emerged. It must be noted that I personally see many, if not all of these themes as interwoven. Moreover, in this chapter I shall note and employ the participants' own words (always italicized) simply because no other words would best describe what the women conveyed to me. As well, it is my belief that utilizing oral tradition is a fundamental way of truly honouring and acknowledging the voice of the participants.

4.1 Themes

4.1.1 Traditional Discourse

Within the Aboriginal community or worldview, I would argue that the predominant discourse in which Aboriginal women operate involves the notion of woman/women as the foundation, the life giver, the cultural caretaker, as intimately related to Mother Nature - the pillar upon which rests the survival of the Society. Well known Aboriginal novelist Jeannette Armstrong echoes this belief in "Invocation: The Real Power of Aboriginal Women" when she states that "the role of Aboriginal women in the health of family systems ...[and] of the responsibility of bearer of life and nourisher of all

generations is ... clear in its relationship to all societal functioning,” (1996:ix). This notion is voiced and sustained throughout an individual’s (male or female) lifetime through indigenous teachings, myths and legends (spiritual and cultural, although these are many times one and the same); and through sacred and spiritual ceremonies - sweat lodges, Pow wows, rite of passage - which inherently denote and place Woman/women as closer to Nature by virtue of their moon times (menstruation) and child bearing biological abilities. Armstrong embraces and promotes the essentialist binary view of the relationship between men and women, and each one’s place and voice within the collective when she argues in favour of and maintains that:

In traditional Aboriginal society, it was woman who shaped the thinking of all its members in a loving, nurturing atmosphere within the base family unit. In such societies, the earliest instruments of governance and law to ensure social order came from quality mothering of children ...[and] it is the strength of this female force that holds all nations and families together (1996: ix-xi).

Likewise, Sarah Carter echoes this view in her essay “First Nation Women of Prairie Canada” when she notes that when First Nations peoples were pushed onto reserves and resources and morale were low, it was the “work of women ... [that] was vital, materially as well as spiritually [and that] women were perhaps even more essential to family and band survival than ever before,” (1996:58). As well, Betty Bastien maintains in her article “Voices Through Time” that “one of the major roles of Indian women has been to maintain ‘tribal identity’ for their children and their children’s children” (1996:127).

Most, if not all, of the interviews conducted began with a very traditional view on what it meant to be an Aboriginal woman. Discussions or illustrations (like those noted above) of Aboriginal women taking care of the whole indigenous society or Aboriginal

women as the real leaders of the community, were images employed by the majority of the participants. These images of Aboriginal women fundamentally contributed to the construction of their own identity and how they saw themselves and their role within the Aboriginal community. By way of illustration, one participant named Chicka Dee, who is an incredibly strong politically and socially active woman in the Aboriginal community stated:

When the men were at war they [women] took care of the camps, they took care of everything. They made sure the children were protected. I think it was just a given. The women knew what their roles were and the men knew what their roles were. I know from oral history that they knew their roles, it was instinctive. The men respected the women's roles and really honoured and valued the women. Some of the decisions about going to war were made by the women. There had to be the grandmothers, there had to be the Council of Women, there had to be the Clans. In every decision everyone was included, including the women. I think they were the most valued. I remember a man saying a story about Creator giving the man a woman in order to bring happiness in life. He created man first but Creator saw how man was lonesome and couldn't procreate and so he created woman. I believe that is the closest you can become to Creator is being woman because of the life they have, the life that they carry on and the life that they nurture, teach and protect. Our women were the caretakers, they were the ones who kept the community, they were the ones who looked after the children. They were the teachers, they were the faith keepers (personal communication, June 12, 2000).

The image of Aboriginal women as lifegiver and nurturer was also shared by Cheryl, who explained that being an Aboriginal woman also meant being connected with the spirit of Creator. For Cheryl, being an Aboriginal woman means

that I am an original woman of this land and that I am connected, in a sacred way, to Mother Earth. This is also true for other human beings - the connectedness, but not all people honour this connection or see it in the same way. I am a proud and gratefully strong Anishinabe Woman, and by virtue of that state of humanness I am gifted with the gift of endeavour, with which I honour my connection to Mother Earth and to the Spirit World with each given breath, heartbeat and thought (personal communication, June 2, 2000).

One characteristic or feeling that displayed itself throughout each of the interviews, which for me is extremely difficult to describe, was the sense of pride and dignity found

among our women in maintaining that traditional (whatever 'traditional' may specifically mean to each participant) place of Aboriginal women. In spite of the colonial legacy that many of us (if not all of us) have had to endure there is an overwhelming sense of pride in our community, in our people and in our history. This is a pride which translates itself into the survival and preserving of our perceived cultures and our traditions. One participant named Deb explained it this way:

I believe that it is the women in our communities and our urban centres that are going to lead the way. And so, I am really honoured to be a part of that movement. And I see so many friends and relatives of mine that I am so proud to be associated with. So many women that for years fought racism and discrimination, fighting for programs and now finally it feels to me, I am forty three years old, that governments are finally starting to listen to us and get the hell out of our way and letting us do things and lettings us work with our youth and work with our kids. It is an exciting time and I am really glad I am alive and I am really glad that I have two daughters that are a part of that (personal communication, July 3, 2000) .

Many, if not all of the women interviewed expressed and shared the above traditional image of being an Aboriginal women. However, at the same time these same women also expressed a counter view.

4.1.2 Counter Discourse to the Traditional

Chris Weedon provides an analysis of Foucault's theory on discourse in *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*. She notes that "discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning ... they constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects which they seek to govern," (1987:108). We currently see Aboriginal people employing what Foucault would call "reverse" discourse. This involves "challenging meaning and power, [and] it enables the production of new, resistant discourses," (Weedon, 1987:111). Weedon goes on to argue

that the first stage in producing a new discourse begins with resistance at the individual level, thus producing “alternative forms of knowledge or where such alternatives already exist, of winning individuals over to these discourses and gradually increasing their social power,” (1987:111). Discourses pertaining to Aboriginal women as the all encompassing Mother/Nurturer have been communicated repeatedly throughout literature and oral tradition, and I would argue are fundamentally based on the biological differences between the sexes - women give birth, men do not. While this biological fact can not be disputed, it inherently shapes each sex’s role and responsibility within the society. Many Aboriginal men and women wholly accept and strictly endorse this view of native women and it is seen as the *traditional* place of Aboriginal women. During the interviews, there emerged a variety of counter discourses in which the 'traditional' was challenged and considered. Some women saw their identity as something that went beyond the traditional view and/or belief of Aboriginal women as the cultural caretakers of the society, or as the member of an indigenous society which was intrinsically closer to Mother Earth by virtue of her physiology. Some women maintained that their identity differed from their mothers’ and grandmothers’ simply because they operated from within a different time and space. Many of the women noted that the contemporary space in which they operated is a global and technological space, a space which fundamentally differs from that of hunting, fishing and trapping, farming, etc.. This is not saying that these life sustaining activities no longer exist or that they are no longer a vital component in the shaping of identity for Aboriginal peoples as this type of assertion simply would not be accurate. It is merely to illustrate that while Aboriginal women are typically categorized from within an Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal traditional ideal, many women feel that this conception has

no bearing on them contemporarily and does not adequately reflect their reality. As Homi Bhabha notes in “The Commitment To Theory”, strictly maintaining a ‘traditional’ premise contributes to the “problem of how, in signifying the present, something comes to be repeated, relocated and translated in the name of tradition, in the guise of a pastness that is not necessarily a faithful sign of historical memory but a strategy of representing authority in terms of the artifice of the archaic” (1994:35). While in and of itself, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with this type of practice, it does produce some very tangible effects and consequences. Those of us who do not necessarily agree and/or fit within this concentric box, are left with the feeling of disloyalty; not wholly woman, not wholly Indian. Those women seeking to venture out of this constructed realm into a new constitution must consistently come up against this belief and defend their actions and desires from within this sphere of supposed existence and place. Undoubtedly, the construction of the indigenous woman/women as closer to Mother Nature and all of the associated discourse has a necessary and critical place within the collective consciousness especially in light of the sexual, domestic and colonial abuse that Aboriginal women have endured (not all of course, but a good majority). However, it is when one is not allowed and/or is discouraged from venturing away from this realm of existence and knowledge that one is again subjected to another form of oppression. One participant explained her confusion about what constitutes the traditional in this way:

I didn't know my grandmother that well but I think that she, as an Aboriginal person experienced things that are old kind of ways. My mom grew up in that and so she knows everything about that and it was never really passed down to me and I've modernized. It's a whole different thing now. As Aboriginal people I think that is the past history and it's kind of gone. And now as Aboriginal women we have to ... were not picking berries or solely taking care of the children. I think as we change, our culture also has to change and what we do also has to change and what we do is always changing. I guess I have

missed out on a lot but I'm also experiencing and seeing new things that those people won't see (personal communication, May 20, 2000).

