

**Aboriginal High School Graduates: An Investigation of Contributing Factors
to Academic Achievement**

by

Sherry Anderson

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

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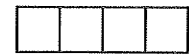
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ABORIGINAL HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES:
AN INVESTIGATION OF CONTRIBUTING FACTORS
TO ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

BY

SHERRY ANDERSON

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba
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ABSTRACT

In the search for factors contributing to academic achievement of Aboriginal high school graduates who had to leave home to attend high school, three research questions were developed. These questions were: 1) How do Aboriginal students account for their success in graduating from high school when so many of their peers do not? 2) What were the major difficulties encountered by Aboriginal youth throughout high school? 3) How were students able to overcome these difficulties while completing high school?

The methodology used to investigate the research questions were interviews with Aboriginal high school graduates. All participants in this study were contacted by their former native education sponsoring agencies. Four different agencies were contacted to obtain a sample of students from various regions in Manitoba.

An interview guide was established solely for the purpose of focusing the interview on the high school experience, not used verbatim. A background information sheet was filled out by all participants to provide family information. The interviews were tape recorded, transcribed and analyzed using qualitative analysis. The data was discussed according to the themes found in the transcriptions. The themes reflected commonalities in the participants' high school experiences. Themes were grouped into four sections entitled: Why did students leave home?; What did these students experience away from home

during their first years?; Why was school important?; and What does the future now hold for these people?

The limitations of this study reflect both the sample and methodology used. All participants were Aboriginal high school graduates. Most participants graduated from a Winnipeg mainstream high school after having left their home reserves. Some participants began high school in the residential school system. The sample size (nine) was a relatively small number. This particular number was arrived at, partially to ensure the manageability of the data and partially due to the accessibility of informants living in Winnipeg. High school graduates who were no longer in touch with their sponsoring agency, or who had left Winnipeg were not contacted. The agency counsellors who contacted these graduates played a role in the selection process of participants for this study. There is no information on students who turned down the request to participate. Since most graduates interviewed reside in Winnipeg, the views expressed by this group of people need to be considered with this in mind.

The methodology used for data collection was an open-ended interview focusing in the high school years. Each participant was interviewed once. Although some interviews were almost four hours in length, it is possible that a second set of interviews may have given the participants more time to reflect on certain topics, therefore providing further insights into their experiences. What the participants remembered and what they chose to discuss during these interviews are also considerations for this data.

Given the intent and limitations of this study, the conclusions found are worthwhile for consideration by high school educators and liaison agencies. It was found that family support was crucial for the participants to succeed in school. This support included the instillation of educational values and a will to overcome difficulties away from home. In most cases, it was the mothers of these students who were described as having been the spokesperson in favour of obtaining a high school graduation. Family support also included members of the participants' extended families who lived in the cities where these participants attended school.

The support received by some liaison counsellors, house parents and teaching staff throughout high school was important to these students. Support from these sources was found to be lacking in some areas. Participants in this study encountered difficulties with racism, loneliness, budgeting, home placements, and school work. These students felt that more work needs to be done to adequately prepare them to deal with these difficulties.

Career development was another area found to be lacking throughout high school. Most participants in this study did not have a goal beyond high school graduation. Only after the completion of high school did they explore university and college program options. In many cases, these students did not have the prerequisites to enter the program of choice. All students were interested in a career and a life in the city. Exactly what career path was undecided.

Great strength was found in these individuals' ability to overcome the difficulties encountered throughout high school. Their persistent pursuit of

attaining a high school education superseded all obstacles. Family support and personal drive made adjustment to city life complete by the end of high school.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background

Aboriginal students who relocate from their home reserves to further their education face incredible obstacles to succeed in school (Hawthorne, 1967). Making a transition away from the community can be stressful, as many Aboriginal people view family, home and community, as opposed to job or career, as the centre of their existence (Martin, 1991). Many of these students encounter an alien, forbidding world beyond the reserves, a world for which they are not prepared (Krotz, 1990). These students experience a clash between the culture they knew and the new city culture. The dominant culture in the city often pressures Aboriginals to give up their precious cultural values. Katz (1979) stated that young Aboriginal people can be caught in this clash, struggling to sort out their identities while attempting to succeed in the dominant white culture.

One of the consequences of this clash is that many students do not succeed. They drop out of high school. The Canadian high school dropout rate has remained relatively constant in the past few years (Morris, Pawlovich, & McCall, 1991). All studies report extremely high percentages of dropout rates among Aboriginal students (Lee, 1986; Morris et al., 1991).

The dropout rate among Aboriginal youth in city schools is difficult to determine with any confidence due to the diversity in the numbers reported by different researchers. Band, provincial and federally operated schools report different data. Statistics do not accurately reflect the number of times a student has returned to school after quitting. Suffice it to say that the number of Aboriginal youth who graduate from high school in Manitoba is much smaller than the numbers who begin high school.

In spite of the cultural difficulties and the statistical odds against succeeding in high school, there are some Aboriginal students who do graduate from high school each year. Their number appears to be slowly increasing (Manitoba Indian Education Authority, personal communication, June 10, 1995). Figures obtained from Indian and Northern Affairs and by Frontier School Division (personal communication, June 10, 1995) indicated a larger number of high school graduates in the past few years. There was also a rise in the number of Aboriginal students enrolled in high school programs. Again it is difficult to come up with accurate provincial estimates because these agencies do not represent all of the Manitoba reserve students.

Aboriginal students from northern Manitoba reserves may attend residential, rural, or city high schools. In the latter two, students live in a home placement or houseparent situation, where they live and board with someone who is also willing to advise them during the school year. Houseparents receive approximately four hundred and fifty dollars per month (Manitoba Indian

Education Authority, personal communication, October 21, 1994). Aboriginal high school students do not have any control over the home placement, they are placed by the agency which is in charge of the students while they are away from home. Only students who have a relative already living in the city may have other options.

All students leaving the reserves are sponsored by a designated Band or agency. This designation is based on factors such as treaty status, location of reserve, and family background. Regardless of student history, all students who leave home are sponsored by an agency which is responsible for assigning a Native Liaison Counsellor, for providing home and school placements, for monitoring and supporting students' progress, and for providing information to the home community throughout the school year.

The average age of students who are relocating for the first time is 16, although this age varies due to factors such as special needs, grade levels available on the reserve, funding, student motivation, past school record, and family expectations. The transition to a new school system, decisions about future goals, and relocation to a culturally different society are very difficult when they all occur together. This is a transition faced by many Aboriginal students who wish to further their education. During this early transition period, students must continue to develop their self-concepts, their academic skill levels, and their ideas about future destinations (Chan, 1984).

Students are allowed limited choice of schools they attend, once they have decided upon a city setting. Their choices are influenced by such factors as location of houseparent, enrollment figures of schools, knowledge of school programs, special needs, influence from peers, families, and liaison counsellors.

The choice of school plays a critical role in the student's development. The school experience will have a direct impact in determining how students will perceive their success (or failure) throughout this developmental process. The school experience is important to explore from the students' point of view.

There are many known obstacles leading to the failure of Aboriginal students in the public education system (DeLandro, 1984; Marcuzzi, 1986). Very little is known, on the other hand, about those students whose experiences lead to success. Educators could benefit from a study of factors which seem to have led to the success of Aboriginal students. Building upon the strengths of these young people, learning their coping strategies, and exploring their development throughout their high school experience could provide valuable information on which to develop new approaches to education for all such transitional students. It should be a goal to recognize, maintain, and strengthen positive experiences, performances, and aspirations of Indian students (Davis, 1992).

General Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study will be to investigate the experiences of Aboriginal high school students who relocated from reserves to graduate from

high schools in Manitoba. An investigation of their strengths and the factors leading to these strengths is important for educators and parents of Aboriginal students. Many Aboriginal students who enter high school in the city with the same background and the same problems as those who drop out, but they persevere and graduate. Why?

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The review will focus on school, family and personal factors that have been reported by researchers to relate to academic success of Aboriginal high school students.

School Factors

The educational institution an individual attends is important with respect to future goals and choices. The school setting, including teachers, peers, community, and curriculum, can affect students' achievement and can affect the process of formulating vocational decision making (Breton, McDonald, & Richer, 1972).

Studies conducted by Blowers (1981) and Marcuzzi (1986) investigated teacher attitudes toward native students. Teachers were reported to have overestimated the incoming language competencies of native children. Students who did not progress within the normal mainstreamed range were considered to have learning problems or a lack of intelligence (Blowers, 1981). Marcuzzi (1986) found that teacher expectations were lower for native students, as they were perceived as coming from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Persi and Brunatti (1987) examined IQ test results of native and non-native students. They found no difference between the two groups of students. The test results were found to be a good predictor of student success with both native and non-native students. The researchers in this study pointed out that both IQ tests and the curriculum are culturally biased, placing native students at a disadvantage, yet both groups studied performed the same.

The relevance of the school curriculum to those students from geographically isolated areas has been studied as a determinant in school achievement (Blowers, 1981). Students who see no reflection of their lifestyle in the curriculum, except perhaps as historical curiosities, are not as likely to perceive the course content as important to their lives. Rodriguez (1983) supported this conclusion by discussing the unreality of curriculum as it pertains to contemporary societal issues. An issue such as discrimination is glossed over rather than dealt with. Students are not prepared for the realities they face every day. Many research studies have indicated the need for curriculum changes to better meet the needs of native students (Bailey, 1975; Hawthorne, 1967; Koens, 1989; Wilson & Corcoran, 1988).

Banks (1983) noted that school curricula did not provide equal opportunity for minority groups. He contended that a total school reform, including staff attitudes, teaching strategies, testing procedures, curriculum changes and school sanctioned languages, is necessary if educational equality is to become a reality. Heritage language programs have also been recommended

by Cummins and Danesi (1990). They maintained that study of the home cultural language will enhance self-esteem, pride in heritage, and communication with family members.

Latham (1989) indicated a variety of needs after studying Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools for a five year period in the United States. One of the consequences for students who are taught English as a second language is that they are not provided with all the same options as other students in the larger society. This study also found that students expressed that teachers do not expect enough of them. Educational programs in BIA schools were found to inadequately prepare students to assume a competitive role in the job market. This finding is particularly significant in light of the high unemployment rate of native people in the United States. Latham (1989) reported unemployment rates ranging from 40% to 80% for native people.

Unemployment rates are relative to dropout rates from high school. Swisher and Hoisch (1992) examined the literature to find reasons for high native dropout rates. Reasons included boredom, loneliness, lack of parental support, content of school is not important, teachers' attitudes, poor retention due to absenteeism, and discipline. Still, 90% of the dropouts studied stated they would advise other students to stay in school. The most important reason given was boredom, yet these students did not seem happier for having dropped out of school. This may suggest that native children perceive education as valuable, but that they do not find the curricular material relevant to their lives.

Hurlburt, Kroeker, and Gade (1991) suggested that native people who viewed school as user friendly were better attenders. Suggestions were made to focus on a confluent educational philosophy and confluent educational strategies in order to enhance the school experience among native students. A more holistic approach is needed to include empowerment of individual students and facilitate meaningful and personally relevant education.

Contemporary Indian life is widely stereotyped in pathological terms (Moodley, 1986). Aboriginal people are often reported in the media as alcoholics, sniffers, prostitutes, thieves, and murderers. While there is no doubt many problems plague the native communities in Manitoba and the rest of North America, there is a definite lack of role models that are visible to both native and non-native people. Racism often rears its ugly head in subtle and not so subtle forms in the classroom by both the non-native student population and the teaching staff. Research by Bienvenue and Goldstein (1985) indicated that prejudices of the non-native population continue to frustrate the academic progress of native students. Davis (1986) recommended the hiring of more skilled, native teachers. An influx of native professionals in education institutions would likely help native students, but, just as important, may help the non-native student population to develop more positive attitudes.

Finn (1989) raised school identification as an important factor in school achievement. Students who feel a sense of belonging, feel as part of the school environment, and feel that school plays a major role in their lives are more likely

to be successful. Persaud and Madak (1992) found that involvement in out-of-school activities was a contributing factor to staying in school. Aboriginal students who have recently moved would more likely have a difficult time with school identification and community involvement. Earlier research by Hawthorne (1967) reported that native children have limited participation in groups outside the family. This lack of group participation may add to the feeling they don't belong in the mainstreamed society. Students that feel inhibited from joining in school groups or working in the community may benefit from extra help and encouragement in these areas.

There is controversy about segregation, integration, and the degree to which either may be beneficial to native youth. Perimeter (1964) believed that the segregation of native children from white settlements was the chief weakness in Canada's education system. On the other hand, Phil Fontaine (personal communication, Special Area Groups Conference, October 21, 1991) maintained that segregation and native control over education could provide native students with better opportunities for academic success. Conversely, Wattunee (1971) stated that the only way native people can overcome their problems is to become totally integrated into the current society.

Home Factors

The sense of commitment an individual develops toward education is influenced by various family experiences. Research by Holland (1973) suggested

that parenting styles, from authoritarian to democratic, contributed to the development of personality types. These personality types are thought to partially determine the way in which individuals formulate career goals. The research on native peoples' parenting styles is extremely varied but the democratic style leaning toward permissive was reported most often. In spite of the many discrepancies in research reports, there seem to be some definite strengths of the family unit among native people that need to be recognized. Many of these strengths such as family commitment and extended family influence can be easily lost when young native people leave home to complete their education in the city. It may be more difficult for native students to remain focused on education and their career goals without the benefit of close family ties.

Correlational studies by Majoribanks (1984) found that career and educational aspirations are influenced by family and are reported to be a determinant in predicting scholastic success. Davies and Kandel (1981) found that adolescents rely on their parents for matters involving future life goals and careers. Suggestions were made for educators to create school contexts that will assist in reducing social group differences in the educational and occupational aspirations of adolescents. Aboriginal students who leave home without the benefit of close family ties are still a part of the reserve world. They cannot be thought of or treated as a homogeneous group. School counselling needs to include opportunities to discuss family expectations and communication with the home.

Koens (1989) found some examples of child-rearing practises of native people that seemed to differ from those of members of the larger society. At the age of mobility, native children were considered a person and left relatively free to explore their environment. Children were given limited feedback from adults. Very few children were ever read stories; instead children were told stories. Children were taught specific skills which imitated the parents' skills in reserve life experiences. Time was not a factor, because routines were flexible, adult-centered. Children did things of interest when they were ready and were not encouraged to stay with a project until completed. Some of these practises are clearly in conflict with the behavior expectations in non-native educational institutions. Krauter and Davies (1978) found that Indians were not always eager to send their children away to school, because formal education was at variance with their traditional values.

