

**"The Undercover Indian": Explorations in Urban, Mixed-Ancestry  
Aboriginal Identity and Culture**

by

**Karen Elaine Froman**

**A Thesis**

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

**MASTER OF ARTS**

**Department of Native Studies  
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**This thesis is dedicated to Hayley and Logan. Never forget who you are and where your roots are. Walk proud my children.**

## **Abstract**

**“The Undercover Indian”: Explorations in Urban, Mixed- Ancestry Aboriginal Identity and Culture**

Karen Froman

The literature review examined mixed-ancestry Aboriginal identity through the impact of colonization, legislated policies and practices, racism, images, culture and traditions and living in an urban setting.

An Indigenous research method which acknowledged experience, storytelling and sharing relationships as a legitimate way of knowing was used. Interviews with individuals of mixed-ancestry residing in the city of Winnipeg and personal reflections of the researcher were used to answer the research question.

The factors explored were: connection to a home community, role of family, socio economic status, obstacles, cultural resources, legislated policies and color of skin. The most influential factor was the knowledge and supports received in the University setting. The legacy of legislated definitions, skin color, parental silence, and lack of contact with a home community impacted the participants’ formation of their identities as Aboriginal people.



## **Preface**

I have chosen to share who I am and my struggle with understanding my identity in keeping with the practice of many Aboriginal writers and researchers. This body of research arose from my lifelong awareness and experiences as an urban born mixed Aboriginal and “White” woman. I was aware of the differences in how one was perceived and treated by others based on appearance, as some of us were seen as “more Native” than others. Growing up in the city of Winnipeg which has the largest Aboriginal population of any major city in Canada, in a family that identified as both Mohawk and Dutch/British Canadian, I had always wondered where I “belonged”. The childhood questions of “who am I, “where do I come from?” were never fully explained to me. The question that most overwhelmed me for most of my life was my obvious difference in “colour” from the rest of my family. I wanted to know if I was “the only one”. Were there other pale mixed Native people like me who had similar feelings and experiences about our ambiguous identities? The personal need to answer these questions was what drove me to this research. I was born in Winnipeg, Manitoba. My father is a treaty Mohawk and grew up on the Six Nations Reserve in Ontario. My mother’s background is English and Dutch. My father was raised in a family that did not speak their language or follow traditional ways. He spent two years in residential school and left home for good when he was fourteen. I did not resemble the other members of my immediate family with my fair

hair and green eyes. I always felt I fit into the “non-conformity” category; where society had no idea what to do with people like myself. We do not “fit” anywhere as we do not “conform” to societal “norms” of what an Aboriginal person “should” *look and act* like. One cannot be economically ‘middle class’ or even be fair-haired and be an “Indian”. I grew up in a middle class community in south Winnipeg. Due to the social and economic choices of my parents, my life has been one of social and cultural angst; with a profound sense of not “belonging” and living from a position of exile in that I am disconnected from my Aboriginal “home” community. Though I am in my “own country”, I felt “cut off” from my past, my lands and my roots in many ways. I found that once people at school discovered my ancestry, I occasionally had the experience of being told to “go back to the reserve” and being called a “dirty half-breed squaw”. In stark contrast to this, I also had the experience of denial of my Aboriginal background based simply on my physical appearance. In other words, my green eyes and light brown hair gave me the ability to “hide” my heritage from my non-Aboriginal peers. I was never quite sure how to react to negative reactions to my Aboriginal heritage, as all my father ever said to me was to be proud of who I was. It was the same thing when I would see Hollywood images of Aboriginal people on television. I would ask if that was really what we were, and the response was a laughing “no”. That was it; there was no explanation of *why* what I saw in the movies was wrong or what the reality was.

My adolescence and early adulthood was spent in a downward spiral of identity confusion and self-destructive behaviours. In a twisted effort to “prove” my “Indianness”, I attempted to conform to the stereotypes held by “Whites”, to abuse alcohol and drugs and enter into violent domestic relationships, the “dirty Indian.” On the flip side of this, I also embraced environmentalism, a manifestation of the “noble, spiritual Indian”. I tried on different identities like pieces of clothing. Any attempt to “remake” myself in the image of the dominant class, in other words “White”, resulted in failure. I simply could never “pull it off” as some mannerism, the way I pronounce a word or something I would say would eventually “give me away”. I had become convinced that I really was just a stupid “half-breed”; that I represented all that was bad about both Natives and White.

It was not until adulthood and my entry into University that I began to know my history and to form a more positive and cohesive sense of my identity as an Aboriginal person. I found myself struggling to find out my history, who I was, what it *meant* to be Mohawk, especially in Manitoba, and being constantly challenged by my Aboriginal classmates to *prove* my “Aboriginality”. I was ashamed to admit that I did not know my language, that I did not grow up on the reserve and that I really did not know anything. Further, to be pale and green eyed and assert an Aboriginal identity amongst classmates who were predominantly, though not exclusively, reserve-raised and “obviously” Aboriginal in the physical

sense was an additional challenge. I was confused and angry with my parents for not giving me a sense of belonging in either culture. I have struggled with understanding that my father simply did not possess the knowledge that I was craving.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

The research on identity within the Canadian context has been the focus in a wide variety of disciplines including psychology, sociology, anthropology, education, political science, women's studies and native studies (Rummens, 2001). Research on Aboriginal identity has primarily examined the identity of the Aboriginal communities as a whole rather than addressing the cultural diversity that exists. Many of the studies on Aboriginal identity address acculturation strategies such as assimilation, integration, segregation and marginalization. Although discussion of such concepts as Aboriginal healing practices, rituals, traditional culture and practices, cultural retention and maintenance have been addressed the research has not been from the perspective of Aboriginal people (Rummens, 2001, p.6). Study of the development of Aboriginal identity from an Aboriginal perspective within the Canadian context thus is in the beginning stages. Definitions of identity for Aboriginal people are a complex issue. Identity has been and continues to be profoundly influenced and controlled by government systems and Colonial power. Traditional Aboriginal ways of describing identity have been altered throughout this process of external control on Aboriginal identity. The influencing factors in identity development from both the historical and current perspective are complex.

Serious gaps exist in the research focused on the development of identity among those who are of mixed Aboriginal and European ancestry. Lawrence (2004) in *“Real” Indians and Others, Mixed –Blood Urban Native Peoples and Indigenous Nationhood*, examined issues of identity among mixed ancestry urban Native peoples in Toronto, Ontario. She found that individuals of mixed ancestry may or may not have ties to a reserve community, may or may not look ‘Aboriginal’, may or may not possess cultural knowledge or speak their Native language, may or may not have learned about their identity from a family member, and live and work in mainstream Canadian society (p. xv). She explored the process of identity development among mixed ancestry individuals through an examination of the external historical and current impact of Colonial power and control and experiences of genocide on Aboriginal identity. This included colonization, gender control of identity, the Indian Act, Bill C 31, the treaties, and the practices of genocide. She further explored the additional strain placed on the urban mixed ancestry Aboriginal person who navigates their identity in an environment that may not provide direction. Lawrence provides an important basis for further examination of this complex issue.

Parker (in Taylor and Spencer, 2004) in a review of the social identities of people of mixed race in Britain and the United States noted that little is actually known about the development of the individual’s sense of self identity. He proposed that:

Mixed race people reflect a complex three way mirror. To minority communities defensive about the degree to which they have already assimilated and who see 'mixed race' people as evidence of betrayal and racial 'traitor hood.' To a white majority fearful of the visible evidence of demographic change and mixture which 'mixed race' people embody. To liberals who see 'mixed race' children as signs of peaceful integration and living prefaces to a harmonious multicultural future. (p.125)

Taylor and Spencer (2004) proposed that "human identity is socially, historically and culturally constructed. While there is individual choice and freedom of movement, in practice this is circumscribed by shared conventions, codes and values" (p. 2). Although the authors see identity as a personal sense of self, identity also mirrors the individuals place in society, how the person is seen and categorized by others, the impact of dominant cultural meanings and how the power relationships in society impact on the person. Identity therefore was seen as part of a process within the specific social context of the person. Individuals of mixed Aboriginal and European ancestry living in the social context of Euro-Canadian society and who may not have access to resources to explore their Aboriginal ancestry may therefore struggle in their search for their identity.

### **Purpose and Research Goal**

The purpose of the study was to explore how an individual of mixed Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian ancestry living in the urban setting of Winnipeg, Manitoba develops their sense of identity. The goal was to establish a basis for the understanding of the process and definition of

identity for individuals who are of mixed Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian ancestry. It was anticipated that additional understandings of the complex questions around identity development for urban born mixed ancestry individuals would result from this research.

### **Method**

A basic assumption of this research was the perception that development of identity for those individuals of mixed ancestry is fraught with a multitude of difficulties. Lawrence (2004) proposed that the urban mixed ancestry Native must reconstruct their history “around the once-silenced voices of their parents and grandparents. In the process they have been reshaping their own lives to challenge the assumptions that their families’ Native identities are going to vanish. ..(they) struggle with the realities of both invisibility and placelessness” (p. xvii). Lawrence’s basic assumption was that identity for mixed ancestry Native peoples could only be understood through a legacy of genocide.