There was a general recognition and agreement found among the participants that there was a kind of contradiction in maintaining and adhering to a solely traditional view on Aboriginal women. One participant, Darlene, explained it this way:

We hear all these romantic notions - we are the backbone of the nation, we have so much responsibility, we are so good and we are going to pull it all together. And we just need to survive sometimes. We are just so overworked with all the responsibilities we have to our nation. The image is getting bigger and bigger. But when in reality there is not a voice, the oppression for women seems to be getting stronger. No voice. Politically not represented, very much an old boys club. The oppression is so thick that you are labeled militant, lesbian, everything that keeps you still so oppressed and lost. To continually go against it, on top of looking after our kids and our house, and everything else - you get really tired. A romanticized notion of Aboriginal women is very marketable and still goes back to Pocohontas and to Indian Princesses, still that same image is very much prevalent. I think that people in the dominant society want to hear and believe that. They don't want to hear that we are sick, that we are hurt, can't feed our kids or trying to get out from underneath it. They want to hear how much responsibility we are willing to take on, and that everything is good. This in turn keeps us exactly where we are, not moving forward but not moving back. They are not perceiving to move us back when they really are (personal communication, July 14, 2000).

Other women sought to redefine what it meant to be an Aboriginal woman by not allowing anyone or anything (government, community, teachings, etc.) to define them.

One participant named Wendy explained it this way:

Because I'm Aboriginal and because I'm a woman, I have statistics say certain things about me and who I am. I will be uneducated, that I'm destined for failure because of that identity. Now if I would have believed that I'd be ten foot underground and walking around like a zombie if I had believed in that. But because I believed in something better for myself...it's like proving that I'm better than that. Ya, I had a child when I was a teenager but that didn't stop me from getting educated, it didn't stop me from being where I need to be in this lifetime. So if you look at the statistics of Aboriginal women, I'd be doomed to failure right off the hop because I was poor, violence, drugs, whatever ... I had all that against me. If I had believed that I'd be nothing today. I guess it would for me to carrying on traditions as they were taught to me by my mother and grandmother. Part of that is creating harmonious relationships between myself and all things. Whether they're animals or people, Mother Earth, the trees. That's my understanding of why I'm here. But I also don't want to be just kept within the confines of just being an Aboriginal

woman cause I think that beyond that I belong to the human race and don't I want to be pigeon holed into one distinct identity. So I think spiritually I like to think of it as being here as a human being. And then it transcends all these walls that we've built up about race or identity. So in my life look for things that will make me a stronger person, whether that's in the Aboriginal culture or in the Buddhist tradition, whatever. I've been taught to use what fits (personal communication, May 14, 2000).

Another participant indicated the following:

I think it is up to the women themselves to figure out who exactly who they are. We know that Aboriginal women are so diverse. Diverse backgrounds, diverse images, diverse sexuality. We are viewed with those two images and that is it, when we know we live in the middle. Interrelated, we are all of those things together. I think the whole aspect of who you are as an Aboriginal woman, the two discourses that have kept us enclosed is the place where we really just need to kick out of it and just push and fight it. If we can empower our young people just to be who they are and kick past the crap is the key. And even ourselves, allowing ourselves to kick past all the stuff that we are suppose to be like this or like that (personal communication, July 14, 2000).

Clearly the above quotes illustrate the participant's resistance to any type of discourse, Western and/or Aboriginal that seeks to confine, define and/or regulate what their identity might or should look like. I would argue that this resistance to being defined by anyone and/or anything is creating a new space in which to reconstruct a contemporary identity. However, I would also argue that it is not without discomfort and/or confusion that this new space emerges as the next theme will clearly illustrate.

4.1.3 Acceptance

Another theme that emerged throughout the discussions was one of 'acceptance'. Some of the women felt that they were not accepted in either the Aboriginal community or the dominant society. Anderson notes this non-acceptance felt among Aboriginal women. Aboriginal women who were considered 'mixed' particularly felt this feeling of not being accepted. She recounts the following story:

Catherine and I were talking about the classic line that many of us often hear from white people: "Oh, but you don't look Indian." One

time this happened to her in the presence of a Penobscot Elder. He offered this response to the woman who had made the remark: “She is that way for a reason. She can go to places we can’t go. She can speak in places we can’t speak. People like her have been part of our culture ever since time began. We have always had people like her to do the work we can’t do (2000:31).

This feeling of not being accepted had for some participants a tremendous impact on how they saw themselves and their self-worth as a person and led to a sense of confusion. One participant who felt she was not accepted explained in this way:

Most of the time when people want to know my background. Lots of people don't know what I am, they're like "what are you?" I don't have really dark skin but they know I'm not white They're not quite sure, so I feel like I'm never totally in. When I'm at school I definitely feel the separation because I'm not totally white or totally black or totally Aboriginal. I'm stuck in the middle and really don't know where to go. People kind of see that as "oh she likes to hang out with white people because she wants to be white" But I really don't care what they think, but it is what happens. And when I go to drum group I never feel like I'm totally ... Like everyone is Aboriginal .. I never totally feel like I'm accepted in the group because I don't look like everyone. It's hard to try and fit in somewhere. I don 't really know where I belong (personal communication, May 20, 2000).

Wendy discussed not being accepted from within the context of migrancy to and from the reserve:

Because I was brought up in the city [Winnipeg] I was considered a dirty Indian here in the city and when I would go up north I would be called a white Indian. So I was not accepted (personal communication, May 14, 2000).

In contrast, other women turned the notion of acceptance on its head by countering and acknowledging that they did not need to fit in anywhere. Some of the women recognized that historically it has always been the indigenous peoples who have needed to adapt their worldview, traditions and beliefs in order to fit within the dominant Euro-Canadian society. These women believed in their own truth and experience and felt no need to try and conform to western notions of womanhood or societal norms, either Aboriginal or

non-Aboriginal. As one participant explained, it was not she who did not fit in as an Aboriginal woman but they (society, institutions. etc.) who did not fit within her space:

I used to feel that I didn't belong anywhere and that I was an outcast. I would find myself sitting by myself because nobody knew where I was coming from or what I was talking about. The respect for human life, the environment, our children, the struggle. Nobody was in that mind frame or that space at that time and so I used to feel that I didn't fit anywhere. I was told one day "you don't have to fit in that world, it's them trying to fit in your world." And I thought about that and I thought it is true because I have a different worldview than a lot of people. I don't have to fit, to be a part of this and a part of that. I don't have to feel left out. And I have never felt left out since then. I walk in my truth wherever I go. The truth meaning Ahagatiin Bimotzween, the true way of life, walking in your own truth. We live to the best of knowledge of respect, and love. I can't walk in your way, I can only walk in my own way (personal communication, June 12, 2000).