Bell (1963) was interested in parents' influence on their children's aspirations. He found that parents who provided high motivation produced children with high ambition. Well-educated parents tended to expect their children to seek high education levels as well. This motivation factor was found to be more significant than social class in determining aspirations.

Cardinal (1969) reported parental expectations and values on education from native people as being high. There was, however, a discrepancy between these expectations and the students' poor attendance and homework, both of which are important for scholastic achievement (Ekstrom, Goertz, & Rock, 1988).

If there were limited opportunities available to young people while living on reserves, it would seem likely that Aboriginal students would face difficulty in schools. Formal education has not always been seen by natives as a necessary means to a better life.

Females who have a working mother as a role model tended to evaluate female competence more highly than females who did not have role models within the family (Hoffman, 1974). Females may remain in school longer if they can see the connection between education and work. They may also believe in their own ability to succeed at work with family role models paving the way. These girls perceived both men and women involved in a wide range of activities and developed less traditional sex-role concepts.

Female and male students from rural reserves are at a disadvantage due to lack of employment opportunities for themselves and their parents. In spite of this obvious disadvantage, Light and Martin (1986) found that Indian women were optimistic about the future. Family strengths were relied upon for a sense of courage and confidence. One family strength noted was the stability of marriages. Over three quarters of the families studied had the husband, wife, and children in the home.

The extended family was also found to be an important aspect of daily family interactions. Respect in relationships and positive feedback served as a foundation of family strength. The average score in the Family Strengths Esteem and Communication survey for Indian women in a study by Light and Martin

(1986) was found to be significantly higher than the score of the general population. Currently, the number of native females graduating each year is far exceeding that of the native male population (Manitoba Indian Education Authority, personal communication, June 10, 1993). One explanation given for this is that native females are better at drawing support from one another in times of need.

In order to find solutions to the problems Indian students encounter in city cultures, more of the research must focus on the native experience. Rindone (1988) studied Navajo students who had completed a four-year degree to investigate factors that influenced their success. Only one factor was found to significantly motivate students. The family (as measured by the stability of traditional values) was the key to the academic success of high achieving students.

King (1976) suggested that native students need to be aware of their cultural strengths and at the same time, acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to participate in the wider society. Students who do not wish to return to their reserves may wish to enter the competitive urban job market. Those students who do wish to return home need to be provided with more employment opportunities in the rural or northern communities.

Lin (1990) conducted a study comparing traditional and modern Indian families and their children's success in school. It was found that traditional families did not necessarily openly support or encourage the pursuit of education,

but their children by far out performed those from modern Indian families. Traditional families valued the importance of task completion and achievement. Success in any goal-related human activity requires dedication and sacrifice. It is suggested that, once this value is internalized, the orientation towards task and achievement becomes an independent factor so powerful that it is able to transcend external limitations. Rindone's (1988) study supported the suggestion that parental involvement supports an individual child's goal and is an important factor in educational success. It should be noted that this support is much different from the larger society's expectations of behavior such as school attendance. Conflicting research by Davis (1986) found that only some types of parental involvement produced the desired effect of higher academic achievement in native children's education. Perhaps other key factors, such as examining the children themselves in a combination of factors and experiences, need to be researched for answers.

Student Factors

While there have been limited increases in numbers of native graduates in Manitoba high schools, overall dropout rates are still alarming. Research reports range from 50 to 80% for Aboriginal high school dropouts (Kaegi, 1972; Krauter & Davis, 1978). King (1981) explained that part of the reason for native dropouts was due to cultural conflicts. These conflicts generate anxieties, personal trauma, frustrations, and feelings of inadequacies. Research by Liebkind (1989) stated

that cultural conflicts affect self-concepts. Finn's (1989) literature review found that students' self-concept was related to academic success. Byrne (1984) also noted that studies related self-concept to academic achievement.

In a study by Wall and Madak (1991), no significant difference in measured self-concept was found between native students attending a band-controlled school and those attending a provincially controlled school. What this study did find significant was that students who attended the band controlled school had higher scores in their perceptions of parental and teacher expectations.

The self-concept an individual develops over time is crucial to the ability to overcome obstacles encountered throughout life. Adults have found strategies to defend and support their positive identities, but children are much more vulnerable to the negative views expressed by others. Native teenagers arriving in the city for the first time from the reserve may have their self-concept influenced by their new living environment and the new school population. A school and living environment need to help promote positive identities to facilitate educational and career aspirations. Liebkind (1989) stated that some negative school behavior exhibited by native children is a result of belonging to a social group which is seen as a source of guilt and shame. It is important that the positive identity an individual has developed is preserved by people in native students' new environment as well as continued influence from the home, even if it is long distance communication.

One possible reason for the recent growth in numbers of students graduating is that reserve communities are taking a more active role politically and many Aboriginal people have become committed to bettering the lives of their people. To native people, identity, pride, and a positive self-concept are one and the same thing (Dawson, 1988). They are crucial to achievement, not only in school, but in all aspects of life. One way of achieving a better life is thought to be through education, so it is understandable that native people are frustrated with the limited success for their young people in the current educational system.

Another factor related to Aboriginal students' success is in the home placement within the cities. Although students leave home with a set of values, a personality, and certain views of themselves and their futures, once in the city they are influenced by those with whom they are in immediate contact. Ekstrom et al. (1988) pointed out several needs that must be met if students were to have a successful student experience. For instance, the home must provide study aids such as books, a quiet place to study, and time in the daily routine conducive for studying. Equally important, opportunities for out-of-school learning need to be provided. The houseparents and native liaison counsellor assigned to Aboriginal students clearly have an important task in maintaining conditions that foster educational aspirations of students who arrive in the city.

Duda and Allison (1989) concluded that researchers should carefully analyze the concepts of success and failure as they are a function of culture and context. They found that native students equated success to personal

characteristics instead of objective, competitive-based criteria such as grades. Native students who leave home to attend school are often under more pressure to succeed at school than the larger society realizes. Perhaps this pressure needs to be addressed.

Success Factors

The obstacles faced by Aboriginal students have been outlined to include factors such as teaching attitudes, curriculum deficiencies, stereotyping, lack of role models, school identification, family, and cultural influences. Literature supports the view that parental involvement is a crucial factor in the success of native students in the education field and in the development of self-concept (Street, 1985). Leung, Wright, and Foster (1987) found that even perceived parental concern is a factor which influences adolescents' post-secondary career plans. This probably relates to their commitment to succeed in high school.

Fossett Jones (1990), of Manitoba's Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, made several recommendations for the success of native students. There should be greater use of the heritage languages in primary schools, a change in curricula to include Indian history and culture, vocational training appropriate to the home community, more Aboriginal teachers, incorporation of native literature in libraries, and training for non-natives. Many other suggestions were given but most significant is the inclusion of Aboriginal parents' input into the education of

their children. This inclusion must have the support of the mainstreamed society if it is truly to have an impact.

While these recommendations seem justified in light of the research, educators in Manitoba could direct some focus on the small but significant gains being made by the current Aboriginal graduates (Indian Northern Affairs and Frontier School Division, personal communication, June 10, 1995). This small number is significant due to the overwhelming odds against graduating. Bowker's (1992) study did not find any formula for success. Many dropouts were not considered at risk by educators; others succeeded with all odds seemingly against them. It is those students who seem to have an inner strength, the ability to utilize their own resources to overcome problems they encounter in the mainstreamed society. It is this inner strength that needs to be further explored as it provides the source for building coping strategies which enable Aboriginal students to make it through the mainstream educational system in Manitoba.

Specific Purpose of the Study

Research questions to be investigated are as follows:

1. How do Aboriginal students account for their success in graduating from high school when so many of their peers do not complete school?
2. What were the major difficulties encountered by Aboriginal youth throughout the high school years?

3. How were students able to overcome these difficulties while completing high school?

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The research design is a qualitative process using interview data for analysis. A qualitative design has been chosen to gain a more comprehensive understanding of reserve native high school experiences away from home. Qualitative studies have been given more credibility in recent years. The term qualitative research is used to describe many research strategies that share certain characteristics (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). These characteristics include: research questions formulated to investigate the complexity of a topic, the collection of descriptive data, and a concern for understanding behaviour from the subject's own frame of reference. The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of Aboriginal high school graduates who had to leave home to attend school. Investigating the perceptions of the participants' experiences throughout the high school years was the intent of this study. The respondents, interview guide, data collection and analysis of data will be discussed in this section.

Respondents

Native education agencies which sponsor high school students were approached with this proposal to obtain graduates who might be willing to participate in the study. Agencies were initially contacted by telephone, then sent

a letter outlining the purpose of this study and requesting their assistance (Appendix A). Four different agencies were contacted, the four sponsor students from various regions of the province to attend school away from home reserves. All agencies agreed to contact previous graduates. Students who remained in the city after graduation and graduates who are living on the reserves but who visit Winnipeg periodically were contacted. All students who expressed an interest in participating in this study contacted me to arrange for an interview date.

Participants

Nine students were interviewed for this study. All nine participants were of Aboriginal descent. Their ages, gender, culture and family background vary. The interviews of these nine high school graduates provided an opportunity to discover how these individuals saw themselves, their family influences, and their high school experiences. These interviews provided some insight about what factors contributed toward students' perseverance throughout high school.

(All names used in this paper are pseudonyms.)

Shirley was the one participant in this study who did not leave her home community to attend school in the city. She left Winnipeg to attend a residential school. Shirley's family had left the reserve some years prior to her high school years. Shirley attended the residential school for two years and then returned to Winnipeg for her graduating year. While Shirley is unique to this study because of the fact she is from the city, many of her experiences are similar to the other participants.

Shirley is twenty years old. She graduated two years ago with a university entrance standing in her academic courses. Shirley had quit school once before returning and graduating. Her family has treaty status and consider themselves traditional in maintaining their native culture. English was reported as the primary language spoken in the home. Shirley's parents are married. Her father graduated from high school as did her older brother. Shirley's brother graduated from the same residential school she attended.

Shirley is currently unemployed. She plans to take career interest workshops sponsored by a city native agency to help her set goals for the future. University is a future goal for Shirley although specific plans were uncertain at the conclusion of the interview.

Ralph graduated from high school three years ago. He attended a specialized program in a city high school for gifted students. He then attended a college in the United States for two years. Ralph came to Winnipeg because the community his mother lives in did not have very good education programs. Ralph lived with an uncle most of the time throughout his high school years.

Ralph is a twenty-one year old Aboriginal man with treaty status. His parents are separated. His mother was the primary care giver after the separation. Both parents had graduated from high school and have some post secondary education. Both parents are employed. Ralph reports his family as being totally assimilated with the mainstreamed society. English was the main language

spoken at home. Ralph never quit school throughout high school and graduated with a university entrance academic program.

Ralph went directly to an American university on a football scholarship from high school. After two years of accounting, he realized this was not what he wanted to do. Ralph quit school and returned to Winnipeg. He had some bad experiences in the United States and now plans to return to university in Winnipeg. The field of study was undecided during this interview.

George graduated from high school last year. He is currently in high school upgrading some of his courses to prepare for university in the fall. His eventual goal is in the field of Medicine.

The home community George came from only went up to grade nine so George had to leave home to continue his education. George arrived in the city at the age of thirteen because he had skipped two grades in his home community.

George is a sixteen year old Aboriginal teenager without treaty status. His parents are married and both are employed. George's mother has some post secondary education. Both George's siblings graduated from high school. He describes his cultural orientation as partially acculturated. English was the primary language spoken at home.

Dennis is a twenty year old Aboriginal man with treaty status. He graduated from high school last year with a general level standing. Dennis had quit school once prior to completion of high school.

Dennis's parents are married and both are unemployed. Both parents have less than six years of formal education. Dennis reports his family as totally traditional in native culture. They did not speak English at home. He also reports his home community as being extremely remote. The reserve school went up to grade nine.

Dennis is planning to return to school in the city next year. He is currently living on the reserve, but has made trips into the city to investigate his educational options for the upcoming school year.

Cheryl graduated from high school two years ago with a general level standing. She is nineteen years old and does not have treaty status, she is Métis. Cheryl's mother has been separated, widowed and remarried. Cheryl lived on a remote reserve with her mother and later with her grandmother. She moved to Winnipeg for school in grade ten. The school on the reserve went up to grade nine.

Cheryl's older brothers and sister had all graduated from the same city school she attended. Cheryl's mother had completed grade ten and then became a mother and homemaker. Cheryl reports her cultural orientation as totally traditional. English was not spoken in her home.

Currently, Cheryl is employed as a receptionist with one of the native education agencies. She is not happy with this role and is looking at becoming a counsellor herself one day. Cheryl has already unsuccessfully attempted upgrading her high school courses to meet university entrance requirements. She

plans to try university again in the future.

Jason graduated from high school last June with a general level standing. Jason is a nineteen year old Métis. Jason's parents are divorced. His mother has been the primary care giver all of his life. Jason's father did not complete high school and is unemployed. His mother has some post secondary education and is currently employed. Jason's older sister graduated from a residential high school and is working for the RCMP. Jason reported his family as being partially acculturated with the mainstreamed society. English was spoken at home.

Jason went to residential school initially, because his reserve school only went up to grade eight. Later when the reserve school was extended to include high school, Jason chose to continue his education outside the reserve. He came to Winnipeg after one year in residential school, primarily because he wanted to live in the city.

After graduating from high school, Jason went to an accounting program at Red River Community College. He is currently living on his own, working part time and attending college. Jason's future plans include residing in Winnipeg and working in the business field.

Faye graduated from high school two years ago. Faye left home at age fourteen to attend residential school. The school in the community Faye came from went up to grade nine. Faye completed her high school in a city high school after completing two years in the residential school. She is nineteen years old and has treaty status. Faye's parents are married. Neither parent completed high

school. Both are currently self-employed. Faye reports her family as being partially acculturated with the mainstream society. English is the primary language spoken at home. She has an older brother who is planning on graduating from high school this year and a younger sister who is in grade eleven. Both siblings attend a Winnipeg city high school.

Faye is currently completing her second year of university in Winnipeg. She plans to continue with university and eventually complete a Law degree.