Two approaches were used to examine the research question, first an autobiographical story of my own personal search and reflections on my experience and second, interviews with mixed ancestry individuals living in the city of Winnipeg. The second approach in addressing the research question was to collect information about the experience of individuals of mixed Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian ancestry through an interview process.



It was intended that this research would serve the urban Aboriginal communities as well as the academy and society as a whole by building bridges of understanding. This research is intended to be disseminated throughout the urban Aboriginal and academic communities. The research reflects only the voices of the community of individuals who participated in the study. Through these voices a window into the dynamics of a sample of contemporary mixed ancestry peoples in an urban community will be heard. The text that will emerge at the end of this research will be "a blend of writing about the self, the group studied, and the methods by which that group was studied" (Reinhartz, 1992, p. 74). However, given the diversity of the urban Aboriginal population in Winnipeg, both culturally and in terms of socio-economics, this study was not, and nor was it intended to be, representative of the entire urban Aboriginal population. Rather, my intent was to focus on those who were urban born and raised with a particular focus on those who are of "mixed" ancestry.

The theoretical constructs used to form the questions, guide the way of thinking and gain knowledge about the research question were based in the philosophy of indigenous ways of knowing and searching from the radical Indigenous perspective proposed by Garrouette (2003) and Kovach (2005). Several factors that potentially influence choice making were explored including living in an urban setting, historical factors, influence of family related to identity and culture, self identified obstacles, racism, socioeconomic status, the education system, the Aboriginal

community and services, designated or legislated status as Treaty, non Treaty or Métis, Aboriginal language, culture and spirituality and self exploration.

American scholar Eva Marie Garrouette (2003) in *Real Indians Identity and the Survival of Native America* explored Aboriginal identity through the theoretical perspective of Radical Indigenism. This theoretical construct was based on the premise that using Native ways of knowing and viewing the world were valid research methods in exploring Aboriginal issues. She proposed that any exploration of identity must be from the basic knowledge and philosophies, traditional teachings, and various ways of acknowledging kinship of Aboriginal people.

Kovach (2005) writing in *Research as Resistance* (in Brown and Strega) proposed that indigenous research link Aboriginal epistemology with an indigenous theoretical framework. She drew four assumptions from Aboriginal epistemology to guide research: “(a) experience as a legitimate way of knowing; (b) Indigenous methods, such as storytelling, as a legitimate way of sharing knowledge; (c) receptivity and relationship between researcher and participants as a natural part of the research “methodology”; and (d) collectively as a way of knowing assumes reciprocity to the community” (p.28). She proposed that indigenous theory provides a particular perspective on the research methodology that includes Aboriginal ways of knowing, is founded in research principles, respects the research process protocols and ethics, is respectful of the

natural world and incorporates looking back at the history of colonization. Canadian research that focuses on the development of identity among Aboriginal people and mixed ancestry people remains minimal and as such is a relatively unexplored concept.

This research was a beginning step in the use of an Indigenous research paradigm to understand the process of identity development among those of mixed Aboriginal and European/Canadian ancestry.

### **Definition of Terms**

Identity was defined as a concept which embodies our sense of uniqueness as a person, the internal sense of self and the person's place in society as a member of a group sharing values and beliefs. Identity is a 'work in progress, a negotiated place between ourselves and others that is constantly being reassessed in relation to society. Identity is a concept that is individually, socially, historically and culturally constructed (Taylor and Spencer, 2004, p. 1-3).

There are a number of terms used to describe Indigenous peoples. These include Indian, American Indian, First Nations, Native, Native American, and Indigenous.

For the purpose of this research the terms Aboriginal and mixed-ancestry Aboriginal were used throughout the paper as an inclusive word to refer to *all* people of Aboriginal ancestry, including Status, non-Status, Inuit and Métis. "Aboriginal peoples of Canada include the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada" (Canadian Constitution Act, 1982, Section

35(2). Although this term may be seen by as supporting the colonial agenda of assimilation (Alfred 1999, Cornassel, 2003) the intent in the usage was not to perpetuate negative connotations surrounding the word but to ensure that the term used was inclusive. Terms such as “mixed race”, “mixed blood” and “half-breed” are avoided as they are inherently racist terms and appear only in cases of direct quotation.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Review of the Literature**

#### **Colonization, Post Colonialism, and Decolonization**

##### **Colonization**

Canada's history began as one of colonialism in which the French first began the colonization of this land succeeded by the British. Exploration of identity of Aboriginal people thus begins with the history of the colonization of Canada. The relationship between Aboriginal people and the colonial state was one where the colonial people assumed that as the conquering people, they held power and dominance over an inferior group. The process of colonization has had a major impact on the identity of Aboriginal people and those of mixed Aboriginal/European ancestry. Colonialism has been defined in a variety of ways. Said (1993) defined it as a consequence of imperialism where imperialism is seen as the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory; and colonialism is the consequence of imperialism and is the implanting of settlements on a distant territory (p.8). Boehmer (1995) defined colonialism as the process of occupying a land, exploitation and development of the resources and governance of the people of the land (p.2). Gandhi (1998) saw colonialism as the process where those of the dominant group, the West, systematically work to cancel, negate and deny the cultural beliefs and values of the dominated non-West group (p.16). Maori scholar Smith (1999) described colonialism as a process that began

in the fifteenth century as European's began the march to conquer the world. She described colonialism as a part of the European economic expansion which included subjugation of the conquered people, development of the superiority of European thought and ownership of knowledge (p.21). Laenui (2000) provided a description of the process of colonization that clearly outlines the impact of colonization on the identity of Aboriginal people. The process is summarized as follows:

1. The dominant colonizing group denies the value and existence of the Aboriginal people occupying the land.
2. Through a variety of means including aggression and legislation the dominant group destroys, devalues and prohibits the values, beliefs and cultural practices of the Aboriginal people.
3. The dominant group creates new systems for the Aboriginal people through legislation such as controlling agencies, education, religion, economic, residence i.e. reserves, that support the goal of destruction and devaluing of Aboriginal people.
4. Aspects of the original culture are allowed as a demonstration of good faith and respect of the Aboriginal people such as exhibitions of dances, crafts, folktales, and mystical religious beliefs.
5. Aspects of the Aboriginal culture that have continued are expropriated by the members of the dominant group into their own culture such as the use of the Medicine Wheel, or Sweat Lodge ceremonies in new age religious practices. (p.150-160)

Frideres (2001) provided an explanation of the colonization process in the Canadian context that reflects the impact of colonization on all aspects of Aboriginal life and thus identity. The process begins with conquering the geographical territory of the Aboriginal people occupying the land. It is

followed by destruction of economic, social and cultural systems, and assumption of total control over the conquered people. This is accomplished through both aggressive and non-aggressive methods. The ongoing process of colonization ensures that the Aboriginal people are economically dependent on the colonizers through establishment of the policies and structures that enable the colonizer to assume control over all aspects of Aboriginal life. Psychological destruction and control of Aboriginal people's identity and value systems is accomplished through the colonizers belief in their superiority and regulation of social interactions. Colonization with its control over all aspects of the lives of Aboriginal people had a major impact on development and maintenance of identity.

### **Post -Colonialism**

Post-colonialism focuses on the processes of imperialism in colonial societies and examines the strategies to deal "with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies" (Ashcroft et al, 2000, p.186). Although the term began as a reference to a period of time after the initial conquest of a culture the definition has broadened to include the;

wide and diverse ways to include the study and analysis of European territorial conquests, the various institutions of European colonialisms, the discursive operations of empire, the subtleties of subject construction in colonial discourse and the resistance of those subjects.(Ashcroft et al, 2000, p.187)

Post colonialism has been critiqued as primarily addressing the needs of the western academy in examining the non-western culture and identity “post colonialism continues to render non western knowledge and culture as ‘other’ in relation to the normative ‘self’ of Western epistemology and rationality (Gandhi, 2000, p. x). Boehmer (1995) proposed that Western writers had assumed without question that their understanding and writings about colonized people’s culture is understood and universal, “It is widely taken for granted that post-imperial cultural diversity is not only comparable across regions, but is all more or less equally transparent and accessible to European, North American or Australian reader, especially given a shared history of colonization. (p.245)

Garrouette (2003) observed that although in the exploration of the post-colonial theorists non-western peoples were seen as having intellectual traditions these traditional beliefs were studied through Western eyes and as a result were often distorted, over whelmed and dismissed. She proposed that a major difficulty was that the post colonialist academic was steeped in the Western tradition of gaining and disseminating scientific knowledge thus indigenous knowledge “can be integrated onto scholarly discourse only if it is severely pared down, sanitized of the spiritual elements...presented as a set of primitive beliefs that have been superseded by contemporary ‘factual knowledge’, or is reconstructed as *symbolically* rather than *literally* truthful. (p. 102-103)



## **Decolonization**

Colonization has deeply impacted the lives, knowledge and identity of Aboriginal people. As Ashcroft et al (2000) states;

Decolonization is the process of revealing and dismantling colonist power in all its forms. This includes dismantling the hidden aspects of those institutional and cultural forces that had maintained the colonialist power and that remain even after political independence is achieved. (p. 63)

This process involves an understanding of where Aboriginal people have come from and a critical analysis of the history, the causes of oppression, the picture of the oppression, the role of both the oppressor and the oppressed and the degree to which the colonialist ideas and practices have been internalized. For writers such as Alfred (1999) the process of decolonization involves removing the state control over Aboriginal people with the end goal of achieving a sovereign Indigenous government. These three concepts have had and continue to have an impact on the identity of Aboriginal people and those of mixed ancestry.