Another participant relayed issues of acceptance by way of her daughter. Darlene is originally from Garden Hill but has been living in the City of Winnipeg for over twenty years. Darlene has an 18 year old daughter whose father is non-Aboriginal. Her daughter, born with blond hair and blue eyes, physically did not look Aboriginal but was raised within the culture and traditions. Her daughter has always been treated differently in the city than in Garden Hill. Darlene described how she has dealt with these two conflicting spheres:

I am Oji-Cree and that is who I am. When I think of home I think of Garden Hill. I get off the plane and I am home because that is who I am. But when I was little if someone called me white that would get me fighting and I would hide that always. It was just so important for me to hide that I had white in me. So I am at the point in my life where I have a blond haired, blue eyed daughter and I had to figure out how to raise her. So I go through two things. I really get upset with my family up north. They almost like worship her which is a really weird thing for me. Cause the racism is still very much there. I don't even know if it is the racism of her being so blond, the internal stuff. But at the same time they will say "white". So I really had to learn in my language and going after my own family not to say "white" all the time because that is what she is reflecting on. I try not to use blame words. I try not to use blanket statements. Somehow because she has been raised in the culture, she has a real strong grounding in the culture and history and identity, she has really developed a real sense of worth. And this year she has been kicked out of her classes a lot and it is really interesting because she had one teacher that told the kids to go research their history because they might have Metis blood and they could

get their education free. So she went after him hard and he threw her out and he wouldn't let her in until she apologized and he didn't understand why she was so upset. And so she wrote to him for the rest of the year. I really found that interesting because I think I assumed she would assimilate because she doesn't look like me. Maybe my emphasis was too much on how she looked and that inside and collectively the history that is all there still. And it is more important what is inside (personal communication, July 14, 2000).

While the feeling of not being accepted was discussed among the participants, I personally see the same resistance being brought forth as in the first two themes. Clearly, just because some participants experienced not being accepted this did not deter them from still creating a new space in which to define and reclaim themselves. I would argue that this resistance comes from healing and empowerment that many of the women have been experiencing over the last several years of their life and the desire to combat all of the negative constructions that have been forced or brainwashed upon them.

4.1.4 Intergenerational Pain and the Path to Healing and Empowerment

Another theme that presented itself throughout the discussions was the intergenerational pain found among our families and the participants' path to healing and empowerment. All of the women interviewed felt they had gone through a lot of healing and empowerment throughout their lives with regard to their Aboriginalness, while at the same time noting how their mothers' and grandmothers' pain and hurt influenced the construction of their own indigenous identity. Many women would relay that healing by first beginning to talk about their mothers and/or grandmothers and how they perceived those women's views on being Aboriginal. Many described family histories which involved their mothers and grandmothers hiding their Aboriginalness either by wearing lots of make-up to make themselves look 'white' or by moving from the reserve into the city to get away from what was perceived to be a bad place. As well, many described how

their mothers and/or grandmothers made conscious decisions to marry outside the Aboriginal community and into the 'white' community because according to the women interviewed, this was the best that these women could hope for. Anderson found this same thing occurring when she interviewed Wanda Whitebird, a Mi'kmaw who married a white man because "that was the thing to do back then: if you were going to be an Indian, you may as well marry one that isn't Indian" (2000:148). Deb recalls her perceptions and memories of her mother:

My mother was sixteen when she left her community of Norway House. She was the oldest girl, did a lot of work, big family, ten kids. My grandmother was very ashamed of being Indian and my grandmother used to tell me stories about how my grandfather's family, he was half Scottish and half Indian, would shun her and wouldn't even talk to her because it was like she didn't exist because he married an Indian woman. I guess he was supposed to marry white and flush out the Indian that was there. My mom was very ashamed of who she was. It was dirty to be Indian. She married white which she thought was the best thing for her. I remember when we were little girls we would ride down to main street and my father would say "lock the doors". And my mother would lock the doors while she was looking out the window trying to recognize somebody walking down main street because she was so lonesome. It just broke my heart. When my mother was dying, she told me not to tell my daughters who we are because it will make it harder on you and on me. She meant "don't tell them we are Aboriginal" (personal communication, July 3, 2000).

Sandra recalls her parents' decision to move away from their home community and her parents' mechanism in dealing with the fact that they were Aboriginal:

My parents are from the Interlake area. The nearest reserve closest to us was Brokenhead. Anything that happened on the reserve was very negative. People drank, it wasn't a good influence. I guess my parents wanted better for us and so they always denied our Aboriginal background. So as we were growing up you weren't called a Metis, you were called a half-breed. Which really brought down the Nation. The half-breed came from a European word, it meant that you were less than the whole. So I grew up with that negative attitude yet knowing that we had native blood in us (personal communication, June 28, 2000) .

Belinda goes on to note that many of us, because there was such a need to hide and/or repress our Aboriginalness in our mothers' and grandmothers' times, have never even learned how to be Indians:

I wasn't comfortable saying that I was an Indian ... part of that was the shame. Not ever learning or knowing your history. Not ever learning to be proud of who you are. My sister had some chicks but didn't know how to take care of them so they asked one of their farmer friends "how do you take care of them". The farmer told them the chicks need to stay with their mother or else they won't know how to become chickens. My sister and I went holy cow, cause that's exactly what's going on with us because we haven't learned how to be original people of this country (personal communication, August 2, 2000).

Out of these many similar family histories came the notion of an intergenerational healing and empowerment. The consensus held that we, as Aboriginal women, have moved beyond and have challenged those pains and hurts that were so prevalent in our mothers' and grandmothers' lives. This is not to say that the women who were interviewed did not feel pain and hurt throughout their lives - they did - but that they took all of the colonial garbage that has been passed down to them for generations and countered it with their truth and experience based on their Aboriginalness. By way of illustration, Chicka Dee described how her life fundamentally differed from that of her mother and grandmother and her role as an Aboriginal in the healing and empowerment process:

I have killed some of the cycles that were instilled in my grandmother and my mother I have killed stereotypes of the submissive woman, the poor Indian woman who can't amount to anything. I have killed the belief of the Aboriginal woman who is devalued and disrespected by de-brainwashing myself. I killed the cycle of alcohol drugs and sexual abuse in my own family. I have worked on a lot of healing. I have talked to a lot of elders and been to a lot of ceremonies. I value and respect myself for who I am and I know that once you respect yourself in who you are, people recognize that and will give you that honour and that respect. But I don't think it comes easy, you have to continually work at it and that is going to be a forever. Empowering yourself, you empower your children, you empower your community and you empower your nation. The way I see my mother and grandmother is not the way I see myself. When the Europeans came here our women's roles were belittled and put down. They were no longer respected. They were

brainwashed to believe that they were lesser than. And today we are fighting to say that we are not. We have nothing to prove to anybody. Killing those stereotypes and cycles is reclaiming who I am. All of that crap made me very unhealthy, made me very unstable, it made me mentally incompetent, it made me feel ill of myself, I wasn't worthy. I didn't matter. It is because of what mainstream society puts in our heads. It is like everyone is attacking us still. Not in the sense of physically but attacking us emotionally and mentally. Trying to kill the spirit of our people. People can't say that it doesn't exist because I live it everyday. I see it and I call it. If you don't address it, it will never be addressed (personal communication, June 12, 2000).

Wendy relates her empowerment to the teachings that were given to her by her mother:

If we look at how our grandmothers were treated or were saw in the culture, we were strong women and we pulled our load more than European women do. We have strength, we work hard, we perform more duties that don't fit into what a European women is good for - their looks, frail, sweet and innocent and dependent. I haven't been raised that way; I've been totally independent. My mom taught me to be independent (personal communication, May 14, 2000).

She also goes on to note that healing to her means that she and her family are healthy and then that healing and well-being can be extended into the collective community:

I guess I never really got involved with community stuff here in the city but now I'm starting to get involved like with my job at Andrew Street Center. I'm starting to work in the community, I think that's just a process. I felt I needed to work on who I was and work on my family first before I could give anything of benefit to the community. I feel pretty grounded in who I am and whoever decides that I'm not Aboriginal, that's their issue, that's not mine to carry and I no longer wish to carry that bullshit (personal communication, May 14, 2000) .

Wanda explains her healing and empowerment as something that she was strategically brought up with because of the pain and the hurt her father had experienced as a boy:

My father actually made a pact with his brother because my dad was so involved in the politics of the community at that time and he knew the anger, he knew the pain, he knew the frustration. I mean they had it, with the residential schools and that was all in his family. What they both agreed was, that they would raise their children without that. So I was not raised with that anger and there was a conscious decision taken by my father to do that. And what I know from my mother is love, love, love. All there is love. She is very open, she's very giving. So how I was raised in terms of my Aboriginal heritage was all the positive things (personal communication, May 28, 2000).