Jan is thirty-five years old and has treaty status. Jan had left home at the age of twelve to attend a rural Manitoba school and live in a residence. The reserve she came from went up to grade eight. There are twelve children in Jan's family. She is the third oldest.

Jan graduated from high school and went to university. After one year in Brandon University, she transferred to the University of Manitoba and graduated in 1985. Neither of Jan's parents went beyond elementary school. Her mother is a homemaker. Jan's father is employed. Jan reported that English was not spoken in her parents' home and that her family background could be described as traditional.

Jan is working as a liaison counsellor herself now for one of the sponsoring native education agencies. She plans to continue in this field and remain in Winnipeg.

Desi is twenty-four years old and has treaty status. She graduated from high school last year. Desi's mother was widowed and remarried. Her mother did not complete high school and is employed. Her stepfather is employed as well.

Desi quit school several times before graduation. She attended four different high schools in four different towns. Desi first left home at the age of thirteen when she was in grade seven. Desi initially left home because of problems she encountered at the reserve school with classmates. She returned to the reserve after one year in Winnipeg in which she was so successful in school that she was promoted to grade nine. The reserve school went up to grade nine so Desi left home again at the age of fourteen. It was during her last year at the reserve school that her father was killed in a house fire. Desi went to rural Manitoba schools for several years off and on. She moved to Winnipeg last year and graduated from a city high school.

Desi reports her family orientation as partially acculturated. Both English and her native language were spoken at home. Desi is the oldest child in her family. She has a younger sister and brother from her mother's first marriage and two more siblings as a result of her mother's re-marriage.

Desi is currently attending an upgrading program at Red River Community College to prepare her for university entrance. She plans to enter a field in the social sciences, possibly Law.

Interview Guide

After reviewing the literature, three general research questions were derived at to investigate the contributing factors that led to the academic achievement of Aboriginal high school graduates. The three questions were: 1) How do Aboriginal students account for their success in graduating from high school when so many of their peers do not? 2) What were the major difficulties encountered by Aboriginal youth throughout high school? 3) How were students able to overcome these difficulties while completing high school? An interview design was chosen for data collection to gain insights from the participants' viewpoint on their high school experience. An interview guide (Appendix C) was developed based on personal experience working with Aboriginal high school students, discussions with other professionals in the field and a review of the related literature. The questions were designed to cover issues raised by the literature review. It was then decided the questions were too specific, and would not allow the participants to tell the story of their high school experiences at their own pace. The leading statement in most interviews ended up being, "Please begin with when you first decided to leave home." Some questions in the guide were used to help focus the participants on their high school years.

The interview design was chosen for its potential of providing insights of the subjects that would not be attainable using quantitative methods (Gay, 1987). Participants in this study were encouraged to relay their personal stories of their high school experiences. This form of research has been described by Lofland

and Lofland (1987) as a guided conversation aiming to elicit details of the interviewee's experience of a particular topic or situation. A guided interview was supposed to ensure that all respondents received a similar interview experience. In fact, the interviews were not all the same. Because these participants had very different experiences throughout the high school years, their stories and resultant emotions varied to extremes. Following the students' responses, probes for clarification were used to obtain more in-depth information (Appendix D). These probes were particularly useful in extrapolating more data to uncover surface and partial comments relating to emotional events in the lives of the participants in this study.

Data Collection

All interviews were scheduled on an individual basis. Students were given the choice of sites for the interviews, such as their sponsoring agency office, my office or their homes. Students who met with me all read and signed the Letter of Consent (Appendix B). Upon signing the letter of consent, all participants were assured that pseudonyms would be used in this study and that identifiers such as school and agency names, as well as the name of home reserves would be confidential. All participants were informed of their right to withdraw any time during this project. This study's respondents knew before meeting with the researcher that all interviews would be taped. I informed the students that the tapes would be transcribed and destroyed upon completion of the

thesis. Students were then informally given further information on this study and engaged in conversation to make them comfortable. Once I felt that the student was ready to begin, I asked them to fill out the Student Background Sheet (Appendix E). This background information sheet was useful, not only in obtaining the family background of the individual participants, but also, in allowing the students to discuss aspects of their lives relating to their home situations.

The average interview took just over two hours, but two extended to four hours. All interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed. The use of the tape recorder was crucial so the researcher could focus on the interview instead of on note taking. Tape recording transcriptions are also more accurate in future analysis. After signing the Letter of Consent and filling out the Background Sheet, the tape recorder was turned on. All participants were asked to tell the story of their high school experience beginning with when they first left home to attend school. There was no deliberate attempt to control or direct the personal experience of the participants but focusing the discussion on high school was sometimes necessary.

Analysis of the Data

An in-depth individual and group analysis was conducted using the methods outlined in the literature. The tape recordings of all nine participants were first transcribed into individual transcripts. Field notes or observer

comments were written up after each transcription. These observations are recommended by Bogdan and Biklen (1992) to supplement the interviews by recording body language, intonations and different meanings. What was observed by the researcher as well as what was heard before and after the tape recorder was turned on can be valuable data. The purpose of keeping a record of the researcher's hunches, thoughts and feelings throughout the development of the interviews is believed to assist the researcher with future interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). In my case, this strategy was particularly useful. I received a lot more information by keeping a record of my observations. This information helped me to change some questions asked to the participants allowing for freer responses. The observer comments were also useful in gaining more insight into the lives of the participants in this study.

The responses were analyzed for categories or patterns in the ideas expressed. Patton (1990) suggested the development of systematic categories by finding recurring regularities in the data. These patterns are then sorted into categories. There were no pre-existing categories established before the interviews. Within each descriptive category, themes were established so that selected responses could be arranged to reflect opinions and feelings held in common by all participants. Occasionally, smaller numbers of the participants were found to have common ground. Minority themes and those that appeared to have a high impact upon the participants' lives were explored. The relationships

among categories to age and family backgrounds were also identified and discussed.

Hegarty and Evans (1985) support interview analysis to understand human action and behaviour in terms of how participants perceive and understand past events in their lives. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) also support qualitative research to better understand human behaviour and experience. Some researchers suggest that qualitative analysis does not lead to a prescription, but to questions for further exploration (McMillan & Schumacher, 1989; Miles & Huberman, 1984). More recent literature suggests that qualitative analysis can be effective for educators to induce changes to the environment to provide more positive experiences for their students (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Data analysis that can provide insight for positive change and raise questions for further research are desirable goals of qualitative research.

The categories and themes that were identified throughout this study were developed and discussed to provide insight that can be used to continue building upon the strengths that many native high school students already possess.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEMES

The nine subjects in this study were all of Aboriginal descent. Most participants had to leave their home reserve to continue their education. One exception was a participant who left home in Winnipeg for two years to attend a residential school. Upon completion of these interviews I have decided to present the findings in four sections in order to paint a clearer picture of the nine participants' experiences throughout high school. The questions or categories used to organize the reporting of the data are as follows: 1) Why did students leave home? 2) What did these students experience away from home during their first years? 3) Why was school important? 4) What does the future now hold for these people?

Within each of the four categories, the students' experiences are described under theme headings. These themes were derived after transcribing and analyzing the interviews of the nine participants. Recurring themes were found in the data of all nine interviews. Similarities in the experiences of these participants are presented in this section of the thesis.

Why Did Students Leave Home?

The students in this study left home for two main reasons. I had initially assumed everyone would have left home solely for continuing their education, but found out this was not true. Although education was an underlying reason in all cases, some participants reported wanting to leave home for other reasons. The themes found in this category are: Home Issues, Continuing Education, Selection Process and Family Expectations.

Home Issues

One person, Shirley, was sent away by her parents. Shirley's parents felt that she was being subjected to bad influences in the city and thought that a residential school "would straighten her out." Shirley said she had been "bad" and used to run away from home all the time. Shirley seemed to feel that this solution "worked." Her older brother had also been in residential school although the reason he was there is unclear. Shirley said she did not talk to anyone or hang around with anyone at the residential school.

For the students who left their home reserves to attend high school, many saw this opportunity as an adventure, an adventure in which education was not necessarily the primary goal for all participants in this study. Jason had left a small reserve to attend a residential school, a concession to his mother's wishes. Other relatives in his family had graduated from this residential school. Jason had always wanted to come to Winnipeg for high school and was unhappy in the residential school. After his first year in residential school, Jason got his wish and

was given permission by his mother to come to Winnipeg. Jason knew about Winnipeg from previous holidays. He said, "it was exciting all the time . . . fun . . . different . . . compared to what we had back home . . . there's nothing, so boring. My first year out here and it seemed there was no time . . . it was always go out anywhere, everywhere . . . explore the city . . . plus we drank way more . . . the bar scene."

Jan left home at the age of twelve to attend school. The home community school she came from went up to grade eight. Jan described her situation as living in a boarding home but attending the town school. Jan came from a large family, twelve children, and said she wanted to leave home so she would not have to baby sit anymore. The fact that school was a means to leave home seemed almost secondary, a good reason to leave.

Desi left home to come to Winnipeg the first time at age thirteen when she was in grade seven. She left because, "There were a lot of bad girls at the school on the reserve. They used to do everything to me, stab me with pencils, tease me and punch me all the time. I still have that scar from that pencil. The lead broke off in my arm. My dad was really overweight, they called my dad fat. I never used to say anything. They used to wait for me after school everyday. My parents talked to the school but they couldn't do anything. That girl had four brothers and they would have given the teachers a licking if they tried to do anything. So I left and came here. I lived with my aunt and uncle for the rest of grade seven. I was doing really good in that school."

Dennis had to leave his home reserve if he wished to pursue an education because the reserve school only went up to grade nine. Yet when asked if he would have stayed at home if the school on the reserve had gone up to grade twelve, Dennis said he would have wanted to come to Winnipeg anyway. Dennis said that he wanted to do something for himself. "You can't always stay with your family . . . you have to strike out on your own. My family encouraged me to depend on myself." Dennis felt that people who stayed on the reserve without experiencing life somewhere else were missing out. He felt that living on your own was a good experience, not because this experience was always positive but because of what you learn from it. Learning how to experience the "reality of life" was how Dennis explained why he liked living in Winnipeg.

Continuing Education

Cheryl and George came to city high schools because their reserve schools only went up to grade nine. Cheryl's mother had moved from her home reserve when she remarried after Cheryl had completed grade eight. She lived with her grandmother for grade nine and had very little contact with her mother. An older sister and two brothers of Cheryl's had graduated from the school in Winnipeg she attended. George also had an older brother and sister who had graduated from the school he attended in the city. Both graduates seemed to have come to Winnipeg more out of family tradition than any actual desire. The idea of continuing school was a given in their families. Both students related in very

matter of fact tones about everyone from their respective reserves coming to Winnipeg after grade nine.

Cheryl's stepfather had drowned the year before her mother left the reserve. Cheryl said the relationship with her mother declined rapidly after that. She did not attend school much on the reserve but was placed in the next grade the following year. She had been recommended for a special education program in grade ten that she declined in favour of a regular high school program.

Cheryl's mother had no participation in her high school choice or program.

George had previously skipped two grades in school and began grade ten in Winnipeg at the age of thirteen. Ralph came to Winnipeg to attend a specialized advanced program for high school. He said the education was not very good up north. Continuing school was not an option for him on the reserve. The specific program Ralph attended required testing before admission. Ralph, along with George, was exceptionally bright in terms of academics.

Faye left her reserve to attend a residential school because school on the reserve went to grade nine. She said, "I had to leave if I wanted to continue." Faye was fourteen years old at the time. She said what helped to make it easier was that her older brother and she started simultaneously. Faye spoke highly of the residential experience in her first two years away from home.

Selection Process

The politics within the bands on each reserve along with financial constraints also played a role in who left home. All participants in this study,

except Shirley, were funded by a native education agency. In order for an agency to fund students, these students must be approved by the band council on the reserve. According to the students interviewed, there is some dispute over who gets the approval for funding. Dennis said, "They look at who is good and who is not, it's like a battle game - child's game . . . if someone graduates . . . he's really smart . . . if you don't . . . you're really stupid." Jason recalled that he was allowed to leave home because he is Métis and had a different sponsoring agency than the treaty Indians from his reserve. Those that were treaty had to stay on the reserve and attend school there. In Jason's opinion, the school was "too easy" on the reserve so this was another reason for him to want to come to Winnipeg. Other students reported that whether students were sponsored was dependent upon past school performance.

Each sponsoring agency had expectations for students' achievement in the city. The students' progress was evaluated at the end of each school year before approval for the following year. Jason was initially turned down for funding in his second year in Winnipeg because he had not done very well in his first year. After pleading his case and having one of the sponsoring agency counsellors take him "under his wing," Jason was given a second chance to return to Winnipeg. The various sponsoring agencies either have different rules or varying amounts of money as some other participants in this study were not threatened with lack of funding in spite of poor academic performances during their first year away from home.

Family Expectations

Perhaps the most important factor in leaving home was the participants' families. Once funding was approved for secondary education away from the reserve, these students still needed their parents' permission to attend a high school away from home. Some participants had older brothers and sisters who had graduated from a city school. Others had siblings who had been successful in the residential school system. George, Cheryl and Dennis all had family members who had been successful in Winnipeg schools. Jason's mother had reservations about allowing him to come to Winnipeg. Her preference would have been for Jason to remain in the residence closer to his home community. Factors such as long distance, fewer visits and financial concerns were issues for some parents. Also, the fear of big city influences may have concerned some people from small northern communities. George mentioned Winnipeg youth gangs as one concern for many people from his community. Other parents did not want their children away from home at all, even in the smaller rural Manitoba communities such as Thompson and Dauphin. Jan's mother never liked her being away from home at all.

Ralph's mother was definitely in favour of him attending a Winnipeg high school because of the advanced program he enrolled in. Both Ralph and his mother initially believed this program would be the best place for him to attain a "good education." Ralph was lucky enough to have other relatives living in the city so his mother may have felt reassured by this support.

Desi initially came to Winnipeg with her parents' support to live with relatives. If it was not for the fact that Desi had relatives in the city, school in Winnipeg may not have been seen as a viable option. Later, Desi left home again to complete her education because the reserve school did not go beyond grade nine.

Faye had both parents' support to leave home to attend the residential school. Her home community school did not go beyond grade nine. Her older brother attended the same residential school. She later felt that it was important for her education to leave the residential school and attend a city school to prepare for university. Education was her primary goal in leaving home.