## **Identity**

Identity of Aboriginal people has been impacted by the colonial past, the writings and thoughts of the post colonialists and the more recent Aboriginal writers and researchers. As Mishibinijima (2004) points out the study of ethnic identity as it applies to Aboriginal people is important in understanding the “conflicting balancing act that Aboriginal people face in how they think of their own ethnic identity and what “others” expect of them (p. 2) .

Research on identity has been conducted in a variety of disciplines.

Rummens (2001) conducted an interdisciplinary review of the literature of Canadian research on identity. She identified five major thematic areas.

These were:

- 1). Types of identity; Aboriginal/Indigenous/Native/First Nations, Ethnic, Linguistic, National, Regional, Racial, Religious
- 2) Specific Identities; Aboriginal/Indigenous/Native/First Nations, Canadian ethnic, Linguistic, Religious, Visible Minorities
- 3). Identity Process; Development/Formation, Construction, Negotiation
- 4). Group dynamics; Intergroup Attitudes and Relations, Intragroup Attitudes and Relations
- 5). Role of the State; State sponsorship /Promotion, Citizenship/Naturalization, Communication, Constitutional Legislation and discourse, Cultural Policy, Education policy and practice, Human Resources, Human Rights, Immigration policy and practices, Justice System, Language policy, legislation, policies and Practices regarding Aboriginal/First Nations/Native peoples, Social Services and Support for the Arts (p. 2-3).

It was interesting to note that identity of people of mixed Aboriginal and European ancestry was not one of the themes arising from the literature review.

Rummens (2001) proposed that identity could be examined from three perspectives. First, identity as “the distinctive character belonging to any given individual, or shared by all members of a particular social category or group...and is both a relational and contextual notion. (p. 3).

The second perspective looks at identity as self identity where the person understands who they are in terms of their own life history and experience and embraces the distinctive essence of the person. The third perspective social identity is seen as the characteristics of the individual as seen or

ascribed by others in society. Rumens concluded that there are several gaps in the research. The research on Aboriginal identity primarily addressed concepts such as healing practices, ceremonial rituals, sacred traditional beliefs, traditional games, traditional subsistence patterns, native cosmology and world views. She recommended that research was required to address the diversity that exists in the Aboriginal community rather than a general overview of Aboriginal identity. This oversimplification and generalization of Aboriginal identity has created a 'pan-Indian' value system that does not reflect the reality of the distinct Aboriginal groups in Canada. As Lawrence (2003) states;

Contemporary Native identity therefore exists in an uneasy balance between the concepts of generic "Indianness" as a racial identity and of specific "tribal identity" as an Indigenous nationhood. In general, Native resistance to colonization rejects notions of 'pan-Indian' identities that can, at best, only aspire for equality within a settler state framework. (p. 10)

A variety of terms have been used to describe identity. The term ethnic identity is commonly used to identify one group of people from another in terms of culture, nationality, race and religion (Rummens, p. 9). Early anthropological and sociological studies employed a primordial approach in studying identity. The primordial approach, proposed that ethnicity is a natural phenomena due to common heritage and traditions tied to that heritage. Blood ties to a specific group through birth were the basis of identity. This approach excluded those of mixed ancestry unless the structure of blood quantum was superimposed on the definitions of identity.

The constructionist or emergent approach was described by Nagel (1996, p. 19) as a way to combine the past and present as an ongoing process to address the “fluid, situational, volitional, and dynamic character of ethnic identification, organization and action.” This approach recognizes that change and interaction between the individual and the community are important components in the development of identity.

Song (2003, p.7) describes ethnic identity as awareness in the person that is activated at specific times in relation or response to events and persons in the environment. Identity has been described as the “product of interactions between individuals and social structures, and individuals and others” (Jordan 1986, p.6). According to Dorais (1995) there is a difference between ethnic and cultural identity. “Cultural identity is universal, because all people in the world are conscious of some sort of specificity that sets them apart from others, ethnic identity only seems to occur within complex societies (p.12).

Schouls (2003) examined identity through the assessment of two theories of ethnicity. The first theory “links the source of ethnic identity to attributes of community difference, and the other links that source to relatively open-ended processes of community self definition”(p.1). He then examined identity through what he described as the difference approach and the identification approach. The difference approach assumes that personal identity is founded and nurtured in the cultural values and allegiances that the person experiences as a member of a

specific group. Culture defines the way of life of the person and their assumptions about the world and how to live and behave. Maintenance of community and individual identity including as the common history, language as different from other groups is seen as necessary in the ongoing survival of the group. The identification approach to identity and defining ethnicity assumes that human identity is “derived from a sense of relatedness that is ascribed to peoples, either by themselves or by others or both.” (Schouls, p. 8) The identification approach proposes that cultural attributes may be shared by several groups regardless of the group that an individual may feel ethnically attached. Further ethnic identity is constructed in the context of the contemporary circumstances of the individual and group. He concluded that using the identification approach to explore Aboriginal identity allowed identity to be linked to shared ancestry and historical continuity without containing specific criteria that define membership and that the development of Aboriginal identity is a dynamic, process oriented concept.

Taylor and Spencer (2004) edited a series of articles that reviewed the multidisciplinary approaches used to define social identity. They proposed that the traditional views of identity are in decline and that identity must be viewed in the framework of the dislocation and changes in modern society. They saw ethnic identity as a politically charged term where the dominant social structures define ethnicity as belonging to other groups not themselves. Thus identity as an Aboriginal would be viewed as

a homogenous identity of common interests and attributes rather than as a multitude of separate groups. "This everyday essentialism allows for certain groups to be marginalized and made passive; there is no need to examine individual cases or social and historical forces which have shaped relations" (Taylor and Spencer, p.3). The authors proposed that in studying social identities the complex range of factors that influence how we view ourselves, how others view us is part of the negotiation process in understanding the uncertain and fragmented nature of social identity. The authors provided a broad definition of identity as a concept which embodies our sense of uniqueness as a person, the internal sense of self and the person's place in society as a member of a group sharing values and beliefs. Identity is a 'work in progress, a negotiated place between ourselves and others that is constantly being reassessed in relation to society. Identity is a concept that is individually, socially, historically and culturally constructed. (Taylor and Spencer, p.1-3).

Parker (2004, in Taylor and Spencer) examined the social identities of 'mixed race'. Through a review of population census in Britain and the United States, interview material, fictional representations and internet sites he explored the development of identity among those of mixed race. He found that concepts of mixed race people varied from being still being seen as an outsider by both groups, producing children who are ambiguous looking, to having the best of both worlds, proof that love can conquer all, to being the saviours in a new world. Parker states;

'mixed race' people are a complex three way mirror. To minority communities defensive about the degree to which they have already been assimilated and who see 'mixed race' people as evidence of betrayal and racial 'traitor hood'. To a white majority fearful of the visible evidence of demographic change and mixture which 'mixed race' people embody. To liberals who see 'mixed race' children as signs of peaceful integration and living prefaces to a harmonious multicultural future. (p.125)

He proposed that mixed race people must be one of the forces involved in deconstructing the past patterns of social identity and developing new identities and understandings.

Race and racist beliefs about the identity of a group of people have long been used to justify the actions of a conquering group. Adams (2001) described racial identity as possession of "cultural, material, physical and linguistic differences which need not imply inequality of social status" (p.210). Racial descriptions of identity were social definitions based on the distinctive hereditary physical and intellectual characteristics of a group of people and thus excluded a person of mixed race who would not necessarily meet the physical characteristics inherent in describing a racial identity. Definition of identity based on biological markers led to the development of blood quantum to describe people of mixed Aboriginal/White and Black/White in the United States.

Biological definitions lend credence to the notion that race is an objective, genetically based difference between groups of people and to sort out the superior races from the inferior ones. "Scientific" markers such as size of feet, straightness of hair, and color of blood were also used to differentiate between races (Garrouette, p.57-59). As Clifton (1989) stated

the idea of Indian blood is a culturally standardized figure of speech, a folk metaphor for biological ancestry, the old European root of thinking that something called *race* inherently determines the identities and characteristics of individuals and groups. (p.26)

Although Canada did not employ the blood quantum theory in the same way as the United States, legal definitions do acknowledge the percentage of Aboriginal blood. The impact of blood quantum/percentage for individuals has created a system whereby a person who has one quarter Aboriginal blood may be considered legally Aboriginal but they may not be acknowledged by the band or accepted as a band member. Thus many may legally belong to an 'ethnic' group with a distinctive culture but they are not accepted by the group members (Mishibinijima, 2004, p. 20-21). An example of the use of blood quantum for band membership is among the Kahnawake Mohawk's in Quebec. In 1981, the Band council ruled that in order to be considered a band member the person must possess 50% Mohawk blood. And further, "charges all band members –male or female– to marry Indians or forfeit their band membership, along with the rights to live on the reserve, own land, hold office, or vote in tribal elections"(Valaskakis, 2005, 234).