Again in the above section we see the creation of a new and resistant space in which Aboriginal women can begin to construct their identity even if that means that it fundamentally differs from that of their mother's and grandmother's. I would venture to argue that a fundamental component to each of the participants' healing and empowerment came and comes from the practice of Native spirituality as is described in the following section.

4.1.5 Spirituality

Another theme that presented itself very poignantly was that of spirituality. Throughout the interviews the realm of spirituality consistently flowed in and out of our discussions. By 'realm of spirituality', I mean that interconnectedness and respect of all living and non-living things that really forms the core of Aboriginal spirituality. Aboriginal spirituality is not separate from public and private life and is not relegated only to one day a week. Anderson notes the following about spirituality:

... many people do not divorce spirituality from politics, business, education, health or social organization ... For many Native women, spirituality is the heart of survival, resistance and renewal. Some of the women I interviewed mix Christianity with Native spiritual traditions, but many have turned exclusively to Native spiritual tradition because it allows them to claim an identity that has been historically denied. Many Native women told me it felt like they had finally found something that was "ours" when they began to practise Native spirituality. The practise of Native spiritual tradition is, in and of itself, an act of resistance to all the conditioning that Native ways are "evil," "pagan" and witchcraft" (2000:133).

Anderson goes on to note that:

... a connection with the Great Mystery has been a significant factor in helping Native women resist oppressive experiences and redefine their womanhood. Taken in an Indigenous context, it is really a part of everything we do (2000:136).

During the discussions I asked the women whether or not their spirituality was intertwined with their identity and what influence it had on them. It must be noted this was a very difficult question to ask as well as gather a response for. Spirituality is something that is so sacred and personal, many times it is hard to put into words, let alone into English words that do not have the same conception and experience. The predominant notion and/or explanation of Aboriginal spirituality by the participants was one of the interconnectedness between the physical and spiritual realms of reality and the inability to separate oneself from that experience. As Cheryl states:

In my understanding as an Anishinabekwe - Anishinabe woman - I know that there is a natural world and there is a spiritual world and we are as much a part of one as the other. At the same time without even having to refer to time. I guess that there is that eternal knowing in the spirit world and then it coming through us and living through us in the natural world. It is like a circle (personal communication, June 2, 2000).

Darlene offered a similar account of Aboriginal spirituality. However, at the same time Darlene noted some of the conflictual tendencies that could sometimes be found within Aboriginal spirituality and its experience:

I think it is everything, absolutely everything. When you go on the Medicine Wheel, and there is the physical, the emotional, the spiritual, all of that needs to be balanced with who you are. So if you have that piece balanced that is important. But then there are stereotypes of Aboriginal people as so spiritual and God-like ... you kind of resist that. You resist even talking about how spiritual you are. It kind of brings us into the closet. It romanticizes it, and when to me its everything. If that's the big piece of who you are and you can find some strength and guidance from spirituality, it just helps you (personal communication, July 14, 2000) .

Like Darlene, many of the participants stated that Aboriginal spirituality was something not really talked about and/or celebrated openly. As Deb notes:

I think it is in everything you are. We need to celebrate our spirituality more openly because I think it is a hushed event. I think it is a consequence of being an Aboriginal person because our spirituality was stripped from us. As a people I still don't think we are comfortable, we are still fighting. We are still trying to find out who we are. I mean

we don't have sweat lodges in the city, we don't have teaching lodges in the city and we sneak out to Roseau Rapids for ceremonies (personal communication, July 3, 2000).

For Wanda, it was when she started receiving her teachings that her identity as an Aboriginal woman really began to flourish:

When I came here and I sat with an Ojibway teacher of the medicine wheel, who just started walking down the Red Road, I knew that I could ask her about the traditions and teachings. And she shared that with me and that was the beginning. And that is only six years ago. The door swung open. Sometimes it shocks my family and my husband because I wasn't this strong into my identity when he married me. And here I am dressing and acknowledging my identity and getting into it. We've had some discussions about that because it has been it bit jarring. I said this has always been me except I haven't had an opportunity to explore it (personal communication, May 28, 2000).

The above are just a few examples of statements the participants gave when discussing spirituality. As was noted in the introduction to this chapter many of the themes are interwoven with one another. Spirituality represents one of those interwoven themes so difficult to dissect and organize simply because it was intersected into everything the women discussed. In addition, it is my belief that to try to convey that experience and belief of spirituality which the women held to close to their being via the use of words is grossly inadequate and is the antithesis to the Aboriginal practice and worldview on spirituality. As such, I feel it must be noted for the record that I have only shared little bits and pieces of what was shared with me out of respect and honour for the sacred.

4.1.6 Blood Memory

Another theme that presented itself was that of blood memory. Blood memory, or cell memory as it is sometimes called, is a conception that all of the participants brought forth. Blood or cell memory is the belief that there is something within either of these two components that trigger one to recognize and/or remember where one originated from.

Anderson describes blood memory in the following manner:

I now see my experience as a lesser version of the “adoption breakdown” syndrome that so often happens to Native teens that grown up in white adoptive families. At some point our loss makes itself known ... Why does this happen? ... Sylvia Maracle has suggested to me that my experience was the manifestation of blood memory. Many Native cultures teach that we carry the memories of our ancestors in our physical being. As such, we are immediately connected to those who have gone before us. We live the trauma that has plagued the previous generations. We know their laughter, but also their sorrows (2000:24-25).

Blood memory was described and explained by the participants as something that allowed a person who was culturally and spiritually lost and alienated to help guide themselves back within the culture and spirit. Chicka Dee explained her definition of blood memory and how it impacted on her perception of identity by sharing a dream with me and sharing her explanation of the dream:

I had this dream I was in a restaurant and I was sitting there with this woman who is also a singer, Jo Seenie. And this man came up to us, and we were wearing these beautiful jackets - they were like ice white - it was a crystallized jacket of champion singers. This man came up to us and was really putting us down and was laughing at us. And this other man who is very respectful came over and he said "you leave these women alone". The other man said "well who are they to sing, they have no right to sing and what right do they have to hit a drum." The other man said "things have changed they have rights too." And I said to him "you don't even know who I am" I pulled out this ID card and said "I am a granddaughter of a Sun Dance Keeper. And I pulled out another card and said "my great grandmother was a name giver and I pulled out another card. I was pulling out ID cards to validate who I was and knowing that I don't have to do that. Knowing that it is in my blood. I know this from things that have been passed down to me. It is also in my blood because I carry their blood. My father always says to me that you can never deny your own blood because that is like denying your own child because that is your blood. Blood is ancient, blood is like knowledge that everyday some comes and arrives and we know something but we don't know how we know it. It is like a bubble of knowledge that is within us. And so that encounter with another human being, it is in our spirit, it is in our blood. Someone comes along and says something and releases that knowledge. I know what I know because it is in your blood line. It is ancient, it is old and it is real (personal communication, June 12, 2000).

Another participant explained blood memory as a recognition of Aboriginal culture and beliefs before ever having any teachings and/or assurances that what they were thinking was indeed right. Deb explained in the following manner:

I guess the biggest example is when I was eighteen and I used to walk from my bus stop and I would talk to the sun, the sun was my dad. And I decided that the moon was my grandmother and I would talk to her. This is previous to me knowing anything, no one had ever told me anything. I really believe that those things come deep down from within our core as a human being. I think that specifically when I hear that drum, I know I am Aboriginal, I know that is where my heart is. If I had to choose between being Cree or Dutch, I know I would have to choose being Cree because that is who I am (personal communication, July 13, 2000) .

Sandy asserted the resurgence of Aboriginal women within the political realm as a product of blood memory:

I went to an Elders gathering and I was sitting in the conference with a well respected Elder and he was talking about when the Europeans first came over and how before that Aboriginal women were very much an equal and they were seen as the decision makers. They held the Senate's seats, they chose who the Chiefs were going to be. And he said the Europeans came over with their paternalistic background, they had ownership of their women. When the Treaties were being signed Aboriginal people would gather with everyone, their families, men, women, the Elders, the children. Everybody was there. The Europeans came alone without their women and so in a lot of cases they (Aboriginal peoples) felt that this can't be the final signing of the Treaties because their women aren't here. But they soon came to realize that this was the way they did business and that the Europeans wanted to deal with the men because that was their experience. And so the women stepped back and gave up their power in order to keep the peace, to keep the economy going. This was the way the Europeans wanted to do business and so rather than stall the whole thing they would just step back. And this Elder said "now is the time that the women are starting to take their power back. It does not make the man any less a man and doesn't make the woman any more of a woman. What it is doing is reclaiming our way of life. A lot of it is coming back through blood memory" (personal communication, June 28, 2000) .