The views expressed by the participants in this study varied slightly as to their reasons for leaving home. One common element was that the home community schools could not provide them with a high school education that they deemed appropriate. Another commonality was that the families of most students valued an education for their children. Either there was no education offered at all at the high school level or what was offered was viewed as inferior.

What Did These Students Experience Away From Home During Their First Years?

All participants in this study had a variety of unique experiences during their first year or two away from home. Students ranged from age twelve to sixteen when they first left their home communities to attend school. The

following themes will be explored in this section: Home Placements, Counsellors, Residential Schools, The City School Experience, Racism, Teachers, Academic Programs, Academic Performance, Loneliness, and Alcohol.

Home Placements

One of the most common complaints I heard from these students was the lack of decent home placements in the city. Students who leave the reserve to attend a Winnipeg high school are usually sponsored by a native education agency. This was also the case for students who attended school in Thompson, Dauphin and Brandon. These agencies look for homes in the city to place students in for the school year. Each home placement is paid approximately four hundred and fifty dollars, per student, per month for providing a room and meals. House parents are also expected to monitor students' progress at school. The students in this study were not at all pleased with the placements arranged for them. Some house parents did not even provide the necessities such as food let alone any form of care.

Dennis faced racism in his first home placement. He overheard the people talking about "how Indians stink." Dennis also reported that his house parents drank a lot. When Cheryl was asked about her home placement, her first response was, "I hated it." She said there was never any food, not even to make lunches for school. On Cheryl's second night in the city she was kicked out of her home placement for coming home a few minutes late from the show. Her cousin, who was living there with her, was accused of being on drugs.

Jason finally got his wish and moved into the city after one year in the residential school. He said, "It was the worst place" when asked about his home in the city. "They live so different, they listen to opera music when they eat dinner and they had this fork, fork, knife, knife and they didn't eat what we eat. They had this food out of this cookbook just page by page and it was so gross!" Jan and a cousin of hers lived with a house parent their first year but reported, "We never felt comfortable there. It wasn't very good, they used to fight right in front of our room."

In these instances students were unprepared to deal with the problems they were facing. These students did not expect things to turn out the way they did. Jason had been very excited about the prospect of living in the city, but was totally unprepared for what he would face. I do not know how much time, if any, was spent with students before they left home on issues such as house parent situations, cultural differences and racism.

Other students interviewed lived with relatives and generally had less difficulty in their placements. This is not to imply everything was great though. Ralph said, "I lived with my uncle who didn't give me much support. I would have done a lot better in school academically if I had lived with someone giving me support." Jason ended up moving in with his cousin and slept on the living room floor for three months. Although he felt more comfortable there than with all the forks and knives, Jason admitted that his cousin's place was not conducive to a student lifestyle. "He never really bought food or anything and there was no

discipline and I used to sleep in all the time." Desi said that her aunt and uncle would fight all the time and that her aunt would snoop in her room. The next time Desi left home she was placed with other house parents. She remembered her experience as, "I didn't like it, they treated us like slaves. Their own daughters never cleaned up and they expected us to clean up. Another place we lived, they only bought baloney and hash browns to eat. Another house parent said we ran up the phone bill and the hydro bill so she got a cheque from the agency. Many house parents couldn't care less if the students went to school or not. As long as you don't get kicked out of school, that's all they care so the cheques keep coming."

George lived with his older sister during his last year of high school and said he did not experience any problems. In his previous home placement, George felt he was treated well. He lived with a white family near the school he attended. George did recall bad experiences that many of his friends had and seemed to feel lucky that he was not affected.

Faye lived with a house parent during her graduating year in Brandon. She said she does not remember how many times she wanted to move out but never did. "Just cause I don't like something, you can't just drop it anytime. One of the reasons I'm still in school is because of that family. I still like them now, I keep in touch, every couple of months. I think mainly my attachment to them was because they kept a two year old. I just loved that kid."

After moving several times, Dennis ended up with an aunt. He said he "felt safe there." I'm sure this comment is important in understanding how some students felt. Young teenagers living in strange homes in a strange city probably would fear for their safety at times. Not having a stable home environment is a lot to cope with for anyone at the best of times. Perhaps one coping mechanism these students used was the ability to keep moving from ineffective home placements. Instead of putting up with a difficult situation for a prolonged period, all of the students who experienced difficulties left the home placement almost immediately. The students knew that the sponsoring agency would place them somewhere else if they had to. Students who were lucky enough to have relatives in the city arranged their own places. All of the participants in this study left the home placements they were not happy with almost immediately. They found temporary quarters until the agency could place them again, but did not remain where they did not feel welcome.

Counsellors

The sponsoring agencies and Winnipeg, Thompson, Dauphin and Brandon liaison counsellors played a much smaller role in the lives of these students than I would have anticipated. There did not seem to have been any bond created between the counsellors and many participants in this study. One notable exception was the counsellor who took Jason "under his wing and straightened him out." This happened in Jason's last year of high school when he was admitted back to the program for funding on probationary status. Because of this Jason

was monitored much more closely than he had been in his previous year. Because he was afraid of being sent back home, and due to the counsellor's support, Jason attended school regularly. His school progress improved and Jason attributed this to his counsellor.

Another exception was Faye's counsellor. Although Faye is now sponsored by a different agency, she is still in contact regularly with her former counsellor. She felt this counsellor gave her much support, helped her get through the rough spots and prepared her for coming to Winnipeg to attend University. "She would talk to us and help us decide . . . even now, she keeps in contact. They're very family oriented, they really care for you."

Desi spoke highly of most of the liaison counsellors. She said, "They tried everything to keep us in school. They tried everything, signing contracts, lending us money, visits in school, told us about money cutbacks - to be careful so we wouldn't get cut off the next year. There were some teachers and counsellors who wouldn't believe my life story. I would get mad and want to quit, my mom said not everybody is like that. Some counsellors don't know how to keep their mouth shut, you know the confidentiality. Counsellors would go and talk to other people. You need to have a lot of trust."

The students spoke highly about different events the agencies sponsored upon arrival to the city and about the agency moving them to different homes over the years. Some agencies tried to prepare students for life in the city by offering orientation sessions at the beginning of the school year. In hindsight, the

students had many good suggestions for these events to help better prepare incoming students in the future. The participants' suggestions will be discussed in the implications section of this thesis.

Occasionally, the specific counsellors in charge of the students were not reported as being helpful throughout school. When Cheryl spoke about her counsellor, she thought the counsellor was being "nosey" and did not really care about her. Obviously, this did not suggest a close relationship. George, Dennis, and Ralph all stated they had little or nothing to do with their assigned counsellors throughout high school. It is possible that because these students were successful (passing, not in trouble with school or the home placement), the counsellors' attention may have been needed elsewhere. It may be all a matter of priorities and lack of resources. Although I may feel these students were in need of better supervision and counselling, the agencies may have felt these students were doing just fine.

Residential Schools

The students who lived in residence and attended a nearby town school had slightly more positive experiences about their living arrangements than their counterparts with the house parents. Shirley said, "It's really different from all the stories you hear. All the teachers were really helpful." Faye recalled, "I think just having the counsellors there and a whole bunch of people there my age really helped, especially the counsellors because I think they were very encouraging and

the school was really close to the residence. It was easy to participate in a lot of activities in the residence. I think I had fun."

Jan moved into the residence after one year with a house parent. She said, "It was better than the house parent, at least there weren't fights all the time, it was better than the reserve, it wasn't so crowded. Back home there were twelve of us kids living in the same house. So in the residence I had my own space, my own bed. I had my own everything."

Jason's memory of his residential experience was not quite as favourable. "It was hard because you had about six hundred students in a residence and like for me because I am native but I don't look native they assumed I was white which I wasn't so I thought I always had to prove myself to everybody. I wanted to come to the city, be a big city boy. I didn't ever want to go to residential school but my mom wanted me to go there."

The City School Experience

After being "welcomed" to the city by the sponsoring agencies and the house parents, students then proceeded to their respective high schools. Although the names of the specific schools will not be used for the purpose of this study, it is important to note that all of the schools these students attended were large. Student populations were all well over a thousand.

Cheryl mentioned that her reserve only had eight hundred people so it was hard getting accustomed to a school with fifteen hundred students. All of the students made comments about the size of the city school they attended. Dennis

used the word "humongeous." He also pointed out that he was shocked to see so many different races of people in the school. "All the people, the black, the Chinese . . . I thought it would be a couple of people from my reserve. . . ." Ralph went to a different school and said he wanted to leave right away because "it was about 95% white . . . I was used to going to a school where they were my own colour and my own race." Cheryl recalled, "In class you have all these strange people and they are all white and rich. . . ."

Jason found it hard to break into any group for friendship. He said that all the natives "hung around together." This was the case for Jason in both city schools he attended. The second school that Jason attended in Winnipeg had three native students. Jason said they "all clung to each other." Cheryl and Dennis also said they only hung around with other natives from their home reserves in the first year of school. Shirley said she felt very comfortable in the school she attended because most of the people she hung around with were native. She attended a high school with a much larger native population than the other participants. George said he was excited about attending his high school. Initially he was worried about getting lost because of the size of the school.

Many of these students said they associated only with other students of their race in the schools they attended. Besides getting accustomed to the physical size of the school building and the student population in terms of sheer numbers, they also had to deal with cultural differences. For many students, this was a shock. Again, students felt unprepared with what they were faced with

upon entering a new system. One coping mechanism used was to stay with people they felt comfortable with such as people of Aboriginal descent.

Racism

George said that when he first arrived in school he did not like the attitude people had about "Northerners." George was referring to racist comments he overheard by other students. George said that he did not let the comments bother him. When faced with a problem, George said he ignores it until it goes away. In his case it did. George didn't recall any further racist comments after his first year in the school.

Racism was a concern for most of the students I interviewed. Jason remembered a classmate's reaction to a film about conditions on Manitoba reserves. This film was shown during a Canadian History class. A classmate said, "Just tar and feather them all" during the viewing of the film. Jason spoke up at this point in the class and told this student that he was a native person who had spent the past sixteen years on a reserve. He said students in class watched what they said after that.

Jan said she experienced much racism in the town and at the school. "The boys used to chase us in their cars. One time they came to the residence and were throwing stones and calling us names like squaw and stuff. We used to hang around this one side of the school and no one talked to us. Even the teachers, one talked to us and the rest didn't bother."

Desi recalled one teacher who was prejudiced. "He's the reason I quit one time. The Indians would sit on one side of the room and the white students on the other side of the room. Not the students, they weren't prejudiced, just that teacher. There was this one Indian guy he would always pick on and say, "You're so ugly, no one would ever want to sit with you." He said Indians and whites would never work together. . . . Even the white students wouldn't laugh. I told him I'm leaving. He said if you go out that door, you're never coming back. I said I don't plan to. Then four or five other Indian students came with me to tell the principal. The principal gave us a different teacher and said I was a pretty smart girl."

Cheryl recalled numerous occasions when her friends from the reserve or herself were called names such as "stupid Indian." Each time Cheryl talked back to the offending name caller. I was impressed with the fact these students had the ability to speak out for themselves, especially in the face of such adversity. This shows great inner strength.

Faye had a very different experience in that she said she felt uncomfortable at first due to the numbers of white students in school. She was not used to being around so many white people but later found that the native people were the most racist toward her. "I found the white people aren't as snobby as the aboriginal people. I guess it depends on what area you're from. They (Aboriginals) were from the city."

Teachers

Besides being singled out by some of the students in her new school, Cheryl felt that the teachers did not do enough to stop the racial slurs she was subjected to in class. She told me she thought two of her teachers were "wimps" for not having class control. Cheryl was not too impressed by her teacher on the reserve either. This was the teacher who had recommended her for special education classes. Cheryl said this teacher had told all of the other students from her reserve to take the general level instead of university entrance courses. Cheryl felt that some of her friends could have taken the university entrance program and again pointed out that she took the general level and graduated. I do not know why all of the students from a particular reserve would be encouraged to take a lower level high school program.

Not all of the students had bad experiences with teachers during high school. Jason's experience was quite different from Cheryl's in that he found that the teachers did not let the racial comments go by. Jason also acknowledged that a school counsellor was of great support to him throughout high school. Ralph gave credit to his school coach and guidance counsellor for always being available to him. Dennis identified teachers who encouraged him, both on the reserve and in the city. Dennis said teachers helped him with homework. "Homework" was a concept totally unfamiliar to Dennis before arriving in the city. He thought that homework was something you did before you left class each day.

George found that the teachers in his school made a special effort to get to know the names of the students who came from up north. This made him feel more comfortable in school. George said he really liked his teachers from the reserve. He felt more comfortable because on the reserve "everyone knows everyone and does stuff together." He found it hard getting used to all of the new teachers in the city. A different teacher for every subject was not something these students had previously experienced. In spite of some positive comments made by these students, I was surprised by just how little impact the school staff had. As a high school educator, I think I had a notion that teachers played a more important role in the lives of high school students than I found from these students.

Academic Programs

The students interviewed all took general level or university entrance academic programs in their respective high schools. The level of courses students took affected their marks throughout high school as well as future opportunities for employment and/or post-secondary education programs. Still in the cases of these students, neither work nor post-secondary program was initially a consideration in the level of courses chosen.

Cheryl chose not to follow his advice to enter a special education program. By taking the general level program, Cheryl was already taking a higher level than was recommended. Dennis said he had been in a special education program before coming to Winnipeg so the general level program he

attended was seen as an advancement for him. Other students who also chose the general level program were Jan and Desi. Neither student gave any reason for how or why this level was chosen.

None of the students I interviewed had future academic goals at the time they entered high school. Very little, if any, counselling was remembered by these students regarding the selection of high school courses. The issue of course selection seems crucial to most high school educators, something many of us take for granted. This topic will be further explored in the implications section of this paper.

Jason said he began high school in the university entrance program. He switched to the general level program for his last year because he said the university entrance program was too difficult for him. Jason had also begun to focus on a career path in his final year of school. He made sure that the courses he took would enable him to meet the requirements for entrance to a post-secondary program.

Shirley, George and Ralph all entered high school and graduated with university entrance standing. Shirley did not have any plans of attending university at the time she chose her high school program. Both George and Ralph did plan to enter university. Ralph was initially unsure about which field of study he planned to enter. George, on the other hand, had always had his sights set on a career in medicine.

Faye moved to Brandon after completing two years in a residential setting. She had decided she wanted to go to university. Faye said that the level of schooling she was receiving at the residential school would not prepare her adequately for university. She then took university entrance courses in the sciences and then went on to enter the Faculty of Arts. She did not explain this contradiction. The connection of school programs to a future career path seems lacking for most of these students.