In the decolonization process it is important that dialogue around Aboriginal identity now include Aboriginal writers using their perspective and epistemology in addressing the issues. Identity from the perspective of Aboriginal writers is beginning to emerge in the literature. Anderson (2000) proposed that identity reconstruction for Aboriginal people could be studied as a process that was “a fluid journey based on the four directions of the Medicine Wheel” (p.16). She used the Medicine Wheel as a tool to examine the complex relationships among all aspects of life “from natural and physical worlds, to spiritual, mental and emotional aspects of human and natural development” (p.16). Identity construction of Native identity was a four step process

1. Resist, who I am not
2. Reclaim where I have come from
3. Construct where I am going
4. Act what are my responsibilities

The four concepts of reclaim, resist, construct and act were seen as the basis from which exploration of identity and cultural reconstruction for Aboriginal people could begin using past and current understandings of identity. This model was seen as a positive method for research in identity including individuals of mixed ancestry.

Alfred (1999) in *Peace, Power and Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto* rejected the term Aboriginal in discussions of identity as he saw it as a term used by the dominant government with the goal of taking over Indigenous existence into its own political agenda and system. Alfred saw this as creating a world where Aboriginal people would identify themselves only through political-legal terms rather than through ties to their Indigenous culture. He proposed that in order to create healthy indigenous nations it was necessary to reject the colonial state in all ways, physically, spiritually and intellectually and return to the traditional values of the ancestors. Alfred proposed four ways of describing identity. Table 1 describes the spectrum of identities:

Table 1 Spectrum of Identities

Traditional Nationalist	Represents values, principles, and approaches of an indigenous cultural perspective that accepts no compromise with the colonial structure.
Secular Nationalist	Represents an incomplete or unfulfilled indigenous perspective, stripped of its spiritual element and oriented almost solely towards confronting colonial structures
Tribal Pragmatist	Interest based calculation, perspective that merges indigenous and mainstream values towards the integration of Native communities with colonial structures
Racial Minority	Represents Western values-a perspective completely separate from Indigenous cultures and supportive of the colonial structures that are the sole source of Native Identification

(Alfred, 1999, p.32)

Alfred's perspective supports a rather narrow, isolationist approach to identity development that would not include the experience of individuals of mixed ancestry.

Cornthassel (2003) proposed the following definition of Indigenous which addresses identity from an Aboriginal perspective;

People who believe they are ancestrally related and identify themselves based on oral and/or written histories, as descendants of the original inhabitants of their ancestral homelands;

People who may, but not necessarily, have their own informal and/or formal political, economic and social institutions, which tend to be community-based and reflect their distinct ceremonial cycles, kinship networks, and continuously evolving cultural traditions;

People who speak(or once spoke) an Indigenous language, often different from the dominant society's language-even where the indigenous language is not spoken, distinct dialects and uniquely indigenous expressions may persist as a form of indigenous identity;

People who distinguish themselves from the dominant society, and/or other cultural groups while maintaining a close relationship with the ancestral homelands/sacred sites, which may be threatened by ongoing military, economic or political encroachments or may be places where indigenous peoples have been previously expelled, which seeking to enhance their cultural, political and economic autonomy.(p.91-92)

Cherokee scholar Eva Marie Garroutte (2003) in *Real Indians Identity and the Survival of Native America* explored a variety of issues surrounding Aboriginal identity. She examined the various methods of defining identity, legal, biological, self identification, and culture:

First, like definitions based on law, a definition of identity based on kinship as I have constructed it respects the primacy of the collective, the tribal 'we', without becoming entangled in legal fictions; for it reminds members that they enjoy their place ...only by the communities collective pleasure. They must understand that should they offend the community or act in ways that harm it, the community can renounce and remove them- individual claims to rights of belonging based on law, blood, culture, or self-definition notwithstanding.

Second, like definitions based on biology, a definition of identity based on kinship honours a persons' essential connection to the ancestors; yet it does so without shaming or diminishing either mixed bloods or individuals who enter the life of a tribal community through a pathway other than birth.

Third, like identity definitions based on culture, one based on kinship...does not demand that we see Native culture as either a static, unchanging relic or as whatever anyone chooses to label Indian. Instead, it suggests that cultures both change and stay the same- that they include both specific practices, which may shift and change as circumstances demand, and stable underlying principles (such as...reciprocity), which may properly be lived out at different times in different ways.

Finally, like definitions based on self-identification, identity founded on kinship respects the dignity and personhood of the individual. It does not ask communities to heedlessly spread out their...resources for the rampant delectation of all comers. But it does encourage them to see even those who are on the margins of other definitions of identity...as individuals who carry in their very bodies a powerful and important connection to the ancestors, and thus as potential relatives who possess personal worth and unique talents.

In short, a definition of identity founded on traditional notions of kinship sets the conditions for the potential, compassionate incorporation into the tribal community of Indian persons whom other definitions can exclude. Thus, it is a flexible definition. (p.135)

In terms of identity, she suggested that Aboriginal communities “do have traditional teachings concerning such questions” (p.114) such as various ways of reckoning kinship that may or may not have anything to do with actual “blood” relationship (p.118-121). For example, many Aboriginal peoples have expressed the connections between people as being “memory in the blood” (p.120), or in other words, “one either belongs to the ancestors or one does not [and] it’s not important [...] what their blood quantum is” (p.124). While this may seem to be bringing us into notions of essentialism, Garrouette argues “that the essentialism of tribal philosophies can be founded on a different logic than the one that has dominated social scientific thinking about kinship; a sacred logic to which notions of genealogical distance and blood quantum are foreign and even irrelevant” (p.125). For example, Western thought on identity transmission and kinship is biological, that is, transmitted strictly through birth. However, many Aboriginal philosophies also allow for the ceremonial transmission of identity and kinship via means such as adoption. One of the better examples of this practice of adoption of “outsiders” into a tribal community is that of the Houdenosaunee, well known for adopting both Native and Non-native peoples and fully integrating them into Houdenosaunee society based on the individual adoptee’s *behaviour as a Houdenosaunee person* (p.130-1 emphasis mine). If the adoptee did not behave in an appropriate manner, they were likely to be killed. In other Aboriginal philosophies, people who did not

behave appropriately, such as using sorcery for personal gain or exhibiting the hoarding of wealth, ran the risk of losing one's place in society (p.131-2). Thus Garrouette argues that indigenous essentialisms are very different from the biological, social scientific varieties and that they have nothing to do with race. Rather, the indigenous essentialisms of identity "emphasise the unique importance of genealogical relatedness to tribal communities while also allowing, at least in principle, for people of any race to be brought into kinship relations through the transformative mechanism of ceremony" (p.127). In other words, identity and belonging based on traditional notions of kinship. Further Garrouette offers the following viewpoint on the issue of identity, "individuals belong to those communities because they carry the essential nature that binds them to the people *and* because they are willing to behave in ways that the communities define as responsible" (p.134 *emphases original*). Garrouette's discussion on identity is inclusive of those of mixed ancestry and supports the direction of this study.

As previously mentioned the work by Lawrence (2004) is one of the few Canadian studies on identity among mixed ancestry Aboriginal people. She identified the struggles of mixed ancestry Aboriginal people in an urban setting coming to terms with their sense of identity. These struggles included that the difficulty in recouping knowledge of culture and history coming from families where silence and lack of connection to the culture was the norm; the impact of the Canadian government imposed

definitions on who was of Aboriginal ancestry and their efforts to create a community within the urban environment. Lawrence proposed that these issues point to the need;

for different ways of conceptualizing citizenship in Indigenous nations where being Onkwehonwe or Anishinaabe-that is, members of specific nations-is the goal and where Indianness, as a signifier that one is a member of an oppressed and colonized minority who must fight for federal patronage, ceases to exist. (p.226)

### **The Métis**

A distinct group of mixed ancestry peoples in the Canadian context are the Métis and it is this group that most Canadians think of when we hear or read terms such as “half breed”, “mixed blood” and “mixed race” as the predominant view is that the Métis are simply people who are half Aboriginal and half European, usually French. Such assumptions, which are deeply rooted in Canadian history, are difficult to dislodge and have resulted in the question of Métis identity being one fraught with difficulty. Currently, there are several different and sometimes conflicting ways of looking at Métis identity all of which are “intimately connected to the origins and history of the people being described” (Shore, 1996, p. 125).

To a large degree, the Métis have been defined “in terms of who they not, instead of who they are” (LaRocque, 2001, p. 381). According to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) the Métis are a distinct group who are “neither First Nations or Inuit” (RCAP, 1996, p.199). Generally, anyone with some degree of Aboriginal and European

heritage is seen as Métis, while others make distinctions between those who can trace their ancestry to the historic Red River Métis community and those who cannot. However, as Emma LaRocque points out, “all these descriptions are either misleading or inadequate as Métis and Halfbreed histories and identities cannot be so easily generalized or fused together” (LaRocque, 2001, p.381).

That the Métis had their origins in the St. Lawrence fur trade system and that by the 1700's distinctly Métis communities were in existence in the Old Northwest is undisputed (Shore, 1996, LaRocque, 2001). However, stereotypes, government policy, politics and the tendency for the historical record to deal with the Métis as individuals rather than communities has resulted in the confusion and misperceptions surrounding Métis identity (LaRocque, 2001, p.381-384). Further, as argued by Emma LaRocque, the scholarly focus on the Red River Métis has obscured “the complexity of Métis origins and history” (2001, p.385).