Blood memory was also described as a linkage between Anishinabe peoples. As Darlene states it is that mechanism which allows you to feel at 'home':

Like I said when I get off the plane up north or even just to get up north once a year there is this incredible urge for me as I get older to be up there and to know the trees, to be near the air. It is a different atmosphere. And so, it is also like that collective memory, it

is also the hurts that you can feel but it is also the incredible strength and power that it took for our people to survive up there, our people to survive the residential school system and their children being taken away. So all of that combined ties back to who we are (personal communication, July 14, 2000).

Belinda relays a story about a time when she believes she saw the physical manifestation of blood memory:

One time we were drumming on the big drum at a children's healing gathering on the Assiniboine Downs grounds. There was this white woman there with her adoptive native son who attended the gathering. When we started singing on the drum, the woman told us that the little boy heard the drum from way across the grounds and immediately came running to find the drum. She said he had never heard the drum before but as soon as he had gotten to where we were he started laughing and singing, basically celebrating with the ancestors (personal communication, August 2, 2000).

Similarly, Anderson recounts a woman's story about the drum and it being able to trigger blood memory. She writes:

Edna Manitowabi, also a singer, describes the first time she heard the drum. The sound reached deep inside her. It was like "finding a great sense of peace," "coming home to where I belonged." It changed her life. "The sound and the vibration of the drum triggered a very deep emotion in my heart that awakened my spirit. It allowed me to see life in a different way, in a spiritual way. The memory of my grandmothers and grandfathers, my ancestors, my historical memory, my blood memory was awakened in me" (2000,142-143).

Blood or cell memory represents one of these very critical variables in the formation of the participants' identity. Blood memory is similar to having a pass into your history, culture and spirit as an Aboriginal person even if you didn't have that knowledge and/or access to these elements before. It is an assured connection to those ancestors who have come and gone before you as well as to those who are yet to come. Having experienced some of these same things (i.e. recognition of Aboriginal culture prior to having any teachings, etc.) I myself absolutely believe in this realm of possibility.

4.1.7 Aboriginal Men

Paula Gunn Allen notes in her book titled *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering The Feminine In American Indian Traditions* that early settlers and missionaries:

could not tolerate peoples who allowed women to occupy prominent positions and decision-making capacity at every level of society ... The colonizers saw (and rightly) that as long as women held unquestioned power of such magnitude, attempts at total conquest of the continents were bound to fail (1992:3).

As Mona Etienne argues in her essay titled “Women and Anthropology: Conceptual Problems”, it was the systematic policy of missionaries to “attack ...the autonomy of women,” (1980:18). As such, whether speciously or not, Aboriginal women’s identity was systematically altered through text that was produced for the colonial nation(s) (reports, journals, art, etc.). By way of illustration, let us briefly examine the following passage written by the Reverend Peter Jones, a missionary to the Ojibwa people:

In accordance with the custom of all pagan nations the Indian men look upon their women as an inferior race of beings, created for their use and convenience. They therefore tend to treat them as menials, and impose on them all the drudgeries of a savage life, such as making the wigwam, providing fuel, planting and hoeing the Indian corn or maize, fetching the venison and bear’s meat from the woods where the man shot it: in short, all the hard work falls upon the women; so that it may be truly said of them, that they are the slaves of their husbands (Buffalohead, 1983:238).

It could be argued that the above passage, and others like it (too numerous to quote) have for all intents and purposes absolutely distorted and misrepresented the indigenous women in question. Reverend Jones did not take into account, or methodically chose to ignore the spiritual, economic, political and social magnitude and importance of performing these activities. Furthermore, by consciously or unconsciously dividing the labour of the community by *sex* and recording it as such, he inherently created a space

where women and men's work was situated into a binary relationship of inferior and superior. This left little room for alternative interpretations of Aboriginal women's activities except as slavery and drudgery. Perhaps, as Etienne argues indigenous males' and females' (in all categories of age) activities and roles and responsibilities were more fluid and "female-male reciprocity and complementarily, rather than female subservience to men, characterized these societies," (1980:6). Anderson notes these same beliefs by recounting what Barbra Nahwegahbow, an Ojibway women, said on the matter:

My mother had her role, she was happy with it, and my father had his. Together they kind of made a team. So there was never any sense in our family of inequality - that her role and function weren't valued (2000:117).

Carol Devens argues in her book titled *Countering Colonization: Native American Women and Great Lakes Missions, 1630-1900* that because women fought and strived to keep these traditional ways, "antagonistic relations between the sexes eventually prevailed in many communities [and that] the friction between men and women is in fact the bitter fruit of colonization" (1992:5). As such, it is no surprise that the context of relations between Aboriginal men and Aboriginal women emerged throughout most of the discussions with the participants. Discussions would sometimes pertain to the role Aboriginal men played in the construction of Aboriginal women's identity. Other times the discussions would lean towards what is felt by some of the women to be a domineering and antagonistic position by Aboriginal men over Aboriginal women. In spite of these differences, one very important theme emerged when discussing Aboriginal men. It was generally agreed upon by the women that Aboriginal women's identity is fundamentally intertwined and connected with that of our men. If one were to examine and/or participate within Aboriginal discursive practices, one would immediately note

differences between Western feminist discourses and that of Aboriginal women's movements. The Aboriginal women's movement does not employ a discourse of 'them' versus 'us' when referring to Aboriginal men. Indeed it is quite the opposite. Many Aboriginal women will adamantly argue and maintain that the healing and/or empowerment of Aboriginal women is intimately tied to the healing and/or empowerment of Aboriginal men. It is generally believed that the empowerment and healing of the Aboriginal collective is not a separate process and endeavour between the genders. The Aboriginal collective as a whole (men, women, children, youth and elders) has historically been, and indeed still is, subject to oppression and domination by Euro-Canadian society and as such, it was felt by the participants that the process and/or mechanism towards empowerment and healing must be a concerted effort by both sexes.

By way of illustration, Darlene asserted that:

There has always been a balance. Half the population is male and half is female. My healing depends on their healing, my survival depends on their survival. So to move ahead and leave the men behind doesn't make sense. To not include them doesn't make sense because we will still be at that point. We are just doing what they are doing. The hurts were laid in on native men and they have never gotten a hand on it. At least we [Aboriginal women] had each other. They [Aboriginal men] have been separated from day one (personal communication, July 14, 2000).

Cheryl went on to declare she really couldn't see many differences between men and women:

I don't believe that there are certain things that man should do and woman shouldn't. But I still believe that both men and women are very important. I know that there are differences but I could never really articulate any of those differences. I don't believe that women are one way and men are another. I don't see men having certain attributes and women have certain attributes (personal communication, June 2, 2000) .

Further to the above, Cheryl goes on to discuss some her perceptions of the contemporary antagonistic relations between the sexes:

It makes me sad that men and women have lost respect for each other. I think men as a group know that they are not the same as Aboriginal men from a long time ago and women know that we are not the same as Aboriginal women from a long time ago. It seems like they did a lot harder work but I think that both men and women know that there are some things that we have lost as a result of colonization. Maybe there is some laying of blame. The men are saying "the women should have been doing this" and the women are saying "the men should have been doing this". Instead of blaming the White man (personal communication, June 2, 2000).

Chicka Dee explained her views on the relations between Aboriginal men and Aboriginal women from in the colonial space that we as Aboriginal women currently operate from within:

Our men have adopted Euro-Canadian mainstream thinking that they are dominant, that they are smarter. All of this is a bunch a crap. We are in the home. We are in the community. We are doing all these things. We are working for the betterment of families, the people, our communities. I don't think men support us in a lot of ways because they don't know what their roles and responsibilities. I think we need to re-teach them. Men identify our roles for us and so some women believe in that. We have a double obstacle to de-brainwash our women in believing that they don't have to adopt those ways in order to survive we have to identify our own roles (personal communication, June 12, 2000).