Academic Performance

Although all of the participants in this study were successful in graduating from high school there were wide differences in the levels of achievement attained by these students. Dennis and Cheryl both received marks in the 50's throughout high school. Neither student seemed happy with this although both had previously been in special education classes. Jan and Desi also received lower marks in their courses. Jason's marks did go up in his final year in the general level program. Shirley, Faye, George and Ralph, all who graduated with a university entrance program, achieved higher marks ranging from 60 - 80 percent in most courses.

What was most interesting about these differences was how the students themselves responded to their performance. They were not satisfied with their final grades. All students said they wished they had worked harder during high school. By working harder, students referred to "focusing more on what was important," better attendance patterns than they had established in their first

couple of years, doing homework more often and taking higher level courses. Now that the students had graduated and still did not wish to return home, some began to realize the important implications of marks, and course levels. Desi, Cheryl and Dennis said they wished they had taken university entrance courses in high school, "so they could go to university."

The students also made comments about their previous schools as partially to blame for what the students viewed as poor performance. Some blamed the school system they came from. They found that they did not have the same equipment as city schools, others blamed the lack of teaching skill for feeling unprepared for what they faced in the city school classroom. The work was always viewed as harder in the city schools. This included the difference between residential schools and city schools as well, not just in comparison to the reserve schools. These students all felt that the work level expectations were much higher in the mainstreamed city schools.

Loneliness

Another common experience among many participants who left home was loneliness. This loneliness was like a necessary evil to be endured if students were to continue their education in their present school. It did not seem to matter whether students went to residential school or lived in the city. Loneliness was experienced in both cases. I would have thought loneliness would not have been as severe in a residential school because of the proximity of other students from the same reserves, but this was not true.

Jason recalled his time at residential school, "I remember being very lonely . . . we got to go home every month so we wouldn't get lonesome . . . that was good but you still got lonesome . . . you just get over being lonely and then you have to leave again." Jason's recollections seem quite vivid considering it was over three years since he attended residential school. This was a very traumatic experience for Jason but he had never wanted to go there in the first place. Shirley's recollections of residential school were similar; she did not have any friends at the school and did not associate with anyone other than her brother. "Then I was there a year without him and then I got lonely and came here."

Ralph did not use the word lonely but could articulate his feelings as a city high school student. "I had a lot of depression. I remember feeling trapped. My mother wouldn't let me leave. I remember for a month or two feelings of suicide because I just felt I didn't belong there and wanted to get out but couldn't." When Jason moved to the city he said, "I liked it being out here . . . it's just that you weren't stable and you were lonesome . . . you have to sacrifice that loneliness." Jason felt he had no choice but to put up with these feelings to attain the type of education he wanted. Ralph and Shirley said they put up with these feelings to attain the type of education their parents wanted for them.

Faye said that she often could not sleep at night because she was lonely. She found that counsellors being on night duty in the residence were particularly useful for her. During the day, she was popular, outgoing and busy but at night,

the loneliness affected her. During her graduating year in Brandon, Faye did not recall loneliness as an issue for her.

Dennis, Cheryl, George and Jan did not experience loneliness to the same degree. When Dennis was asked about loneliness, he talked about how this was one of the reasons that other students from his reserve wanted to return home. He did not mention this to be a factor for himself. Dennis seemed to feel the experience of living in the city was more important to him. Cheryl spoke about missing her grandparents but again not to the point where she considered this a problem. George, at the age of thirteen in grade ten, said he was never lonely. Jan never mentioned once wanting to return home. As the youngest student to have left home in this study, at the age of twelve, Jan did not recall ever being lonely.

Desi, on the other hand, had many problems adjusting to life away from home. After a great start in Winnipeg passing grade seven and skipping grade eight, Desi returned to her home community for grade nine. During this year, Desi experienced the death of her father in a house fire and the deaths of several other relatives due to drowning, shooting and suicide. "I don't even remember the rest of the school year. After that I was suicidal." Desi left home after that traumatic year to attend school in a centre where she could be close to what was left of her family. It would be trivializing her problems to classify her emotions just as loneliness, but Desi remembers being able to phone her mom all the time when she got lonesome. "Sometimes I would just jump on a bus and go home for

the weekend. I felt lonesome, I didn't want to go to school. I found it too hard." When asked why she stuck it out, Desi replied, "Just to be away from home. I didn't like driving past the place where my dad died. I kept trying to finish school."

Alcohol

Most of the people I interviewed said they did a lot of drinking their first year away from home. This may have been partly because many students were from "dry" reserves. Alcohol is a large part of the social scene for many teenagers in the cities. The most unfortunate aspect of alcohol consumption for the students in this study is the fact that their experiences are related to exploring their new neighbourhoods, again with little or no supervision.

The students I interviewed seemed to handle the new social environment and lifestyle better than some of their peers. Jason said that "he had more of a conscience than his friends" because after a night out at the bar, he still managed to come to school the next day. Dennis said that he did not want to end up a drunk like some of his friends and relatives, so it was okay to drink once in a while but not all the time. Cheryl said she used to party a lot in her first year, but quit drinking and smoking after she met her boyfriend in the city. Shirley said many of the people she knew ended up pregnant, so she chose not to associate with anybody while she attended residential school. Other students said they did not hang around with people who were into partying all the time, they stuck to schooling.

Why Was School Important?

Instead of finding a wealth of positive examples about city high school experiences, I found other reasons students chose to remain in school. I had initially expected the experiences recalled by these participants would focus on high school, but found the following themes to be more relevant: Not Returning Home, Leisure Time, Adjustment and Coping in the Final Years, Family Influences, Graduation - The Ultimate Goal and A Will Of Their Own.

Not Returning Home

Although some students did not feel a sense of belonging in school, the alternative was even less appealing. Dennis said, "Those who didn't graduate . . . back home they'd be kicking cans around and I didn't want to do that." Shirley talked about life in the city as a possible dropout. "Most people who dropped out of school were lonely later on . . . they were not happy. . . ." George said, "Things are bad enough without dropping out."

When I asked Cheryl why she stayed in the city after so many of her friends returned to the reserve, she replied, "I don't know why I stayed, maybe cause there's nothing to go back to - nothing to do." Ralph never discussed contemplating returning home. It is possible that because his mother travelled extensively, Ralph did not really feel as though he had a home base. Perhaps this was why he thought of suicide when things got tough.

Jason and Dennis both expressed a real desire for living in the city. School was only the vehicle to achieve this goal. Neither of these participants ever wanted to return home during their high school years.

Jan spoke about the number of young women who left school due to pregnancy. This was an issue that came up quite often. Shirley spoke about the young women who dropped out of school, "they're all pregnant and having kids." The teen pregnancy rate among Aboriginal youth is quite high according to the students I interviewed and according to the liaison counsellors I spoke with.

Leisure Time

Sports was one very positive aspect about school and community life according to some students I interviewed. Shirley, Ralph, George, Dennis and Faye all participated in sports throughout high school. Ralph said he, "wouldn't have fit into school if it weren't for sports . . . team camaraderie . . . sports was a big part of me staying in school." In Ralph's case, excellent football skills led to a scholarship for university. Shirley said sports was fun but she did not consider that school. Shirley played varsity level volleyball and basketball for a large city high school. I would think her skills must have been rather good to make a team at this level. George not only played sports in school, he joined a community volleyball club that met twice a week. Dennis joined nearly every sports team his school had to offer plus joined a lacrosse team at another high school in the city. Faye played volleyball and participated in student government committees.

These students obviously have a lot to offer, not only in athletic ability, but the ability to try out for school teams shows an inner confidence that was likely an important coping factor in the city schools. Being a part of a school team may also have helped overcome the lack of belonging these students felt in other areas of their lives. I found it interesting that none of the students discussed their athletic ability. They did not talk about whether they were "good" or otherwise in their respective sports. Although Ralph won a scholarship, he never talked about his skill level. This may be a cultural trait, not to brag, but I thought it was important to note. Sports may be a factor in why some students stayed in school. The fact that these students could make high calibre school teams, along with the team camaraderie that Ralph mentioned, may have played a role in how students felt about themselves and how they felt about school.

Jason did not participate in school or community sports but he always held down a part-time job. In the residential school, Jason worked at the school cafeteria and in Winnipeg, Jason works at a furniture store. Money is a constant source of stress for Jason. His ability to do something about it and take some of the financial burden off his mother was admirable. Jason's mother is the sole provider for other children on the reserve.

Jan, Desi and Cheryl did not participate in school sports or part-time jobs. Cheryl spent all of her free time the last two years of high school with her boyfriend. Jan said she spent most of her time at the residence just hanging around. She moved to Winnipeg to graduate after her older sister graduated and

was living in the city. Desi, as previously mentioned, wandered around for years until settling in Winnipeg last year.

Adjustment and Coping - The Final Years in High School

Most of the participants in this study had much more positive experiences in school during their second and third years away from home. That first year was a real adjustment between different home placements, new schools and so on. During the next two years, students said that they felt more comfortable in their respective cities and in their schools. Instances of overt racism were not experienced by these students beyond their first year. Some found new friends in the city and adapted to the city lifestyle that was more conducive to being a successful student. Much of this adjustment may have had to do with finding more appropriate home placements. It may also have to do with the fact that their goal of graduation seemed more attainable after that first year. Students could settle down enough to focus on school.

Desi was an exception to this adjustment period being better after the first year away from home. Besides having to cope with the deaths of many family members, Desi became heavily involved with alcohol and drugs. She had extremely bad experiences with boyfriends. On one occasion she was raped which resulted in a tubal pregnancy, and much emotional turmoil. She attended four different schools in as many years and quit school numerous times. In spite of quitting school several times, Desi always had the desire to finish and kept returning to school. Because of her bad experiences, Desi usually began anew

each year in a different school. Although it would be difficult to start all over each time, leaving bad memories in the past was one way Desi found to cope with her problems.

Family Influences

Family members played a large role in keeping these students in school. Although some students I interviewed did not see school as important (at least initially) the students' families did. These students had role models within the family who had previously graduated from high school. Sometimes, family members had graduated from college or university. In a couple of cases, it was not the students' parents, but siblings who had experienced success in school.

Cheryl said she never thought of quitting school; she did not want to disappoint her sister. Ralph said, "My family has high hopes." Shirley said, "My mother wanted me to graduate because there are not many opportunities for females without an education." It was interesting that Shirley did not say her mother supported her throughout high school. She attributed staying in school to her brother's support. George said that his family had no expectations for him yet when pressed on this issue he admitted his parents would have kicked him out of the house if he had quit school.

Jan said that it was her brother who kept her in school, not her mother. "My mom always wanted me to go home, she didn't like me being here or over there, she just wanted me at home. I never went to visit very often, only at Christmas and summer and I only phoned a couple of times a year." When she

did call home, her brother encouraged her to remain in school. Jan's situation is unique in that most of the other participants had more family contact throughout the school year. Jan also had no desire to return home more often for visits. She said this was mainly to do with the situation on the reserve. Her grandfather had been the chief at one time. The reserve had been flooded forcing the residents to relocate to a new reserve. Members of the community blamed her family although it had happened a long time ago.

The form of support from family members came in a variety of ways. Many students had much contact with their families. Jason was free to call home every day despite the fact that money was a concern for his mother. George, Ralph and Shirley had frequent visits by their parents. George also had the added benefit of living with an older sister in Winnipeg, although this only occurred in his final year. During his first three years in the city, George had lived in a different home placement. Cheryl had older siblings in the city as well. Ralph, Dennis and Jason all lived with other relatives at various times throughout their high school years. Most students would have liked to be able to return home more often during the school year. This was not always possible due to the financial constraints of the sponsoring agencies and the families.

Faye said that she still talks to her parents every second day. "They are the reason that made me come this far." I believe that a strong family network provided these students with much of the emotional support necessary to endure life in the city. Ralph put it best, "Native families are really close . . . not just

mother, father, brother, sister but also auntie, uncle, cousin, second cousins and so on . . . it's all like one big family that's really close. The students who are not here with family in boarder homes get really lonely. My uncle is like a father figure . . . if my mother's not around I can confide to my aunties."

The influence of students' mothers stood out in these interviews. This influence was not always positive as in Cheryl's case but the impact of the mothers' influence was certainly prevalent. Even Cheryl spoke about how she did not want people to think she was a "loser" because of who her mother was. Some participants in this study came from single parent homes and were raised by their mothers. Since the mother was the primary care giver, it is understandable this parent would be the most influential. Jason and Ralph both had been raised by their mothers after divorce. Cheryl had previously lived with her mother and a stepfather. Faye, George, Dennis and Shirley were with their biological parents but apparently the mother was spokesperson for education. Desi's mother had been widowed, then later remarried. Jan's mother was also a widow. Most of these mothers had impressed upon their children the need for an education and/or showed their never ending support to their children in other ways. Desi said, "I did everything for my mom. I felt bad for the way I treated her, but she never gave up on me." It may be that the lack of opportunities available for these women was not something they wanted their children to experience. The role of the mother in the native community came across as significant for the students I interviewed.

Graduation - The Ultimate Goal

School was important for these students because of graduation. The goal to graduate superseded all other obstacles encountered in the city. Even if this goal was not upper most in the students' minds, it was developed over the years they were in high school. The fact that these students had role models in the family who had graduated gave them an idea about how this accomplishment would feel. Otherwise, I cannot imagine that the goal of graduation would have been tangible enough for these students to have identified with.

Jason said that his graduation day was the best day he ever had. Ralph said his graduation felt rewarding, "like when we won the city championship for football." He said that he felt now he could actually do something and be successful. When Shirley was asked what she found rewarding about school, she answered, "Graduating, finishing school was the most rewarding." Cheryl and Jason both had high school graduation pictures of themselves in their Winnipeg apartments. Cheryl's picture covered half of her living room wall. Jan had her diplomas proudly displayed in her office. Obviously, these students were very proud of their accomplishments.

Jan said that her high school graduation wasn't "that big of a deal " to her or her family. She didn't even attend the ceremony. Jan said she wasn't really connected to the school. She only came to Winnipeg needing a couple of credits and didn't know anyone at the school. Although Jan now plays this down, a high school graduation was important in that it allowed her to remain in the city and

continue getting sponsored to attend university. Jan's university graduation was something memorable. "Everybody was really happy, they all came down. I remember that time because they all made it down, they made it to my ceremony. I had my graduation pictures done with my mom and dad."