Government control and legislation of Aboriginal identity via the Indian Act has further served to exclude and marginalize the Métis. The Indian Act is not only exclusionary, it also created the “legal loophole known as enfranchisement by which status Indians would lose their status. Enfranchisement created a new group: the non-status Indians” (LaRocque, 2001, p.386). Those who lost their status could no longer stay on the reserves, nor were they welcome in mainstream society and as a result, joined Métis communities, particularly those situated close to reserves.



Generations of intermarriage meant that these communities were already related and in many cases, “it has become virtually impossible to make a distinction between non-status Indians and Métis as some Métis may also be legally non-status, and some non-status Indians may be racially and culturally Métis” (LaRocque, 2001, p.387).

Colonization for the Métis people of Western Canada took the form of political dismissal and dispossession and the role of the Canadian government in this has had significant impacts. Not only did the Canadian government effectively dispossess the Métis of their lands in the Red River as well as ensuring that political control of the area was lost, the government has “consistently refused to recognize the Métis as a distinct ethnic group” (LaRocque, 2001, p.386). Further, the historical dismissal of the Métis “as confused, volatile half-savages who embodied presumed conflicting forces of ‘civilisation’ and ‘savagery’” (Stanley, 1960; Morton, 1950, as cited in LaRocque, 2001, p.382) has contributed to the entrenchment of definitions based on biology.

In a study that reflects this impact on the identity of Métis people, Legasse (1958) in *People of Indian Ancestry in Manitoba* surveyed twenty people and proposed the following definition of Métis people;

1. Any person of mixed white and Indian blood having not less than one-quarter Indian blood but that does not include Indians as defined in the Indian Act or non-treaty Indians.
2. Half-Breeds are persons of Indian descent living in poor houses similar to those on the reserves. One-eighth being as far as I would go in searching for people of Indian background.
3. Any full-blooded or half-blooded Indian who is not living as a white person. In this connection, the attitude of the White neighbours may force certain families to remain Half-Breeds longer than they would otherwise.
4. A Half-Breed is a person who has some degree of Indian blood plus an upbringing which combines primitive living usually in conjunction with a hunting and fishing economy. This applies even when these people have almost embraced the white way of life. A person with a similar degree of Indian blood is accepted into the Canadian way of life only when he conforms to all general requirements of this society; the degree of blood is not too important.
5. People with Indian background who do menial tasks or are generally employed on part-time jobs. They usually live in poorer homes and have poorer standards of living. For example, I would not consider Mr. as a half-breed because he is an office manager and a respected citizen in our community. (p. 56-57)

While such obviously racist definitions are unacceptable today, it is interesting to note that the undercurrents of such thinking continues to move contemporary thinking as seen in the current apparent inability to move beyond the biological.

The contemporary definition as put forth by the Métis National Council (MNC) defines Métis as “an Aboriginal person who self-identifies as Métis, who is distinct from Indian and Inuit and is a descendant of those Métis who received or were entitled to receive land grants and/or scrip

under the provisions of the Manitoba Act, 1870, or the Dominion Lands Act” (RCAP, 1996, p.377). The Manitoba Métis Federation takes this definition a step further and defines the Métis as

- (a) “Métis” means a person who self identifies as Métis, is of historic Métis Nation Ancestry, is distinct from other Aboriginal people and is accepted by the Métis Nation.
- (b) “Historic Métis Nation” means the Aboriginal people then known as Métis or Halfbreeds who resided in the Historic Métis Nation Homeland;
- (c) “Historic Métis Nation Homeland” means the area of land in west central North America used and occupied as the traditional territory of the Métis or Halfbreeds as they were then known;
- (d) “Métis Nation” means the Aboriginal people descended from the Historic Métis Nation, which is now comprised of all Métis Nation citizens and is one of the “aboriginal peoples of Canada” within s.35 of the Constitution Act of 1982;
- (e) “Distinct from other Aboriginal peoples” means distinct for cultural and nationhood purposes.
- (f) “Children” includes all natural or adopted children, whether legitimate or illegitimate under Canadian law. (MMF, 2005)

As Valaskakis (2005) pointed out the recognition of who a Métis person is remains complex. The current meaning of the term Métis is highly contentious and open to debate. As stated by LaRocque (2001),

For those who insist that anyone should have the right to become “Métis” merely by self-declaration is engaging in colonial imposition. If Aboriginal self-government or the actualization of land grants and Aboriginal rights is to mean anything for the Métis, they must have the right to define and determine their constituencies. (p.396)

### **Legislated Policies and Practices**

Legislated policies and practices have been crafted within the framework of colonization with both a stated and unstated goal of controlling and annihilating Aboriginal people. The Royal Proclamation of 1763 was crafted by the British Crown, to address the need for increased demand for Aboriginal land by settlers. This Proclamation recognised that Aboriginal people possessed the land and it could be relinquished by recognised Aboriginal leaders. Identity was thus tied to who the colonizers identified as Aboriginal and who were the leaders. The Proclamation set the pattern for later establishment of treaties and legislated identity to facilitate the process of obtaining the land in exchange for parcels of land, hunting fishing and trapping rights and annual annuities in exchange for the use and profit by the settlers of the British Crown.

The Indian Protection Act of 1850 and the British North America Act Section 91 (24) made “Indians” the sole responsibility of the government. The definition of ‘Indian’ was narrowed again in the 1869 Indian Act. Traditional methods of government such as hereditary leaders,

clan systems, collective governance were replaced with the electoral system of the colonial government "Control over "Indians and lands reserved for Indians" was exercised through laws and a series of regulations collectively contained within the Indian Act of 1869" (Schouls, p.41). The Indian Act of 1876 determined who was legally described as an 'Indian', who was eligible to live on a reserve, what cultural practices were allowed, how people would be educated, how land and resources could be used, in other words a comprehensive control over the identity and lives of Aboriginal people. This Act consolidated and modified pre-existing legislation regarding Aboriginal peoples and legally defined an "Indian" as "a person who pursuant of this Act is registered as an Indian, or is entitled to be registered as an Indian or a person of Indian blood reputed to belong to a band and entitled to use its lands." An amendment was passed in 1880 which established a Department of Indian Affairs and thus Aboriginal people became firmly controlled by the colonial powers. Colonial interests of obtaining the land and resources were relentlessly pursued and realized through the dispossession of Aboriginal people from their lands and into a position where identity and existence was increasingly dependent on government.

Over the next fifty years colonial expansion continued as the West was settled. The policies and programs of the Department of Indian Affairs effectively allowed for suppression of Aboriginal culture and traditional values. Assimilation of Aboriginal people into Canadian

society was seen by government, educators and the church as the answer to helping Aboriginal people to lead a “better”, i.e. Euro-Canadian, life. Children were placed in residential schools, forbidden to speak their language and were taught Christianity and the Canadian way of life. This practice effectively created generations of Aboriginal people who had been removed from their culture and traditions, their Elders, their values, their family and their identity as Aboriginal.

Prior to 1985, section 12(1) (b) of the Indian Act stripped an ‘Indian’ woman of her registration / status if she married a non-registered /non-status man and any children born would also be denied status under the Indian Act. The non legalized children of status women could also lose their status if the father was alleged to be non-status. Additionally, in what is known as the “double mother clause”, section 12(1) (a) (p. iv), a person whose mother *and* paternal grandmother *did not* have status prior to marriage to a status person would be stripped of their status upon reaching the age of 21 (Lawrence, 2004, p. 53). Between 1876 and 1985 it is estimated that 25,000 people lost their status as “Indians” (Holmes, 1987, p.8). Generally, people who lost their status, mainly Native women who married non-Status men, their connection with their community was broken, and in most cases neither the woman nor her children could reconnect with the community, i.e.: no going back. Thus, the majority of these women and children were prevented from returning to their home communities and ended up in urban centres (Lawrence, 2004, p. 79).

Following the 1981 ruling by the United Nations Human Rights Committee that Canada was in violation of the International Covenant on Political and Civil Rights by denying Sandra Lovelace, a woman who had lost status upon marriage “her full cultural rights under section 27 of the Covenant” the right to live in her ethnic community of origin after marriage (Holmes, p. 5, Lawrence, 2004, p. 57). This ruling forced Canada to bring the Indian Act into compliance with the new Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and as a result Canada implemented *Bill C-31 an Act to Amend the Indian Act* in 1985. The intention of Bill C-31 was to remove gender based discrimination and to restore status and membership rights to those eligible persons. In addition, it also separated status and band membership, whereby the federal government would retain control over who was registered as an “Indian” while individual bands had the option to control who could be a band member. As a result, some people are registered or status ‘Indians’ but are not members of a band, others are band members but are not registered, while others are both registered and band members. Further, as a result of Bill C-31, not all status ‘Indians’ have the same ability to pass their status on to their children and the legal distinctions between “Indians” and other Aboriginal peoples, non-status and Métis, remains. Obviously, this has created significant divisions within the Aboriginal population down to the individual family level. (Holmes, p.12-13; Lawrence, 2004, p. 64-5).