Anderson notes the following:

Native girls begin to hear racial/sexual slurs from an early age often before they even understand the terms themselves. Ojibway Professor Shirley Williams says she remembers hearing white boys singing, "Squaws along the Yukon aren't good enough for me." The boys would follow up with, "Would two dollars be enough?" playing on the myth the Native women are "easy" (2000:105).

As is noted in the beginning of this theme, many authors have argued that because of colonialism there has been a shift in how Aboriginal women are seen within the collective. What were once strong and respectful relations between Aboriginal men and women are now just transferred colonial distorted perceptions and ideals on what Aboriginal women are and how they should be treated. One participant shared a poem with me for the purpose of this research entitled 'Dreading the Walk'. Clearly the poem

illustrates what Anderson writes about and how men can negatively influence a women's experience and identity.

Dreading The Walk

*A simple walk, turns into a nightmare.
Afraid to be approached, another proposition,
another sick man
Looking to buy sex.
It's like because you're native,
they have permission to ask
if your selling, or willing to sell.
A young girl, young women crossing the street.
A man waving at her,
his finger motioning her to come over.
Young and afraid she ignores his sickness.
He turns his car around, follows her to the bus stop.
She looks away pretending not to see him, scared he will come after her.
His car so shiny, so bright, so new
looking at native women as sexual objects
ready to expose his perversion for buying sex.
What kind of creeps,
creeps around trying to pick me up?
Where do I hold a sign saying "Buy sex here?"
Where do I promote myself as such?
That I am native, you can buy me,
because I walk down the street, I'm selling sex.
Where does it say, it's okay to approach me?
I am Anishinabe Ikwe, I'm a mother, a daughter,
I am a human being with emotions, feelings,
dreading to walk because of who I am.
Sickened by the men, harassing me as I walk.
Angry as I think that I would share something so
sacred, so spiritual, so freely, with the wave of a bill.
An unknown parasite,
who violates a woman being, as she walks.
Like the parasites who cause wide spread diseases.*

- Catherine Richard

While what is described in the poem is for some a daily reality, the author has shown her ability and her resistance not to internalize the negative feelings that most often occur with such experiences and has clearly placed all the garbage back where it belongs - with

the perpetrator. This resistance creates a space in which Aboriginal women can choose whether or not they expect this notion of themselves or if they choose to counter it with the knowledge that it is the perpetrator that is a “parasite”.

Throughout the interviews, the women discussed many very personal things with me. Some of these things ranged from sexual, physical and emotional abuse from family, friends and partners to discussions about their addiction years and the hardships they faced when drinking and/or drugging. I chose to relay and record only the above noted themes because I felt it would be disrespectful for me to write about anything that was too personal just for the purpose of this research. That is not to say that those elements discussed are not just as important as the ones I chose to record in reclaiming and reconstructing an identity. It was a personal choice that I made because I felt that it would be exploiting the participants’ spirits, experiences and teachings that brought them to the point of where they presently were just so that I could get a Masters degree. I have discussed with the women that perhaps at a later date we would collectively pursue a writing project in which we each record those components of our lives that we feel have had the most impact on our process of reclaiming and reconstructing our identity. With that said, the next component that this piece of research must look at is what the theory and the women's words might say to one another.

4.1.8 What do the theory and the women’s voices have to say to one another, if anything?

Stuart Hall notes in *Who Needs ‘Identity’?* deconstruction “puts key concepts ‘under erasure’” (1996:1). It is clear to me from the voices of the women above that all of the participants have put fundamental conceptions of what it means to be an Aboriginal

women 'under erasure' and are actively challenging and changing those conceptions and/or are reclaiming those constructions in a new light. Throughout the discussions, I continually saw examples of the participants deciding what it meant to be an Aboriginal woman and not letting someone else (government, literature, men, etc.) dictate what it meant or what it should look like. For example, let us look again at what Wendy believes:

Because I'm Aboriginal and because I'm a woman, I have statistics say certain things about me and who I am. I will be uneducated, that I'm destined for failure because of that identity. Now if I would have believed that I'd be ten foot underground and walking around like a zombie if I had believed in that. But because I believed in something better for myself ...it's like proving that I'm better than that. Ya, I had a child when I was a teenager but that didn't stop me from getting educated, it didn't stop me from being where I need to be in this lifetime. So if you look at the statistics of Aboriginal women, I'd be doomed to failure right off the hop because I was poor, violence, drugs, whatever ... I had all that against me. If I had believed that I'd be nothing today (personal communication, May 14, 2000).

I would *cautiously* argue that what the women are currently participating in is creating a new post-colonial space. It is a space in which the women recognize how colonialism and sexism have fundamentally contributed to a time and place where their mothers and grandmothers were not free to be themselves and were being "brainwashed", as Chicka Dee maintains, to be white. I use the term 'post-colonial' because I would have to argue that for the most part our people have been taught by the colonial state (residential schools, legislation, overt racism, etc.) to believe that their current situation (poverty, physical and sexual abuse; environmental degradation; additions; band deficits; etc.) is a result of our own actions and that we brought these conditions on ourselves (i.e. "culture of poverty" theory). Recently, someone remarked to me how they had never heard of the term and/or analysis of post-colonialism until very recently and how reading and learning about it has really changed the way he sees the conditions within our Aboriginal

community. This is exactly what I think is happening in our community. As more and more Aboriginal peoples become educated and/or participate within the political and economic spheres of contemporary Aboriginal society, we begin to see that what was once propagated to be our fault has its history and foundation in the colonial conquest of Turtle Island (North America). When we begin to acknowledge and know the above, we can begin to change those things that have been done against us including changing the negative and stereotypical perceptions and constructions of our people. The women who participated in this research clearly acknowledge and show how colonialism has affected their identity, either intergenerationally and/or contemporarily and how they needed to move away from those negative and destructive constructions. As Robert Kroetsch notes in his article titled “Unhiding the Hidden” I believe our women are ‘uncreating’ themselves into something new while at the same time not negating their traditions and cultures (however those may be defined):

It is possible that the old obsessive notion of identity and ego, is itself a spent fiction, that these new writers are discovering something essentially new, something essential not only to Canadians but to the world they would uncreate. Whatever the case, they dare the ultimate *contra-diction*: they uncreate themselves into existence (1995:396).

By way of illustration of the above ‘recreation’, the following assertion by renowned artist Jimmie Durham shows his refusal to be constructed within Westerns ideals and/or stereotypical beliefs about being Indian and instead creates his own identity (indeed one of my all time favorite quotes):

The U.S. Congress recently passed a law which states that American Indian artists and galleries which show their work must present government authorized documentation of the artist’s “Indianess.” Personally, I do not much like Congress, and feel that they do not have American Indians’ interests at heart. Nevertheless, to protect myself and

the gallery from Congressional wrath, I hereby swear to the truth of the following statement: I am a full-blood contemporary artist, of the subgroup (or clan) called sculptors. I am not an American Indian, nor have I ever seen or sworn loyalty to India. I am not a Native "American," nor do I feel that "America" has any right to either name me or un-name me. I have previously stated that I should be considered a mixed-blood: that is, I claim to be a male but in fact only one of my parents was a male (quoted in Churchill, 1994:107).

I also see within the voices of the women the belief that identity is not a static, ever unchanging thing. There is as Hall notes a process of identification that all of us continually go through. Hall maintains the "discursive approach [to identity] sees identification as a construction, a process never completed - always 'in process'" (1996:2). Many times throughout the interviews the participants clearly show that they acknowledge that their identity and context has and continues to change. By way of illustration (again), Isca shares with the reader how:

I didn't know my grandmother that well but I think that she, as an Aboriginal person experienced things that are old kind of ways. My mom grew up in that and so she knows everything about that and it was never really passed down to me and I've modernized. It's a whole different thing now. As Aboriginal people I think that is the past history and it's kind of gone. And now as Aboriginal women we have to ... were not picking berries or solely taking care of the children. I think as we change, our culture also has to change and what we do also has to change and what we do is always changing. I guess I have missed out on a lot but I'm also experiencing and seeing new things that those people won't see (personal communication, May 20, 2000).