Desi also did not take part in her high school graduation ceremony. She had come to Winnipeg after much wandering and finally graduated after six years of dropping in and out of different high schools. Desi was also not connected to the high school she graduated from, but by the time she went there she only needed a couple of credits to graduate.

A Will of Their Own

Jason mentioned that in his last year in high school, things were different for him because he started fresh. He moved to a new school and no longer associated with his relatives who skipped school. "I started getting 70's and 80's so it was good, fresh start and all by myself now. I was doing it all for myself now. When I moved in with my cousin, he wasn't my house parent, he was my roommate. I had nobody waking me up and my counsellor started laying off. It was the best thing in my life so far - graduating. I'll never forget that day."

Jason attributed graduation mainly to himself. He was upset when he talked about people from back home congratulating his cousin for his success. "Last year, that's what everyone used to refer to him being my saviour. I guess in a way he was but that first year, even though I was close to getting kicked out, he helped me a lot. But my last year, he really had nothing to do with it because I

came out and already decided I was going to do it. I started doing really good and everybody started thanking him and I told them I live with him and that's all there is." Jason was not about to let these comments go by without pointing out who was really responsible for his success.

Even though many students received encouragement over the years from family members, school staff and liaison counsellors, the drive to graduate was something they had when leaving home or this drive was developed over time. Faye stated that "education has always been my first priority and still is." Neither Jan nor Desi wanted to return home. Their initial motivation in completing school was to continue living away from home, not to get an education. The fact that both continued their education after high school proves that their desire not to return home transformed into the drive to be successful in school. This success has given them the confidence to strive for a post-secondary education. Dennis still attributes his success to his parents but does it in a way that shows his own inner strength. "My family encouraged me to depend on myself."

The students in my study experienced the loss of their friends throughout their stay in Winnipeg. They were well aware of the fact that graduation from high school was not the norm on the reserve or in the city for Aboriginal youth. Many participants said that people from their reserves quit school and returned home or were sent back home by the sponsoring agency. Their graduation was a bittersweet victory. They felt a great sense of pride upon graduation but missed their peers from the reserves.

This sense of pride is often tainted by remarks made by members of their home communities when they return for visits. Desi said that students who did not graduate would say "you know so much and you come here and make us feel like shit." Dennis said that when he returned home he was called names like "apple" (red on the outside, white on the inside) because of doing well in a mainstreamed "white" high school system. Dennis said he was very hurt by these comments as he never felt that he was anything but native.

It may be that in order to experience some form of successful adjustment, students do have to give up some of their traditional ways, at least temporarily. The people from these students' home communities who were making the comments were most often other students who were sent home after not performing well in the residence and city high school systems. The reasons students may not do well in school away from home are numerous and multifactorial. In spite of the uphill battle many Aboriginal youth have to fight in order to graduate from high school, those who do not graduate are too involved in their own issues to show encouragement to their successful counterparts. If the plight of the Aboriginal youth on Manitoba reserves is as bad as the students interviewed depicted it, it is no wonder jealousy rears its ugly head. These students had to sacrifice and endure a lot while accomplishing their goal to graduate.

What Does The Future Hold For These Students?

Very few of the participants in this study had future career goals. Students said there was no future without an education, yet most did not have a plan beyond high school. It was almost as if graduating from high school was the sole goal for many of these students.

In Farrell's (1994) study on inner-city graduates, I found the students had many of the same characteristics as the participants in this study. The greatest differing factor with my participants was the lack of a future goal. Farrell attributed students' success due to their future goal. This future goal was seen as the most important reason for being successful in school. What do the participants in this study possess that gave them the strength to continue high school in the face of adversity? Obviously, a career goal was not necessary for them to complete school. School itself was the goal that got them through. Graduation was seen as an end onto itself, not a stepping stone to something else in the future.

The students did acknowledge that graduation would likely help them later, when they decide what they want to do. Shirley, who graduated two years ago, still wants to wait before deciding upon a career goal. "I don't know what I want to be, perhaps next year I'll know." It seemed that she was afraid of selecting the wrong area or perhaps an area of particular interest was never developed. Currently, she is taking career interest workshops so she may find what she is looking for. Ralph spoke about returning to university although he

never specified which faculty he would enter. Ralph had spent two years in a university faculty he was not happy with. University graduation seems to be the next goal for Ralph.

Dennis talked about wanting to return to high school. It is possible that the great feeling he had upon graduation was one he has not been able to recreate. Dennis may be disillusioned if he returns to high school for the purpose of upgrading. Dennis also wants to go to university but said his cousin went there and had a professor who was "racial." Dennis presented very mixed future plans in this interview. He is currently interested in native history and traditional ceremonies of his culture. Dennis is actively looking for his place in the world. He was recently in Winnipeg to look at his options in terms of post-secondary education.

Cheryl also said she misses high school. Cheryl is currently working in the city at a job she does not like. She said she is waiting to figure out what she wants. She is afraid of picking the wrong thing and failing. This fear comes partly from funding limitations. "I'm not ready, not right now . . . I was thinking maybe next year but maybe not." Cheryl had a bad experience the previous year. She went to the collegiate for upgrading and was not successful.

Jason and George were the exceptions in this study as both had career plans throughout high school. George had always wanted to pursue a career in medicine and is still devoted to this goal. Since George graduated from high school with university entrance requirements for the Faculty of Science, he has

made a good start on attaining this goal. George decided to postpone going to university for one year and is currently upgrading his high school marks, which were in the 70 percent range. His young age, sixteen at graduation, may have played a role in this decision. Jason had always wanted to be an RCMP officer until his last year in high school. Jason's sister had previously graduated from the RCMP academy and is currently working as an officer. Once Jason began working at school for "himself," he found an area of interest - accounting. Jason graduated from high school and was accepted to Red River's accounting program where he currently attends. Jason was only one of two high school graduates I interviewed who is currently attending a post-secondary institution in a program that leads to a career plan. Both George and Jason are Métis. George in particular said, "More Aboriginals drop out but I guess I'm more adapted so I don't really need that much." Students who felt more assimilated to the city may have had some advantage over others from the reserves. Again, I believe this feeling comes from having family support in the city.

Faye, the other high school graduate who is attending a post-secondary institution, is in the Faculty of Arts, then she plans to pursue a career in Law. She said she has changed her mind a few times in the past two years at university. Recently she has found that her interest has piqued again in the field of law because of taking political science courses. Faye plans to stay in university as long as she can. The sponsoring agency is willing to continue paying for her as

long as she can keep up her grades. So far, this has not been a problem for Faye. She still says education is her main priority.

Jan had a difficult time before embarking upon her current career as an education counsellor for one of the sponsoring native agencies. Jan graduated from university with an Arts degree in native studies and psychology and ended up on welfare in the city. After unsuccessfully looking for work, Jan took further training as an adult counsellor through a native program. She ultimately was recommended for her current job by her former counsellor.

Desi said that she had no idea what she wanted to do after high school. "I just knew I wanted to graduate, I didn't want to be at home on the reserve so I kept going back to school. Even when I graduated I didn't want to go back, I applied for jobs all over the city and couldn't get anything. I had to go back last summer for four weeks cause the agency won't pay for you to stay here if you're not in school." She is currently attending a Red River upgrading program so that she will meet the university entrance requirements. She plans to eventually enter the field of social sciences, possibly Law. Desi also has plans to become a house parent herself next year. She feels that with all of her past experiences, she has something to offer to the upcoming students.

One criticism these participants and the liaison counsellors have heard from the home communities is that the economy on the reserves is not likely to change due to the fact the best students are leaving the reserves. Many reserves are now in the process of upgrading and extending the years of schooling in their

education programs. Members of the communities and of course many parents are in favour of keeping their youth at home. None of the students I interviewed wanted to return home. Even after the completion of post-secondary training, the option of returning home to work was not seen as a viable option. One explanation offered by the students was the lack of employment opportunities available on the reserves. Perhaps more importantly was that the lifestyle on the reserve was no longer viewed as desirable by the people in this study.

All of the students expressed no desire to return to their home reserves. Their comments were varied but the message was clear. Desi talked about how Aboriginals have a hard time working with one another. She said too many people are jealous of each other, especially jealous of those who finish university. Jan spoke about the trouble her family has with other members of the band. Dennis talked about alcohol problems and the lack of things to do. Cheryl also said there was nothing to do on her reserve. George said unless things on the reserve changed he did not really want to return. Exactly what George was referring to is unclear. It could be a general lack of direction for the youth on Manitoba reserves. The high unemployment rate on Manitoba reserves is similar to the unemployment on reserves in the United States (Latham, 1989). Educational programs taken by the students in this study can not prepare for a role in a non existent job market.

CHAPTER FIVE
CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, QUESTIONS
FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

In the search for contributing factors leading to the academic achievement of Aboriginal high school graduates who had to leave home to attend high school, three general research questions were designed. These questions were: 1) How do Aboriginal students account for their success in graduating from high school when so many of their peers do not? 2) What were the major difficulties encountered by Aboriginal youth throughout high school? 3) How were students able to overcome these difficulties while completing high school?

Conclusion

The following conclusions seem warranted from the findings in this research:

The participants in this study all found some common barriers to completing high school away from home. Factors such as poor living arrangements, racism and loneliness were obstacles faced by all participants. Participants varied in degree to which each was affected. The coping mechanisms used by each student to overcome these obstacles also varied. What is important to note is that all participants did overcome these obstacles. Although every

participant's story differs, one thing that does not is the continuing pursuit of education. The personal goals for completing high school and after attaining this goal, continuing with a post secondary education were held by all participants.

Most of the students who were interviewed had a positive high school experience in hindsight. Yet, throughout the interviews, one might surmise just the opposite. The students discussed many things about school they did not like, yet, when they were asked if they could do it all over, most said they would have gone to the same school they graduated from. The nine people in this study were extremely forthcoming about their experiences throughout high school. The difficulties they discussed came across as a multitude of horrors. In spite of these obstacles, most participants had fond memories of high school. In a couple of cases, two years later, they talked about the possibility of returning to high school. I believe their fondest memory is of graduation, not of school itself. The feeling they had upon graduation is one they would like to recreate. Jan was the only participant who had graduated from a post-secondary institution at the time these interviews were conducted. She found this graduation to have been her greatest day. It is quite possible that as the participants continue with their education, they will experience a similar sense of accomplishment. All eight other participants have future educational plans.

Most students identified significant others they received emotional support from throughout high school. This support usually came from family members. One student had a supportive boyfriend in the city. A few of the other students

mentioned their sponsoring agency liaison counsellor as a source of support. Some students spoke about school staff and family members who encouraged them to complete school. Every participant in this study could identify someone who had provided support over the high school years.

The support from educational staff, both in the schools and on the reserves, the sponsoring native education agencies, and relatives in the city were important to these students. The little impact the teaching staff seemed to have had on these students stood out in the interviews. According to the interview data, students rarely spoke about their classroom teachers. It is possible that more subtle forms of acceptance and encouragement were prevalent in the schools. George said his teachers made an effort to get to know the names of the students who came from reserves. This made him feel more comfortable. Ralph, Shirley, Faye and Dennis all said they got along well with their teachers but again, the significance I was looking for was lacking in this data. These participants may not be able to remember or articulate every aspect of support they encountered in high school. Another reason for the omission of teaching staff in this data could be because the teachers really were insignificant in the overall picture. It would seem appropriate that high school educators take the extra time to build relationships with Aboriginal youth. These participants appreciated the effort taken by some teachers throughout high school.

In the schools attended away from home, there was evidence of students being able to retain associations with their friends from the reserves. At least

initially, this was very important for students to have a sense of belonging. The large scale schools were very forbidding in terms of physical size, numbers and cultural differences. The experiences of overt racism by other students and occasionally teachers were quite an obstacle to overcome. Having a group of people the same race, also from reserves, was important for these students in their initial adjustment away from home.

All of the graduates valued the support from family members. This support took many forms, from financial aid to emotional support. Family members who provided support included parents, siblings, cousins, aunts and uncles. Those family members who lived in the city often provided tangible support such as money, a place to live and someone to talk to. The mothers of these participants played an exceptionally significant role in their expectations of attaining a high school graduation. This support was not structured in terms of discipline or homework, but the general goal of higher education was expressed as desirable by most of the participants' mothers. It was typical for these mothers to inform their children about the lack of opportunities without a high school diploma.

The parents of these students did not have first hand knowledge about the schools or the progress of their children. What information they did receive came sporadically throughout the school year. This would depend upon the students themselves and the particular agency the family dealt with. Despite not dealing

with the nuts and bolts of the education system, these parents still showed their support by expectations of completion.

The home placements were crucial to supporting many of the participants' successes in school. While students talked about what was wrong with their home placements, many of these participants lived at least part of the time with relatives. A setting that promoted safety and a sense of belonging was more important than one that was viewed as being more conducive to study. After all, concentration would likely be difficult in a home where one felt alienated.

The issue of race was not important for students who did not live with relatives. This surprised me because I would have thought these students would have been more comfortable with people of their race. There was one example where the cultural differences made a student quite uneasy. Another student was faced with racism. All other participants who were unhappy with their home placements did live with native families. It seemed to be more important to find an accepting, supportive home for the successes of these students.

Support is needed from many sources to assist students in their quest for an education. The respondents in this study provided us a glimpse of where they received support. Sources from the school, native education agencies, house parents, and most importantly the families of these students helped to encourage students to complete high school. Studies by Rindone (1988) and Davis (1992) support the finding that the family influence plays the most significant role in the

academic success of their children. The family members referred to are the extended family of an Aboriginal student.

In spite of the support received by other people, these students felt that high school graduation was a feat they accomplished on their own. These participants all wish to continue their education today. The participants in this study had a wide range of ability levels indicated by their performance. Final high school graduation marks range from 50 percent in a general level program to an 80 percent average in university entrance level course work. Despite the marks and levels attained, all participants felt they have the ability and skills to continue with a post-secondary education.

I believe that all of the students I interviewed possess an inner strength that allowed them to overcome the obstacles they were faced with in the city. Although most students had a wealth of family support (compared to some of their counterparts who quit school) these students still had to stand up for themselves in many different situations. In spite of the fact these students said they felt unprepared for what they faced in the city, they had the skills to de-escalate potentially dangerous situations, to not allow name calling to continue unchallenged and to refuse living at unwelcome home placements. The main coping mechanism used by these students was to rely upon themselves.