In the United States, legal identity as Aboriginal is dependent on blood quantum or percentage of “Indian blood” and can be divided into infinitesimal parts. However, in most cases one must be able to legally prove at least one-quarter ‘Indian blood’ in order to have legal and tribal recognition as ‘Indian’ (Garrouette, p. 15; Lawrence, 2004, p. 73-81). In Canada on the other hand, while legal definitions are not based on “blood quantum”, recognition as ‘Indian’ is nonetheless based on parentage. With control over band membership given to individual First Nations under Bill C-31, a few First Nations in Canada have gone the “blood quantum” route as a requirement for band membership, one of the first being Kahnawake (Lawrence, 2004, p. 77-78), with some deeming those who had status prior to Bill C-31 as having “100% blood quantum, even though Indian status is a very poor indicator of degree of Indian blood” (Lawrence, 2004, p. 68). Under the new eligibility rules outlined by Bill C-31, those eligible to have their status restored included women who had lost status by marriage to a non-status man and her children; children born outside of marriage to a status woman who were stripped of their status due to allegations that their father was non-status; those who previously fell under the “double mother” clause; and those people enfranchised under previous versions of the Indian Act. As a result, if both of the parents of a Bill C-31 applicant are eligible under these new rules, that individual is registered under Section 6(1) of the 1985 Indian Act. If only one parent is eligible, then that person is registered under Section 6(2). Those registered



under Section 6(2) have their ability to pass status on to their children more restricted than those registered under Section 6(1). Essentially, unless a person registered under Section 6(2) has children with a person who is also registered; the children will *not* be eligible for registration. The implications of this for subsequent generations are obvious in that within a generation or two, legal status as “Indians” will once again be “lost” (Holmes, p.12-13).

### **Racism and Identity**

Colonizers sought to justify their actions in establishing dominance over a group by establishing hierarchical definitions of inferior groups. Through tactics such as identifying real or imaginary differences between European civilization and the ‘savages’ of the New World, assigning negative values to real and perceived differences between the colonizers and the colonized, by ensuring that these differences were embedded in policies to justify the privileges and power of the colonizers and the inadequacy of the colonized racial lines were a important tool. (Memmi, 1965) As has been noted Canada’s history is one of colonialism in which the French first began the colonization of this land succeeded by the British. The writings and thoughts regarding Aboriginal peoples have been created within this colonial framework. For example, the idea of the noble, “vanishing Indian” has its roots in the works of French intellectuals of the Romantic and Enlightenment periods, such as Voltaire, Rousseau as well as the writings of Jesuit missionaries (Vickers, 1998, p.40; LaRocque,

1975). In the nineteenth century artists and image makers such as Kane and Curtis took “possession of the Indian image. It was theirs to manipulate and display in way they wanted. The image-makers returned from Indian country with their images and displayed them as actual representations of the way Indians really were. Fanciful as they were in many respects, these images nevertheless became the image of the Indian for most non-Native Canadians who knew no better” (Francis, 1992, p.43).

Colonialism and imperialism are intrinsically related and “economically motivated, but (are) also culturally embedded processes which create and also suppress knowledge. Colonialism depends on a constructed, instrumental racism for its moral legitimisation...to demonstrate the superior nature of the coloniser” (Green, 1995, p.86-7). The image of the “Native” in Euro-Canadian thought is one that is diametrically opposed to notions of “civilisation”. The Native is savage, close to nature, and inherently “uncivilised”. All that the European is, the Native is not “to the point that even ‘acceptable’ Indian ways have to be set apart or used as a castigation of white civilisation” (LaRocque, 1988, 200). The issues and problems faced by Aboriginal people today, particularly as we are rapidly eschewing our segregation and moving into Canada’s urban centres, are ones that face all Canadians. We must all face up to Canada’s colonial past in order to move beyond the current paralysis we are under. In *Towards a Détente with History, Confronting Canada’s*

*Colonial Legacy*, Joyce Green (1995) eloquently states what is facing Canadian society today.

The obscured reality of Canada's colonial foundations contributes to a contemporary Canadian psychosis as we struggle to account for and deal with the consequences of that same colonialism while generally denying its reality. This illness is evident in the repetition of historical accounts that are partial and exclusionary; in the carefully maintained incomprehension at indigenous nation's resistance to assimilation and struggle for self-determination; in policies that purport to respond to indigenous problems while failing to conceptualise the role of settler populations in creating or solving those problems. No reconciliation will grow from such dishonest and partial remedies. (p.91)

In her doctoral dissertation, Emma LaRocque (1999) examined the ways in which colonization has created textual records that serve the purposes of colonisation and work to dehumanise and subjugate the colonised. "Colonization produces a pervasive structural and psychological relationship between the colonizer and the colonized and is ultimately reflected in the dominant institutions, policies and literatures of occupying powers" (p. 9). In terms of image and identity, the fact that we have become stereotypes for North American "entertainment and cultural productions" (p.21) and are "persistently portrayed as the grotesque savage or the Noble savage" (p.45) has resulted in the internalisation of this negative imagery and a struggle for self-acceptance. As Nicole Hetu (2000) suggests in *Ideology: The Seduction of a Mixed-Blood Identity* , "We confuse our own definition of ourselves as Indigenous people living with constructed "Indian" identities those which have their roots in

imperial thought and in the imperial intentions of the dominant settler society” (p.125).

Aboriginal peoples and ‘our place’ in Canadian society in geographical, social and cultural terms have not only been created, but have been consistently researched, written, and discussed within colonial, Euro-Canadian frameworks. The “Native” in Canada has been socially constructed as “other”, spatially segregated from Canadian society and what constitutes “authentic culture” has been, and continues to be, dictated and corrupted by false images constructed by the dominant/colonial society.

Aboriginal “heterogeneous identities have slowly and methodically been restructured by ‘the myths of historians’ into a more homogenous identity that groups all Indians into a single amalgamated ‘tribe’...accomplished by the ‘outside’ influences of the colonizing culture.” (Vickers, p. 3). As a result, today Aboriginal peoples are “living between the two worlds of their own historical culture and that of Christian America. Some have found singular identities that rely on a deft adaptation and manipulation of both these worlds” (Vickers, p. 3). Vickers argued that two basic stereotypes have been imposed upon Aboriginal peoples from ‘outside’, the ‘positive’ image of the ‘Noble Savage’ and the negative one of the ‘Ignoble Savage’ both of which serve to support the idea of Aboriginal peoples being the “racial inferior” (p.3).

Stereotypes about Aboriginal peoples are rooted in history, have been firmly established in the Canadian psyche, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, and have proven difficult to dislodge. Further, there is little evidence to indicate that more realistic mainstream understandings and representations of contemporary Aboriginal societies have replaced the images of the past. However, the construction and definition of identity is a process that is both internal and external. That is images from within and outside of the Aboriginal world is interwoven, that the internal image and definition of Aboriginal identity is created with implicit and explicit reference to the dominant society (Coates, p.28). As argued by Scott Vickers (1998), Aboriginal history over the last five hundred years has been written by the colonizer, using the colonizer's language and has obscured Aboriginal histories and the means by which Aboriginal peoples "knew themselves" (p.3). Finally a major impact of the process of dominance by the colonizer and the concepts of racism is the impact on the people who are colonized. As Poupart (2003, p.87-88) notes assimilation of the dominant groups ideology through the institutions such as church and school form how the Aboriginal person views themselves as they internalize and participate in the perpetuation of the ideas, ideology and definitions of the colonizer. Neither the alienation nor the textual and political devastations are over (LaRocque, 1999, p.10). However, given the diversity of Aboriginal cultures and the fact urban Aboriginal populations are not homogenous, the exploration of "Native identity"

remains complex. As stated by Doxtator (1992), "It is very difficult to discuss "Indianness" with any measure of neutrality. There is no one true perspective on "Indianness". There are ranges of reactions and feelings and interpretations" (p.10).

### **Aboriginal Culture and Tradition**

Connection to the land and a close relationship with the environment has been considered an essential aspect of Aboriginal identity. Valaskakis (2005) described reserves as "a space and state of being that is our own" (p.245). Aboriginal identity was interwoven with having a connection with the past through the land. However many Aboriginal people living in the urban setting do not have the experience of a specific rural home territory. In the words of Said (2000) "exile is solitude experienced outside the group: the deprivations felt at not being with others in the communal habitation. Exile....is fundamentally a discontinuous state of being. Exiles are cut off from their roots, their land, their past" (p.177). Though Said speaks from the position of a Palestinian in North America, it is a useful comparison. The experience for many Aboriginal people is that though they are in their "own country", there are nevertheless "cut off" from their past, their lands and their roots in many ways. In the words of Simone Weil as quoted by Said (2000), "To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognised need of the human soul" (p.183). Said implies that "roots" must be a physical, immovable place rather than portable, in the form of stories and oral

histories. Yet one must question if ones' "roots" must be a physical, immovable place or can ones' sense of "roots" be portable, in the form of stories and oral histories? As significant numbers of Aboriginal peoples are migrating into the cities, and becoming like many people around the world who are engaged in the process of migration, many are in what Warren Cariou (2002) terms "a crisis of belonging"(p.11). However, Cariou also suggests that we do not "need to stay in one place all our lives in order to re-connect with our environments. We need instead to re-examine our stories, to discover a more fluid kind of belonging, one that melds memory and voice and sensation into the complex geometry of our lives" (p.11).