Or again as Darlene shares with us:

I think it is up to the women themselves to figure out who exactly who they are. We know that Aboriginal women are so diverse. Diverse backgrounds, diverse images, diverse sexuality. We are viewed with those two images and that is it, when we know we live in the middle. Interrelated, we are all of those things all to together. I think the whole aspect of who you are as an Aboriginal woman, the two discourses that have kept us enclosed is the place where we really just need to kick out of it and just push and fight it. If we can empower our young people just to be who they are and kick past the crap is the key. And even ourselves, allowing ourselves to kick past all the stuff that we are suppose to be like this or like that (personal communication, July 14, 2000).

Many times throughout the discussions, I personally heard Homi Bhabha's concept of a "third space". There are quotes given by the participants that to me clearly demonstrate this "third space" - this space of operating within internal and external conflicts both as a result of colonialism but also of sexism. By way of illustration, Isca shares the following:

Most of the time when people want to know my background. Lots of people don't know what I am, they're like "what are you?" I don't have really dark skin but they know I'm not white They're not quite sure, so I feel like I'm never totally in. When I'm at school I definitely feel the separation because I'm not totally white or totally black or totally Aboriginal. I'm stuck in the middle and really don't know where to go (personal communication, May 20, 2000).

As well, Darlene thought that "we are viewed with those two images and that is it, when we know we live in the middle. Interrelated, we are all of those things all together," (personal communication, July 14, 2000).

Wendy goes on to share:

But I also don't want to be just kept within the confines of just being an Aboriginal woman cause I think that beyond that I belong to the human race and don't I want to be pigeon holed into one distinct identity. So I think spiritually I like to think of it as being here as a human being. And then it transcends all these walls that we've built up about race or identity. So in my life look for things that will make me a stronger person, whether that's in the Aboriginal culture or in the Buddhist tradition, whatever. I've been taught to use what fits (personal communication, May 14, 2000).

However, it must be noted that when I asked the participants (after they had just disclosed the above type of comments) if they felt they were living within a sphere of neither here, nor there - a third space - most said no. Most of the women indicated that they knew who they were and that was an Aboriginal woman. As such, I was not sure how to examine the above quotes. One possible explanation I thought of was that maybe I didn't explain the concept of a "third space" properly and the women didn't understand what I was talking about. This type of explanation tends assume that the women are not capable of

understanding difficult concepts in theory. I think not! As such, I have chosen to believe that these particular women see themselves within a construct that is wholly Aboriginal and that Homi Bhabha's theory of a "third space" does not apply or suit them. I am still not sure why they believe so but their assertions are something that I need to honour and believe. I believe this because traditionally whenever our people would assert something that countered Western researchers' ideas, Aboriginal peoples would be deemed wrong and not the theory and/or postulation. So for whatever reason Homi Bhabha's theory of a "third space" does not speak to the women that I interviewed. Perhaps, it is the Aboriginal worldview itself which tends to see everything as interconnected and not separate from one another. If nothing, in this case identity, is separated from one another, then the question remains how can you be in-between it?

In the above, I argued *cautiously* that a new space was being created because as Sara Mills notes in *Discourse* "we will never know what those cultures were really like," (1997:120). All the information I had for the purpose of this research was the voices of contemporary Aboriginal women who live and operate from within this time and space. While they often spoke of their mothers and grandmothers in a light that illustrated how these particular women were oppressed and sometimes confused in their identity, I can not know that for sure. Indeed, much literature portrays Aboriginal women as powerful, strong willed and assertive and I do not doubt this for a minute. What I don't know is how they conceptualized their identity. As such, all I can determine is that I believe the women who were interviewed for this particular research are creating a new post-colonial space in which to reclaim and reconstruct their identity how they see fit.

CONCLUSION

In the Aboriginal community we often hear different and contradictory accounts of who Aboriginal women are. These different accounts range from Aboriginal women being held in the highest and most honoured regard because she is the life giver of the society to accounts where it is felt that Aboriginal women have no place outside the domestic sphere. There are accounts that Aboriginal women are the primary decision makers of the community to accounts where Aboriginal women are nothing more than objects for the use and abuse of their ‘partners’. There are ideals where Aboriginal women are very humble and meek (not in a negative sense) to where they are warriors in our indigenous struggles. Over the last several years, I have found myself personally confused about what my role and/or identity should be or what it ought to look like as I have become more and more involved and educated about Aboriginal culture and tradition. In the process of trying to figure this out, I often go to Elders and/or other women in the community for teachings and advice. However, because of the differences and diversity in Aboriginal culture, I am left with many different interpretations of who Aboriginal women are. I sought out this type of research primarily because of my own self-exploring journey into who I am. Ultimately what was revealed from the women I had the honour of interviewing, is that it is really up to me to decide how I might be defined and/or constructed. The women who were interviewed for this research plainly show how it was they who determined what it meant to be an Aboriginal woman by reclaiming and redefining their experience, space and voice. The participants showed me that even though Aboriginal women operate from within a continent of possibilities, it was up to

the individual to decide which of those conceptions we choose to accept, pursue and adopt and which of those we simply discard.

Initially when I thought about pursuing my Masters degree, I thought I might do something within the Traditional Environmental Knowledge (TEK) field. Somehow the thought of this type of research never really reached the depths of my spirit or got me excited. Then one night while I was in ceremony, the Grandfathers and Grandmothers whispered the idea to pursue looking at our women's voices and at what they had to say. I sincerely hope that in some small way I have been able to accomplish this and at the same time honour the life, voice and spirit of all Aboriginal women who have come before us, those who are in the present and those who will make up and determine our indigenous future. All my relations.

AFTERWORD

As noted in the introduction, one of my main reasons for pursuing this research was the belief that it would be one way of tangibly honouring my mother's short and tragic life. By recording Aboriginal women's most intimate thoughts and concerns about their identity, I thought it possible to hear and record a bit of my mother's own experience of being an Aboriginal woman. While she was alive, I never had the need, or the desire for that matter, to sit down and really talk to my mother about what it was like for her to grow up as an Ojibway woman in a society that ultimately, I believe, killed her. On the one more optimistic hand, I believe that I have accomplished a bit of what I initially set out to do by acknowledging her in my research. However, on the other more cynical hand, events that transpired throughout the course of this research in my personal life have led me to believe that I have failed miserably at my first envisioned task. Perhaps, this last point needs to be clarified further: ultimately I am not sure how valuable and/or needed this piece of research really is. At the end of this whole process, I find myself asking what purpose does this particular research serve and can it really serve as a mechanism to make Aboriginal women's lives better? I am not sure of the answer but I leave the reader with the following thoughts and concerns.

On October 30, 1999 while I was attending the required courses for the Interdisciplinary Masters Program, my aunt Shirley died of colon cancer. My aunt Shirley was a beautiful and caring woman who unfortunately had lived the last twenty or so years of her life on Main Street – in the company of drugs, alcohol, violence and poverty. As I sat with my family in my auntie's hospital room, waiting for the inevitable, I wrote the

following piece entitled “Colonialism: Mechanism of Genocide” which for me really illustrates how I view many Aboriginal women’s social context within this country:

I sit writing, in a place where no one wants to be: in a hospital watching yet another one of my family members die. My auntie lies before me weighing approximately eighty-five (85) pounds, perishing from cancer. I watch and listen as the cancer eats away at her flesh, her organs, her mind, and her spirit, silently wondering, “had she not been born Indian, would she be lying here dying at the young age of fifty-one (51)?” Would my auntie’s physical and spiritual being have had the strength and determination to keep on fighting had she not experienced the horrid realities of being Anishinabe within a Western social construct? What must it do to an individual and/or collective, to be socialized from birth to believe that all your people know, honour and desire is fundamentally and inherently fraught with savagery and primitivism? Moreover, that the only true option afforded you, is to become civilized and cultured within a totally antipodal social framework. Does one resist and battle the power relations that exist, and if so, how long does one persevere before eventually existing in a state of helplessness? Perhaps what distresses and saddens me most, is that like my mother, who died at forty-three (43) of a heroin overdose on the floor of a bathroom stall in a Vancouver Sky Train washroom, my aunty has lived a life filled with oppression, violence, racism, sexual abuse, addiction, and suffering too unbearable to think about, let alone to live with. While most people - Euro-Canadians - would attribute these variables to life choices that were consciously made by both my mother and auntie, I would argue these realities are the absolute and direct result of colonialism. As opposed to my family, who sits here crying, praying and occasionally laughing as we reminisce about my almost dead aunt, I am actually quite angry and fed up with watching my family and my people die, having led an incomplete and undeserved life. A life bereft of the privilege of opportunity, education, wealth, justice and freedom. Freedom from all that is pestilential and destructive. How can I make you see, feel and know all that our people go through on a daily basis as a result of the onslaught of imperialism. How can I make you see that racism, sexual abuse, addiction and violence are not just words or notions to denote certain actions, but tangible realities inflicted as a result of colonialism. These realities subsequently destroy, mutilate and alienate the spirit, voice, identity and place of Anishinabe people from this land. How can I make you understand that we, as Anishinabe people, do not see and experience just ourselves. Our context of reality encompasses and includes all of those who have come before us, all of those who live and all of those who will come after us. So that when one of us is sexually molested, raped, develops addictions, is impoverished, hungry, unemployed, battered, subjected to racism, and/or lose our life, we all lose a part of our being, a part of our heritage and a part of our dignity and honour. This holistic connection to all that was, all that is and all that is to come, is the Anishinabe genetics - it is our legacy. Many people maintain that what has transpired with regards to the socio-historical context of colonialism is over, is in the past, so get over it! Perhaps, had I been born within the privileged class, I would wholeheartedly join and agree with you. However, I was not and quite honestly am thankful for that. Being born on the margins of society allows me to recognize, taste and

experience all that is unjust, faithless and barbarous within this eurocentric society, as well as stand outside the illusion of superiority in which the colonial masters see and know themselves. They know themselves by what the Other (read: Aboriginal) is or is not. Unfortunately for all, this mechanism of cultural identification has led to, and preserves, those social relations which we find and experience within the Canadian society. You will never know, respect and honour me. Unfortunately, I have been socialized from the moment of language, to strive and attempt to be you, while inherently denying all that is true, just and beautiful about my own Anishinabe genetics.

After we buried my aunt Shirley, my research also became about honouring her life in addition to my mother's. Less than a year later on October 21, 2000 while I was doing the dishes and thinking how I needed to get my thesis to my aunt Mary Carol for editing (the last of the women in my family), I received a phone call from my uncle that my cousins (her daughters) had just found Mary Carol's body in her apartment - she had killed herself by way of an overdose. As I traveled to my auntie's apartment to comfort my family, I was struck with the irony and realization that all I had actively tried to accomplish in the last several years of my life with regard to Aboriginal women really had come to mean nothing. All this time, I thought that this particular piece of research would actually have some material influence on Aboriginal women but in reality it couldn't even produce anything positive in my own immediate family. It makes me seriously question how important research truly is when the production of work is only pursued by a select few privileged people, either Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal. Does research, more specifically research conducted in the Aboriginal community, truly reach and/or have an impact on grassroots people who are struggling just to survive?

Personally, as I encounter the six year anniversary of my mother's death and reflect on all that has occurred within my family, I would have to argue that until research is conducted radically differently than it is today (what that might look like I am not quite sure at this

point) and produces some real material change for Aboriginal people, research remains nothing more than an academic exercise and in many respects has no real significance and/or impact on their lives. I know this may seem a bit harsh and seriously contradicts what I wrote in the conclusion of this paper but many times I feel at an absolute loss at the social conditions that many Aboriginal women in this country have to face on a daily basis. In the end I have to ask myself “will my research put food on Aboriginal women’s tables?” or “will it help to stop the domestic violence so prevalent in our communities?”. Really the only truthful answer is “no”. As my family I “celebrate” the six year anniversary of my mother’s death, I leave the reader with a piece that I recently wrote for my mother entitled “Anishinabe Ikwe”:

*Six years ago
as one new life grew and kicked inside me,
yours, a tragic and tormented life
was violently and prematurely taken away from us.
I remember looking down at you,
or at what was once your body
during your wake and thinking ...
How is it that a life that begins so pure and beautiful
can end in such pain and despair?
How is it that we as a society could allow you
as one of Creator’s children
to die by yourself
with no one to hear your last breath or cry in search of life,
or to hold your fragile body as it reluctantly made its way towards its final
journey?
Death or life?
Only you know.
Know my sweet mother that while you are no longer with us in the
physical,
your blood, your dreams, and your spirit are still with us
flowing through both me and your beautiful grandson.
I say ‘Meegwetch’ for the life that you gave me,
and for the life you subsequently gave my son.
Know that everything I do is for your memory and honour
as a strong and beautiful Anishinabe Ikwe.*

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RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

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Date:

Dear

I am a Master's student in the Department of Native Studies at the University of Manitoba and I am conducting research for my thesis. This project is titled *Towards a Post-colonial Analysis of Identity of Canadian Aboriginal Women* which explores Aboriginal women's experiences, perceptions and viewpoints regarding Aboriginal women's identity.

Upon signing this consent form you are agreeing to participate in an interview which will take place at a mutually agreed upon time and place. A tape recorder will be used to ensure that all of the information that you give is recorded accurately.

As a participant, you should know that you have certain rights. They include:

- * You may refuse to answer any questions.
- You may end the interview at any time.
- Your suggestions and opinions are valuable and critical to the success of this research, therefore I would encourage you to comment on any aspect of this project.
- Should you prefer you may remain anonymous and are assured confidentiality in the analysis and reporting of this study.

Meegwetch for your cooperation. If at anytime you would like to contact me (Nahanni Fontaine) to discuss this project, I can be reached at (204) 487-1403.

I _____ give my consent to be interviewed for the purpose of the research project described above:

_____.



Name of principal investigator
Nahanni Fontaine

Research Ethics

This section is to be completed by the institution's committee for the surveillance and monitoring of standards of ethics for research in which human subjects are involved. The term "subject", for purposes of this review, refers to any person who is used as a source of raw or unformulated data in the conduct of research and who is not acting in the capacity of principal investigator or assisting such an individual.

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada supports the principle that, in any research undertaking, the rights and integrity of human subjects take precedence over the need to conduct research. The Council recognizes that it is not itself vested with any authority to decide, on behalf of the public, when an individual's right may be superseded by the need for research. However, as a trustee of public funds, the Council has a responsibility to ensure that the activities it supports respect the rights of the public it serves.

Accordingly, the Council requires that all research involving human subjects be approved by the ethics review committee of the institution by which the principal is employed.

The committee will be expected to monitor the research program in order to ensure that, over its duration, it continues to meet appropriate standards of ethics. Membership of the ethics review committee is expected to be broadly based and should include individuals from both within and without the applicant's department and discipline who have no association with the research.

In the space below, the composition of the committee should be indicated (though not necessarily the names of the members). This section should be dated and signed by 1) the committee chairperson, and 2) the applicant's department head or a representative of the institution.

The Council provides a set of guidelines on ethics for research with human subjects which should form the basis of the ethics review. (See *Guide for applicants*, articles 35-37 and Annex B.)

This form must be submitted to the Council no later than February 1. Receipt of this completed form will be interpreted as confirmation that the proposed research meets the necessary standards of ethics. However, the Council reserves the right of final judgment where circumstances warrant.

Certification of Institutional Ethics Review Committee SSHRC File No. (if known) _____

This is to certify that the Institutional Ethics Review Committee of

The Faculty of Arts, University of Manitoba (name of institution)

has examined the research proposal by Ms Nahanni Fontaine, graduate student in Women's Studies (name of applicant)

entitled What Might Aboriginal Women Think about Identity (title of research)

and concludes that, in all respects, the proposed research meets appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Composition of the committee

Name (Optional)	Position held	Department or discipline
Grant, Karen R.	Chair	Associate Dean, Faculty of Arts
Vorauer, J.		Psychology
Taylor, K.W.		Sociology
Chodkiewicz, J.-L.		Anthropology
Schafer, A.		Philosophy
Foster, R.		Geography
Johnson, M.		Psychology
Sprague, D.		History

March 7, 2000
Date

Committee chairperson

Department head or institutional representative