Although all of these students said they wished they had worked harder in school, I do not know if that would have been possible given everything else that was going on in their lives. The fact that they graduated is certainly an

accomplishment. No wonder they are proud of themselves. This is an accomplishment they managed all by themselves. Although many students were encouraged by family members and counsellors, the credit must go to the students themselves.

Perhaps such effort was taken for the task of graduation that the time these students are taking before deciding upon the future is much needed. The amount of stress these students must have been under is phenomenal. It may be mentally healthy to take a rest before embarking on yet another venture such as post-secondary education.

Even though there were many reasons for students to quit school and go home, it was interesting that these participants did not attach blame anywhere other than on the students themselves. The school problems, the weaknesses within some of the agencies and the poor home placements encountered would have been enough to turn many people off life away from home. Those issues coupled with factors such as loneliness and cultural differences definitely added to the uphill battle of these students. Students who did not remain in a high school program were sent home. One can only speculate how students felt about returning to the reserve under those conditions. The reasons for the school withdrawals given by the respondents in this study were pregnancy, alcohol abuse, poor school attendance and failing grades. The only aspect similar to these students' experience that was given any credibility for returning home was loneliness. Again, for the Aboriginal youth in this study, the onus on remaining

in school was placed upon the students themselves.

There was a definite lack of focus in the future educational goals for most of these students. Other than the two participants who were always career oriented, the rest mentioned the possibility of going to university. Exactly what they were going to take in university was still undecided for some participants at the conclusion of these interviews. In many respects, this is not unusual given the age of the respondents. People in their late teens and early twenties are searching for their place in life. What is different about the people in this study is that they are also facing issues of culture, race, traditions and possible loss of close family ties if they choose to remain in the city.

In spite of the bad experiences about city life related in these interviews, all nine participants wished to remain in the city. Life on the reserve is not seen as a desirable option; it is viewed as a place to go if you are kicked out of school and cannot find a job in the city. George and Dennis both talked about the "humiliation" of returning home. This is a sad commentary about the plight of Aboriginal youth on Manitoba reserves. The lack of future, direction or employment opportunities on the reserves obviously plays a role in these students' decisions to remain in the city. The other factor here was the reaction these students got from their less successful counterparts back home. Instead of congratulating their friends who stayed in school, more often than not, overt jealousy was the norm.

This study does not explain the academic achievement of Aboriginal youth by focusing on the strengths of the education system. Because so many schools were involved, it was impossible to select which programs, if any, made a significant difference. Other than a couple of instances of racism, most of these respondents got along well with their teachers and generally felt encouraged to continue in their studies. So as not to minimize the racism exhibited by these few teachers, it is important to note that these students took steps to stop it or avoid further subjection. The school programs attended by the participants did not cater to Aboriginal youth as a separate group of students. The students interviewed (with one exception) all said if they had to do it all over, they would go to the same high school they graduated from. In spite of the few problems encountered, these students felt their high school experience was a positive one. The reasons for the positive experiences were not as concrete as I was hoping. Instead, vague descriptions of inclusion, especially in the second and third years of high school, were alluded to during these interviews.

Inclusion is an important factor to consider when examining the academic achievement of northern Aboriginal students. Some respondents in this study referred to being acclimatized or assimilated to the mainstreamed culture. They explained this as one of the reasons they did not have difficulty adapting to a new culture and way of life in the city. As previously mentioned, this may be more difficult and not at all desirable for many more traditional Aboriginal youth who

come to the city for an education. Many participants in this study were from very traditional families so this acculturation was developed upon moving to the city.

The students in this study who took part in school and community sports felt they benefitted from these programs. They talked about team camaraderie and felt more a part of the school and in one case, the community. This finding is consistent with the research done by Finn (1989) where school identification was found to be a contributing factor in school achievement. It is interesting that the students who were not involved in school sports generally had a more difficult time adjusting to school life away from home. Drugs and alcohol played a larger role in the social scene of some other students. School sports may fill that need to belong that was lacking for some people.

Besides sports, other factors were important in making students feel a part of their new communities. Jason's part-time jobs gave him some personal satisfaction in helping support himself. This may have also given Jason another group of people who made him feel welcome away from home. Cheryl gave up her alcohol days upon meeting her boyfriend. She spent almost all of her free time exclusively with this person whom she said provided a lot of support for finishing high school. Persaud and Madak (1992) also found that out of school activities were a contributing factor to staying in school. If a student is not involved in sports, it seems important to find something to occupy one's leisure time.

The essential factors that attributed to the academic success of these nine participants can be summarized as follows: Aboriginal youth who came from a home with high expectations, usually a demanding mother, individuals with good assertive and self management skills and who were goal directed are more likely to finish high school than individuals without these benefits.

Implications

Beyond a high school education, the participants in this study are now facing issues of post-secondary education, searching for a future career path, looking at where to live as an adult and the implications of these decisions. The search for their place in the world is partially dependant upon funding opportunities, the dilemma of breaking traditional ties, limitations due to the level of high school courses and a general lack of career direction.

The search for a place in the world is not a lot different for any of Manitoba's youth. Because the group of Aboriginal students discussed in this study are unique in that they did graduate from high school, they were asked what kinds of support could have been provided to improve the journey throughout high school. All participants provided valuable insights for improvements in the current system. The following recommendations were made by these participants and this researcher in light of the data collected.

Funding and the selection process of who can leave home to go to school was an issue all students mentioned. The amount of funding was deemed

inadequate. One thing students found different in the city was that money was needed for everything. Students in this study said that even though they received an allowance, it did not nearly cover the costs of city life. Clothes, transportation, food and leisure activities were seen as necessities in the city that were not as important on the reserves. Budgeting money was something these students said they learned on their own, the hard way. What money they had to budget simply was not enough according to these students. A recommendation was made to not only increase funding but also to provide concrete examples for budgeting their money.

Another suggestion made by several participants was for the sponsoring agencies to offer more free group leisure activities during the school year. This would enable students to get together more often with others from their home communities and provide more orientation to leisure and social activities in the city. Again, money is the issue here. It may be that the sponsoring agencies do not have any money set aside for what may be considered frivolous activities. These activities are very important to these students. It would be worth considering offering activities during long weekends when students are unable to return home. These activities may make a significant difference in the adjustment to a new city for rural and northern Aboriginal youth.

One student suggested sending fewer students out each year and using the extra money for city orientation programs and leisure activities. Another student said her sponsoring agency had a week long orientation at the beginning of the

school year. She said it was fun, but not very useful in terms of what she really needed at that time. Some of what she learned she said she forgot the next day. Cheryl recommended more concrete information about city life. She gave examples like how to get a bus pass and transfers. Other students talked about information sessions on racism and other issues they would have to face in the city as useful topics for discussion. They suggested that some of these discussions could take place before leaving home. Very little orientation was done throughout the school year with these students as a group. Many students said they would prefer an ongoing orientation throughout the year with varied activities. Some agencies provided orientation sessions, others did not. Again, money is required to meet these needs.

One agency did provide mandatory tutoring twice a week for new students; a few other agencies would provide tutoring on an as needed basis. The students who took part in regular tutoring found it helped them a lot. Even if they did not require tutoring, this provided them with a place to complete homework. Given the situation in many home placements, this was a very good idea. The students who said they could get tutoring if they needed it, often found that by the time arrangements were made, they were too far behind to get caught up.

According to the students, many different agencies were providing some very good activities that many students could have benefitted from. The problem was that the students were all sponsored by different agencies and could not take part in everything offered. One agency offered a weekly gym night and career

sessions throughout the school year. Various agencies would provide activities at Christmas time. Sometimes, students from different bands were invited, but this was usually done on an informal basis. Some students from the more remote communities, or those without a counsellor in the city full time, often did not hear about the activities or did not know anyone to go with.

One of the important aspects of the sponsoring agencies was the student-counsellor relationship. This was something all students mentioned as important to them. While many students in this study had a good relationship with their counsellor, there were some who did not. The building of a caring relationship does not require money, but the inclusion of leisure activities with agency counsellors, which does cost money, could assist this process. The loneliness factor that affected most of the students in this study may have been lessened with evening and weekend activities to look forward to. Especially during the first year away from home, more focus could be spent upon orientation to city life, dealing with issues such as racism, cultural differences and school concerns. The students I talked to were quite adept at dealing with many of these issues but it is likely that many other students, at such a young age, would need assistance.

Some of these participants found the selection process of who can leave the reserve for school to be unfair. A few students mentioned that it was a matter of whom you were related to on the band council. Others talked about how well they had done at school on the reserve deciding their fate. One student said that it depended on whether you had treaty status. As well as differences in the initial

selection of students to be sponsored for education, there were discrepancies over who could remain being sponsored in the ensuing years. Some students were refused sponsorship due to poor academic performances, still others were always granted sponsorship in spite of failing year after year. It may be that the students' views expressed in this study are accurate as they perceive them. It may also be that due to the financial restraints of many bands in Manitoba, the selection process is not seen as being fair. Perhaps this is an area that could be explained and improved upon in the home communities.

The dilemma of breaking with traditional ties is one all these students faced in one form or another. This is an issue that would not have to be faced by people so young if the home community schools provided a quality high school education. Recently, more of the reserves in Manitoba are extending the grade level of the schools. This means that when students first leave home they will be slightly older than the students I interviewed. While the age of the student is important for factors such as school readiness and maturity, many issues already discussed will remain the same. Some participants found that assimilation was good for them because they found it easier to adapt to a new lifestyle. This was a coping mechanism found useful for these students. A few students mentioned that part of their orientation sessions could deal with keeping your traditional values while pursuing an education. Even though students said they were assimilated while in the city did not mean they wanted to give up on their traditional values. Students were really hurt when members of their home

communities berated them for doing well. In some ways they felt like a traitor to their own people. This may be part of the reason students do not want to return home to live after being successful in the mainstreamed education system.

None of the participants in this study want to return home. They all said they got lonesome sometimes for their family but still did not want to return to life on the reserve. A regular phone allowance may help individuals deal with their loneliness. The lack of employment opportunities on the reserves was cited as another reason not to go home. Again the power of the band councils was mentioned as a means of receiving a job or not. Students said there are so few jobs that if you are not related to someone on the council, you will not get a job. There did not seem to be any incentives offered by the home communities for students to complete high school. This is an area that could be explored by the band councils.

Work incentive programs would not only bring some students back home, it may make the students feel good about what they have accomplished within their home communities. The parents would benefit from having their children home again, if only for a period of time, before they embarked on yet another avenue of career exploration. Students who are contemplating their futures could do so in familiar territory. Upgrading and university courses could be offered through correspondence to give students exposure to the work ahead.

Many students said they needed some time after graduation to determine what they wanted to do, but did not return home because there was nothing for

them. After spending three or more years living away from home, the lack of stimulation on the reserve was not a desired option. Despite this, students said they were often lonely and went home to visit or called home regularly. I believe these students also felt unwelcome in their home communities and chose to remain in the city for that reason. Since most of the participants in this study came from traditional native families, this painful separation process seems unnecessary. If there was a way to tie these students back into the home communities, everyone would benefit.

The home placement situation was one all students had comments about. While most students said it was better to live with a relative, this is not always possible. The home placements need to be closely monitored in the first few weeks. From examples given by these students, a better screening process for house parents needs to be adopted by some agencies. Home visits by the agency counsellors would likely help students to feel validated when they face problems. It may be that many of the home placements are first time house parents and are in need of some guidance themselves. Perhaps those students who do not have the benefit of family ties in the city need a lot more monitoring by the agency counsellors. A caring adult could go a long way in making a student feel safe in the city. Students who are alone in the city could use extra time from the counsellors and house parents to help them become involved with other people and activities in the city. Research by Ekstrom et al. (1988) also found the need for students to be involved in out of school activities to have a successful student

experience. Whenever possible, relatives that live in the city should be used as a resource for home placements. These relatives proved themselves to be an inspiration for most of the participants in this study.

The school staff, on the reserve, at the residential schools and in the city need to become more involved in counselling students about course selection and career path options. The plight of some reserve schools, according to these participants, may make course selection difficult before leaving the reserve. Many students spoke about how easy course work was on the reserve. Some students said they had all A's back home and in the city they were barely passing. Some reserve schools may have been trying to motivate students by awarding high marks. It may also be that the teachers on some reserves do not have a frame of reference when handing out marks. This gave some students a false sense of their ability only to be met with much frustration upon coming to the city schools. The marks a student receives in grades eight and nine need to accurately reflect current performance because these marks could help to predict level placement. Past performance is not always an indicator of ability, but can be useful in determining the resources a student may need to be successful in school. School staff need to become more cognisant of the needs of Aboriginal students and reflect these needs in their teaching.

Very little information comes to the city schools about some students past performance and ability. When records do arrive, very often the school year is underway and students have already been placed in the wrong level. I believe it is

important to build upon a student's strengths. They could begin the school year in those subjects they excel in and be reevaluated after the first term. A strong network between the sponsoring agencies and school staff needs to be developed to ensure all students are being monitored closely right from the beginning of the school year. A sharing of information between the former school, the parents, the counsellors and the new schools is important for students' success.

Another implication for schools would be to tie in the self assertive and self management skill training for Aboriginal youth. The participants in this study came to the city schools with these skills as evidenced in the data. These skills were effective when students were faced with obstacles. More Aboriginal youth could benefit from these skills to help them cope with city life.

All high school students need ongoing counselling about course selections and the implications of those changes. I found that many students in this study were lacking in this area. Course selections were usually made without any consideration for the future. In some cases, it may have been the only option to take general level courses, however, the career options from this route were never explored. As was mentioned earlier, the lack of visible careers or jobs on the reserve may make the idea of work in an unheard of field too intangible to consider. The only students with definite career goals interviewed had decided upon careers requiring many years of university such as Law and Medicine. These kinds of career goals are admirable but may not be realistic for everyone. A

university education can be a viable option for those who wish to pursue it and who have the ability to be successful.

Other career paths also need to be explored for those who have different abilities and interests. Two of the students interviewed in this study mentioned going to interest workshops now to help them decide what to go into. Perhaps these workshops could be a part of the high school students' development. Many schools offer career workshops, interest inventories and various work education programs. The students in this study either did not take part in these programs or were not ready to absorb the course content at the time. Many students said they took a work education program in their first year away from home and did not attend very often. They did not even know the city yet and were expected to travel across town to a work site where they would meet even more new people. In hindsight, some students said this course should have been taken in their second or third year in the city.