An important factor in development of identity as an Aboriginal person is knowledge of their culture. Sue and Sue (2003) proposed that concepts such as living in harmony with nature, focusing on extended family relations, searching for becoming within the natural world, and seeing people as essentially good are important concepts for Aboriginal people. According to Gill (2002) the mind, body, spirit and heart were four interrelated concepts that explained the relationships in the world. These relationships included the earth, the plants, animals, environment and spirits. Actions such as storytelling, drumming, ceremonies, dreaming are used to forge and maintain the relationships (Sutherland, 2002). Castellano (2000) defined three ways for the transmission of Aboriginal culture and tradition. These were, traditional teaching passed from one generation to

another through stories and ceremonies, through observations and doing of actions and thoughts and by connecting with the spiritual world dreams, visions and intuition. It also emerges through the language which defines and shapes the world.

Momaday, (1975) a Kiowa-Cherokee writer proposed that there was an intimate connection among tribal people that was “memory in the blood, a racial memory that leaps across generations, linking him to his ancestors, that each of us bears in his genes or in his blood or wherever a recollection of the past”(p.121).

An important source of culture and tradition is the teachings of the Elder's in a community. An Elder has been described as a person who knows the traditional teachings, who carry out the practices of traditional teachings through their behaviours of truth, dignity, humility, and through being available to help and heal others through their knowledge of natural and spiritual medicine and healing practices. (Couture, 1996; Johnson, 1994) A difficulty for many Aboriginal and mixed ancestry people who are born and raised in an urban setting has been their minimal contact with those who could share the cultural knowledge they seek.

An additional legacy of colonization is the notion that authentic Aboriginal identity is embedded in tradition and culture that is time bound in the past, and is connected to the language, spiritual beliefs and practices and connection to the land of the forefathers. Garrouette (2003) defined ‘tradition’ as a concept that is not a petrified relic from the past or a rigid



adherence to past behaviour but rather something spiritual. Tradition does not discount the realm of faith and belief and the knowledge found in the sacred and spiritual (p.138-9). "It is oriented toward Original Instructions, looking to elders, sacred stories, and historic practices for its support...It proposes a place in the conversations for those who live and move in Indian communities, in scholarly communities, or in both" (p.136). Thus her approach to the term "tradition" is one that "respect(s) the tenets of indigenous philosophies of knowledge (p.137).

This idea of an authentic culture implies that the real culture is that which existed in pre-colonial traditions and customs. "The problem with such claims to cultural authenticity is that often become entangled in an essentialist cultural position in which fixed practices become iconized as authentically Indigenous and others are excluded as hybridized or contaminated (Ashcroft et al, 2000, p.21). This perception of Aboriginal culture as static also promotes the idea that "it is more important to focus on Indians still "in the bush" than those that exist in contemporary urban and rural settings" (Mishibinijima, 2004, p.18). Cultures change; this is natural and normal and is certainly the experience of Aboriginal people. As LaRocque points out, we cannot, nor should we "go back" to a pre-contact existence, but neither can we succumb to Western stereotype in the process of re/defining ourselves (1999, p.281). Cook-Lynn (1998) suggests that an unwholesome fascination with tribal authenticity where only a narrow range of practices, beliefs and knowledge reflect the real

'Indian' eventually stunts the growth and vitality of the group. Contact with sources of traditional knowledge and culture such as Elders or home communities is, for many Aboriginal people and those of mixed ancestry, often fraught with difficulty.

### **Images and Aboriginal Identity**

Aboriginal identity as portrayed through images, textbooks and literature has had a major impact on identity development. Othering or the 'other' is defined as the "excluded or 'mastered subject created by the discourse of power. It is a symbolic representation of the colonized people by the colonizers. Othering is a process required in order to separate the groups and establish the "naturalness and primacy of the colonizing culture and world view" (Ashcroft et al, p.169-171). This process is accomplished in Canadian society, in deceptively simple ways, education through the school system, the popular literature and various forms of the media. Colonial language that dehumanises and denigrates Aboriginal people has found expression in Canadian literature (LaRocque, 1999), both academic and non-academic, and has insinuated itself into both the "National consciousness" and "Native consciousness". Many ideas and images of Aboriginal people that are expressed in Canadian culture relegate Native people and cultures to the past (LaRocque, 1999). For example, one can walk into any "tourist" type of store selling "Canadiana" and find postcards of Aboriginal people in "traditional" dress standing in front of a tepee or stuffed toys dressed in "traditional Native" regalia, and

generally manufactured in Asia. It is important to note as well that the majority of these images present the standardized Hollywood "Plains" image (Berkhoffer, 1978). It is also an image that assumes Aboriginal people are "vanishing", "historical" (Francis, 1992) or that Aboriginal people have remained "down" due to our supposed inability to cope with and adapt to the dominant society (LaRocque, 1975, 1999). Much of this discourse by the dominant society has the colonial objective of total subjugation of Aboriginal peoples.

Although it is assumed we now live in "an age of post colonialism [and that] the dominant culture has apparently lost its cultural monopoly", the West perpetuates an assumed sovereignty [and] the colonial legacy and indeed the processes continue" (Todd, 1992, p.71). Indeed, as Todd asserts, in this age of "postmodernism/ post colonialism", the dominant society, in its "spiritual emptiness" has looked to Native cultures, philosophies, and spirituality "in a quest for further discovery" (p.71). Our cultures and spiritualities have been appropriated by the New Age movement and we have been reduced to entertainment. This is yet another, modern day manifestation of the "Noble Savage" and the interwoven idea of a vanished people "makes the appropriation of Indianness easier for those who wish to capitalize on this conception. New Age culture ...has occasioned a resurgence of 'plastic medicine men' who reinforce the mystic warrior image for their own capitalistic use, selling Indian religious experiences...with little regard for either the sanctity of traditional

shamanism or its ceremonial purposes” (Vickers, 1998, p.42). Although the New Age movement is primarily American the concepts have also been embraced by many Canadians. As Garrotte (2003) states, “New Age believers frequently piece together their own versions of a ceremony from bits of tribal practice. Sweat lodges are particularly popular, as are observation of the solstice, the creation of “medicine wheels”, participation in plains-style “vision quests”, and so on.” (p.91). Although Aboriginal peoples speak out against this appropriation of our cultures by the dominant society it is often from the perspective that the ability to perform or participate in ceremonies is a long and difficult road to understand and play an appropriate role. Appropriation of ceremonial practices is often justified in the name of “freedom of speech” (Armstrong, 1990, p.143).

Some of the obvious imagery that comes to the average Canadian when they think of Aboriginal people is of “Teepees, headdresses, totem poles...buckskin and tomahawks. They are the symbols that the public uses in its definition of what an Indian is” (Doxtator, 1992, p.10). As put forward by Absolon and Willet, “the onslaught of distorted images continues through such media as television, movies, literature, school curricula, and popular culture” (2005, p.113). Indeed, one could suggest that the modern image of the alcoholic, welfare dependent “main street Indian” is a modern version of the “howling savage”(LaRocque, 1975, p.33) and Aboriginal peoples “have never been able to stop the traffic in

distorted and sensationalized imagery" (Miller, 1998, p.106). Valaskakis (2005) describes the depiction of 'Indian' women as ranging from beasts of burden, country wives of trappers and traders, and most importantly the 'Indian Princess' and the 'Ugly Squaw'. She proposed that the image of Aboriginal women "both the nobility and the savagery of Indian women have been defined in relation to White males" (p.134).

As Francis (1992) noted;

Where the princess was beautiful, the squaw was ugly, even deformed. Where the princess was virtuous, the squaw was debased immoral, a sexual convenience. Where the princess was proud, the squaw lived a squalid life of servile toil, mistreated by her men- and openly available to non-Native men. (P.121-122)

Through these images the Aboriginal of the imagination has been made more 'real' than the Aboriginal of actual existence.

Mainstream education, both historically and today, presents the world and history from the Euro-Canadian viewpoint. As Blaut (1993) asserts, "Textbooks are an important window to a culture; more than just books, they are semi-official statements of exactly what the opinion-forming elite of the culture want the educated youth of that culture to believe to be true about the past and present world" (p.6). Many Aboriginal writers, scholars, poets and artists express their experiences in school, of how they were taught to hate themselves, to feel shame for their "savage ancestors" who had the audacity to defend themselves and their land from the "gift" of European "civilisation" (LaRocque, 1999, p.181-7). As Memmi asserts, the education systems of the colonizers do not

transmit the history or the “memory” of the colonized, but rather that of the colonizer and

he and his lands are nonentities or exist only with reference...to what he is not. The teacher and school represent a world which is too different from his family environment...far from preparing the adolescent to find himself completely, school creates a permanent duality. (P.105-6)

*Halfbreed* by Maria Campbell (1973) which describes the negative experiences growing up in a marginal community and the negative life choices made as a result of systemic racism and the classic play by George Ryga (1971) *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* which depicts the tragic life and death of an Aboriginal woman living in Vancouver are examples of writings that portray the despair of Aboriginal people. Thus popular writings also play a role in influencing identity for Aboriginal people. As LaRocque (1999) states the image of “the lurking, crouching, tomahawk swinging, scalp taking, painted, naked howling savage (who was rumoured to be my forefather) had a profound and lasting impact on me and others” (p.187). Stereotypes and “othering” have, as LaRocque suggests, “informed and confused contemporary Native peoples (and) in our desperate journeys for cultural meaning, we run back to Hollywood’s ‘pretend Indians’ with their rituals and symbols out of synch with our realities” (LaRocque, 1999, p.192-3). What, exactly, happens to a people who have been subjected to sustained “othering”? Clearly, the levels of distress in all aspects of Aboriginal life are obvious and the very least all

members of society should learn from this is that stereotypes and othering is beyond mere words and images (LaRocque, 1999, p.217).