Most students said they never really thought about what they would do until after graduation. In hindsight, all students interviewed, except the two I already mentioned, said they wished they had done more career exploration during high school. At the residential schools, on the reserves and in the cities, there were very few visible native role models in the work force that were available. More work needs to be done at the home community level, sponsoring agencies and the school level on career counselling for Aboriginal youth. Discussions by Herring (1990) on career myths, irrational career attitudes and

their effects on career decisions on Native American youth would apply to the youth in this study. Aboriginal youth are lacking in the area of career awareness. The implication of this finding is the need for career counselling sensitive to the cultural differences of Aboriginal youth.

The general lack of direction faced by the youth in this study is not an uncommon phenomenon. It does, however, seem unnecessary when you have support personnel and a captive audience. Students, like the participants in this study, who have developed the desire to continue with their education are prime candidates for career education. Career education should be everyone's concern. All of the major stakeholders in these students lives would benefit, and the students themselves.

Questions For Further Research

The further study of Aboriginal students is important to raise the educational standards and future career opportunities for Aboriginal youth. The following questions have been raised for future studies in this area.

The participants in this study all have plans to continue their education and then find employment in the city. On a personal level, students are pleased with their decisions and their accomplishments. There are, however, implications for traditional native values and lifestyle. The negatives could be seen as assimilation weakening native cultures. On the positive side, there will be more Aboriginal people living and working in the city to set good role models for all

youth. These students may have had to give up on some of their traditions to live in the city and be successful in school if they are here without family members to maintain native traditions. As more students leave home, graduate from high school, pursue post-secondary education and find work in the city, the reserves will be depleted of these successful students. Further research needs to be explored as to the effect this will have on Manitoba reserves.

Another topic for further research is the comparison of Aboriginal graduates from a mainstreamed school and those who graduated from a more traditionally native education system. Would the goals about where to live, post-secondary education and future careers be different? Also, the experiences faced in the mainstream schools may be quite different from the experiences one would find in a culture specific environment.

The issues relating to an individual's strong will and persistence to continue the pursuit of education needs to be further explored. The development of intrinsic educational values partially relates to family expectations, but is also formed with the support of others outside the family. The role family members play in this development cannot be understated, however, the subtle nuances and forms of encouragement in other relationships throughout the educational journey of an individual's life can also be of vital importance. It would be interesting to examine this issue in further detail. How much credence should be given to the notion of support over the individual's own desire to achieve? Is it possible that one cannot exist without the other?

A study on the role of self-efficacy and its relationship to learning and performance goals by Kalsner (1992) suggested that students who deal effectively with their sense of identity are more willing to continue with academics.

Aboriginal youth facing the dilemmas discussed in this chapter are dealing with the development of a new identity in the city. Kalsner found that minority students are also more likely to exercise good coping skills in the face of obstacles. The development of self-efficacy among Aboriginal youth is an important topic for further research.

This study did not examine the gender differences in experiences. A topic for further research would be to investigate if there are differences in the experiences between Aboriginal male and female high school graduates and if so what kind of differences were found. It would also prove beneficial for educators to find out if there are differences in the number of male and female graduates who left home reserves to attend high school. Is there a gender difference in who proceeds to post-secondary education?

School related issues may be important to consider when examining reasons for the high drop out rate among Aboriginal youth. How many native students take higher level courses and are frustrated due to their weak academic background? Do teachers and school counsellors work on setting realistic career goals for these students or are they left alone for fear of racism accusations? Do teachers and guidance counsellors set limitations on Aboriginal youth by having lower expectations for the level of school work accepted? What are the

differences between reserve schools' and city schools' expected workloads? Are there real differences or perceived differences in work level expectations?

Finally, what kind of career development would be the most advantageous across the grades to facilitate Aboriginal youth to prepare for life beyond a high school graduation?

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APPENDIX A

LETTER TO AGENCIES

450 Nathaniel Street

Winnipeg, MB

R3E 3M3

(sponsoring agency)

(address)

Dear (name of liaison counsellor in charge):

Further to our telephone conversation I am writing to give you more information about my research proposal entitled "Aboriginal Graduates: An Investigation of Contributing Factors to Academic Achievement." I am currently working on a Master's Thesis in counselling. This study was approved by the University of Manitoba on July 21, 1994. The design of this proposal is an interview analysis for the purpose of gaining insights into the students' perspectives on their high school experience. The participants required for this study are recent high school graduates who left their home reserves to continue their education. A high number of Aboriginal students drop out of school every year for a variety of reasons. I believe it is important to build upon the strengths that already exist among many of the Aboriginal youth who come to city high schools.

I would like to meet with you and your staff to discuss the possibility of obtaining participants from your agency. Each interview is expected to take

approximately two hours and would be conducted at your agency or a site of the graduates choice. A summary of the findings would be given to you upon completion of the study and all participants would be notified that the results are available to them. All information obtained in this study would be strictly confidential in that participants' names, schools, reserves, and sponsoring agencies would not be identified in the final paper. I will call you on August 15th to arrange a meeting to further discuss this study. If you have any questions beforehand, please call me at _____ or call my advisor at the University of Manitoba, Ray Henjum at 474-9018.

Thank-you for your cooperation.

Yours truly,

Sherry Anderson

APPENDIX B

LETTER OF CONSENT

Winnipeg, MB

R3E 3M3

Dear Graduates,

I am a graduate student from the University of Manitoba who is studying Aboriginal high school graduates. I am investigating the factors which may have accounted for your recent success in completing high school. As you know, there are many reasons which may prevent a person from finishing school, but the focus of this research is on your perceptions of which factors may have contributed to your success.

Graduates who agree to participate in this study would be asked to spend approximately two hours with me in an interview session. You would be asked to tell the story of your high school years away from home. Factors in your home reserve, family influences, high school and personal strengths that led to your perseverance throughout high school would be discussed. The purpose of the interview is to gain insight into your perspective on the high school experience you encountered.

If you are interested in participating in this study, it is important for you to be aware that:

- a) This study is in partial fulfillment for the requirements for the degree of Master of Education at the University of Manitoba.
- b) All information acquired from the interviews will be kept strictly confidential in that your name, school and reserve would not be used. (An assumed name would be used in the final paper.)
- c) The interviews will be tape recorded so that I will not need to take notes during the interview. These tapes will be erased after the information has been transcribed (typed) for analysis. I will be looking for similarities in the stories about high school experiences which may have contributed toward your success.
- d) You may withdraw from the interview at any time without penalty if you feel you do not wish to continue and any portion of the taped interview will be erased and not used in the study.
- e) The results of this study will be made available to you through the agency counsellor. A copy of the summary will be given to the agency counsellor and you will be notified by phone.

If you have any questions about this study, you may call me at or call my advisor from the University of Manitoba, Ray Henjum at 474-9018. I would like to conduct the interviews during October and November at your sponsoring agency or a location of your choice. If you are interested in participating in this study, please sign the consent form and return it to me at the address listed at the beginning of this letter, by September 30, 1994. I will call you to set up an interview date within the first two weeks of October.

Thank-you for your cooperation.

Yours truly,

Sherry Anderson

I _____ fully understand the nature of the study and agree to participate in the interview conducted by Sherry Anderson as part of her Master's Thesis. I may opt out of this study without penalty.

Student Signature

Student Phone Number

Date

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction

Thank-you so much for taking the time to conduct this interview session with me. As you know I'm interviewing Aboriginal high school graduates in an attempt to gain a better understanding of the experiences you had while as a high school student. I would like to congratulate you on your graduation from high school. As you are well aware the high school drop out rates among Aboriginal youth are disturbing so you are particularly to be congratulated for your success as one of the few who completed high school. Educators and parents often speculate as to the reasons some students complete school while others drop out. Researchers attempt to find out answers through studying people in a variety of methods. I am interested in finding out how you felt about your past experiences and I'd like to do that by interviewing you on tape. The purpose for the tape recorder is so that I can focus on what you are saying to me rather than on taking notes. Once again your name, reserve and school will not be identified in my final paper. If at anytime throughout the interview you feel you do not wish to continue you are free to go and I will not use anything you said in my paper. If that were to happen I would appreciate you letting me know (if at all possible) why you decided to stop. This is so that I can be aware of the problem prior to my next interview. As you may or may not be aware, very little research exists as to what factors in family, at school or personally may contribute to one's

academic success in school. Since you have recently graduated I'm hoping to find out the strengths you possess and what you feel contributed to your success in school.

Note of Explanation

The interview guide (Appendix C) will not be used verbatim. The participants in this study were asked the more general research questions listed earlier during the telling of their high school experience. This guide is only for the researcher to help when and if prompts are needed for those participants who are not highly verbal. The participants in this study will be asked to tell their own story of their years in high school. The researcher did not focus the entire interview.

Are there any questions before we begin? Okay, I'm now going to turn on the tape recorder. I would like you to begin from when you first decided to leave home to attend school.

Section I - Student Involvement

1. Perhaps we could begin by having you describe the school(s) you attended.
 - (a) I'd be interested in your perceptions of the building itself when you first arrived.
 - (b) How about your perceptions of the students?
 - (c) What were your initial views of the teachers?
2. (a) Were there any differences in the way the students related to you when you first arrived and upon graduation? (b) Were there any differences in the way the

teachers related to you when you first arrived and upon graduation? (c) What do you think accounted for these differences if any?

3. Can you give me any reasons why you happened to choose this particular school?
4. Can you please describe to me a typical day for you at school?
5. Could you tell me if you were ever involved in any school sponsored activities such as sports or clubs?
6. How involved did you feel in the life of the school? Rate your school involvement as high, medium or low.
7. Can you describe to me how you feel as a native student in a predominantly non-native school?
8. Did you join any clubs or groups in the city? Can you describe those experiences to me?
9. Can you describe to me what your past school experience was like in terms of how you felt about a) school? b) your grades? c) your school plans?

Section II - Learning

1. Can you tell me what you feel you learned in terms of general knowledge or skills during your high school experience?
2. What were some of the things you learned that surprised you?
3. What are your personal views on the course content you covered during high school?
4. Is there anything you expected to learn, but didn't?

5. In general terms, can you tell me what your grades are like? What do you think accounts for this?
6. How do you rate yourself as a student in terms of a) skills? b) study habits? and c) motivation?
7. Did the school you attend offer a Native Studies or Native Language course? How do you think one might benefit from such a course?

Section III - Significant Others

1. I'd like to know more about your family history. Could you describe your family on the reserve to me. (In this question, specific probes will be directed to gain information on family background that may be mitigating factors such as education and occupation of parents, siblings etc.)
2. Can you identify the people who were helpful to you during your high school experience? I do not need to know the names of these people - only their relationship to you, e.g. friend, teacher or family member. Please write down, without showing me, a list of all the people you feel assisted you throughout high school. Beside each person's name, list their relationship to you. Now, by relationship only, can you tell me who was most helpful to you? What are some of the things this person said or did that you felt influenced you?
3. Now, would you please tell me the relationship of the other people on your list and how they contributed to your experience. (We will go through the list, one person at a time.)

4. Can you identify some ways the following people could have been more helpful to you: school staff, house parents, Band counsellor, family members or anyone else? Any ideas as to what might be beneficial to students in your situation for the future?
5. Can you please describe to me what your house parent situation was like?
6. How much contact did you have with your family (generally per year)? How did you feel about this?
7. Who did you spend most of your time with in the city? Please tell me the relationship you had with these people. What type of influence did they have on you?
8. Did any other students from your reserve attend this school? How did this influence you?

Section IV - Concerns

1. What were the most difficult experiences for you since leaving home for high school?
2. How did you resolve these difficulties?
3. What bothered you most about the school you attended?
4. Can you tell me what you feel is the biggest concern or issue for Aboriginal students attending any high schools?
5. Can you think of any ways to help students in your situation that is not happening now?

6. How do you feel about yourself in terms of overall self-concept? Is this different than when you first arrived?

Section V - Goals

1. Could you please tell me how you feel you'll benefit as a result of graduating from high school?
2. (a) Could you please describe 1 or 2 experiences you've had that have been particularly rewarding for you? (b) How about any particularly painful experiences?
3. If you had to go through the whole high school experience again, what would you do differently (if anything)?
4. Do you have any immediate plans? Where you will live/employment?
5. Can you describe to me how you feel about your native heritage?
6. How does your reserve deal with employment of high school graduates? College or university graduates?
7. If you wanted to further your education in university or college, do you feel you could now do this?
8. Looking back over your high school experience, is there anything else you can think of that influenced you either positively or negatively?
9. What are the expectations of your family on you after graduation?
10. What opportunities do you think exist for you now?

Closing

That's all the questions I have. I would like to thank you for sharing your experiences with me. If you can think of anything else later on that would be of benefit for educators regarding Aboriginal students, I would be interested in hearing from you. Good luck to you in your future plans.

APPENDIX D

PROBES FOR INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Repeat question.
2. Anything else?
3. Any other reason?
4. Any others?
5. How do you mean?
6. What do you mean?
7. Could you tell me more about your thinking on that?
8. Could you explain that in more detail?
9. I'm not sure I understand. Could you give me an example?

APPENDIX E

BACKGROUND OF GRADUATES

Please check your response

Age _____ Sex _____

Parents married _____

Parents divorced or separated _____

Parent widowed _____

Raised by someone other than parent

Please name relationship _____

Parent's level of education

	Father	Mother
0 - 6 years	_____	_____
7 - 9 years	_____	_____
10 - 12 years	_____	_____
Post-secondary	_____	_____

Parent's occupation

	Father	Mother
Laborer	_____	_____
Skilled/Trade	_____	_____
Unemployed	_____	_____
Other	_____	_____
Homemaker	_____	_____

Primary language spoken in home

English _____

(Name) other _____

Treaty status

Yes _____

No _____

Family cultural orientation

Partially acculturated _____

Totally assimilated _____

Totally traditional _____

Parents strongly support education

Yes _____

No _____

Somewhat _____

Reserve remoteness

Yes _____

No _____

Somewhat _____

Encouraged to attend post secondary by teachers

Yes _____

No _____

Somewhat _____

Encouraged to attend post secondary by family member

Yes _____

No _____

Somewhat _____

Type of high school program

Academic 00 or 01 _____

Vocational _____

Other (Please name type
of program) _____

Number of times you left school prior to completion

0 1 2 3 4 5