LaRocque addressed the questions and issues that Aboriginal writers who live in an urban center rather than a land based culture, and did not grow up in a Native language must confront. “These writers, I believe, face an even more difficult task as they seek to develop an Aboriginal based ‘critical centre’. “Perhaps they are even more vulnerable to idealisation than those of us who are privileged to have grown up in Aboriginally-based lifestyles” (LaRocque, 1999, p.276). Most interesting is the way in which Aboriginal writing has been, and still is, received and interpreted. As LaRocque suggests, the dominant society has tended to treat Aboriginal writings as “bitter”, “angry”, mere expressions of “rage”, and “laments” of “self-pity”. This only serves to further dehumanise Aboriginal peoples and undermine Aboriginal resistance to the colonial machine (1999, p.130-3). These expressions also can serve to undermine the perception of identity as an Aboriginal person for the writer. It can therefore be seen that the popular images of Aboriginal people can impact on the development of identity and may influence choice making by mixed ancestry Aboriginals.

## **Identity and the Urban Setting**

As has been discussed cultures change, this is natural and normal and is certainly the experience of Aboriginal people. What changes have been voluntary and what has been forced is another issue, in examining these concepts it is important to address the struggle to define identity in modern, urban Aboriginal life.

For both the mainstream Canadian as well as the Aboriginal population, one must ask what the source of this social and cultural angst is, this “crisis of belonging” we experience, not only on the reserves or in Métis communities but in the city as well. Like others such as Adams (1989); Doxtator (1992); LaRocque (1999); McMaster & Martin (1992); Valaskakis, (2005) I propose that the social construction of the “other” by colonial society, the outside control and construction of “authentic Indian culture”, images and identities has had a profound and lasting impact upon the lives of all Aboriginal peoples, especially in terms of identity. A 500 year social and physical segregation and construction of the image of the “savage” have served to create the idea that Aboriginal peoples do not “belong” in the city. As stated by Coates (1999), “while many of the harsh and judgmental assumptions of the past have been smoothed [...] the general image is still one manufactured and sustained by outsiders” (p.27). Marilyn Dumont (1993) argues that there is a connection between representation and domination and that these inaccurate, stereotypical images created by the dominant society cause us to doubt our experience



and devalue our realities. Furthermore, rural life has undergone significant changes since these notions first emerged in the 1970's. Although many Aboriginal communities *are* still tied to the land in meaningful ways, this is but one reality or experience of "Nativity". To ignore the urban experience because it does not fit the popular image of the Native and Native culture is, Dumont suggests, another form of colonialism (1993, p.48). In discussing these issues, it is important to keep in mind that I do not direct my words solely to the dominant society, but also Aboriginal society as well since "the Native community is as vulnerable as the White community in its internalization and perpetuation of stereotypes" (LaRocque, 1999, p.70).

Identity and cultural confusion was addressed in Marty Dunn's 1971 biography of Duke Redbird. *Red on White: the Biography of Duke Redbird*. One of the most poignant quotes from Redbird is, "Indian people are wandering around in an abyss of ignorance...They hang on to some kind of traditional past that they don't understand and can't really identify with" (Dunn, p.1). Most interesting, in terms of culture, tradition and identity, Redbird found the differences between urban and reserve life extensive and disillusioning. Redbird had believed that the reserves were the "last bastions of Indian culture...reserves were sanctuaries...and that's where the traditions were" (p.52). The reality of what he found led him to quite different conclusions, however. Redbird concluded that it was all a myth constructed by the dominant society, and believed by Aboriginal

peoples, in order to convince them that the only way to “stay Indian is to stay on the reserve” (p.52), thus perpetuating the social, economic and political separation of Aboriginals and Euro-Canadians. It is Redbird’s assertion that “the only way to be a real Indian, and express real Indian values is to get out into society, where things are happening” (p.52).

Redbird saw no contradiction between modern urban life and Aboriginal culture. To him, Aboriginal culture was not vanishing in the cities; rather it was “undergoing a process of change like anything else. The relationship Indians once had to their moccasins, they now have to their boots; the relationship we once had to our teepees, we now have to our apartments. The culture lives. It is always there” (p.59). Redbird’s words express resistance to the segregation, the othering, and the “outside” definition of Aboriginal culture in asserting that urban Aboriginal culture, whatever form it may take, is just as valid as what is found on the reserves.

Valaskakis (2005) in *Indian Country: Essays on Contemporary Native Culture* proposed that battles over who is Indian can both connect and divide communities. Legal membership in a group does not necessarily ensure that the person is accepted and she notes that “In some tribes, light skinned members aren’t invited to sacred ceremonies” (p.230).

Valaskakis proposed that identity for mixed ancestry Aboriginal people was that of an insider/outsider where they lived “in a contestable personal space that is sometimes recognized as tribal, sometimes as Indian, sometimes as white” (p.251).

Colonization has been a successive east-west movement of invasion and dispossession that continues to this day. Indeed, it has increased since the end of the Second World War as the Canadian state has pushed for “modernisation”. This is simply a new word for colonisation except that now it is couched in terms of “economic development” and is leading to further dispossession (LaRocque, 1999, p.140-2). It can therefore be seen that government policies were designed to subjugate Aboriginal people and render them invisible in Canadian society. Aboriginal identity including those who are of mixed ancestry is deeply rooted in the colonial past.

Aboriginal identity in an urban context has persisted despite the common assumption held by the dominant society that the successful adaptation to an urban setting by Aboriginal peoples necessitates the loss of their identity as Aboriginal. In other words, the “successful” urban Aboriginal is no longer a “real Indian”, which implies cultural assimilation. The entrenched misrepresentation of Native peoples in nearly all aspects

of popular culture leads us (...) to seek validation in each other. This is a two-edged sword (...) generalized representations of Aboriginal role models can negate the reality of oppression. A minority of Aboriginal peoples who have successfully negotiated Western culture are too often held up as proof that the problems of oppression, racism, and inequity can be easily overcome or, worse, that the roots of these problems lie not within institutions or systems of governance but within Aboriginal peoples themselves (Absolon & Willet, 2005, p. 109).

The majority of the research that has been done into the urbanisation of Aboriginal peoples to date has focused on the negative social impacts of urbanisation such as living a marginal existence on skid row, sub-standard housing, substance abuse, family violence, high unemployment and the high rates of incarceration. Furthermore, the majority of this research has been conducted by non-Aboriginal researchers within colonial constructs. A classic example of these studies is Hugh Brody's (1971) exploration of the experience of Indians living on skid row. These studies reinforce the perception among Canadians that Aboriginal people do not fit and cannot function in Canadian society. As a result of such research, the underlying assumption by the dominant society

is that once an Aboriginal person relocates to an urban centre, “their identity as Aboriginal people becomes irrelevant (and) there is a strong, sometimes racist, perception that being Aboriginal and being urban are mutually exclusive” (RCAP, vol.4, p.519). This viewpoint is not only racist, it is unrealistic and unfounded. Such studies assume they will find the deplorable social conditions that they perceive exists in many Aboriginal communities to be replicated in the city, and indeed they find what they seek, though little ever comes of it. Almost none of this research of “Indians as problems” addresses the underlying assumptions, or the hegemonic control, held by the dominant society over Aboriginal peoples.

The question remains however, what exactly is “Aboriginal identity” when the city is home to a myriad of cultures, both Aboriginal and non Aboriginal. Winnipeg, for example, is home to many different Aboriginal groups, including but not limited to, the Métis, Cree, Ojibwa, Dakota, Dene and Inuit. Many urban Aboriginal people have developed their own unique identities in a myriad of ways and many maintain strong ties to home communities. In some ways, many of us “do not “fit” anywhere as we do not “conform” to societal “norms” of what an Aboriginal person “should” *look and act* like. One cannot be economically ‘middle class’ or even “be fair-haired and be an Indian ... ‘Passing’ is threatening” (Merskin, 1996, p.283). To be able to “pass” as ‘white’ and yet possess an Aboriginal identity, legal or otherwise, is to disrupt the positioning of Native and newcomer. It challenges the colonial

notions of physical appearance, social position and disrupts the social status quo. In Bonita Lawrence's study (2004) Rose, one of the mixed ancestry people interviewed, recounts an experience with her Japanese father. "Since I got all the recessive genes, and am so white -looking, when I finished high school, he took me to a justice of the peace in the town to get my name changed....He just said, "Look you are white. Life can be a lot easier for you with your mother's name" (p.266).

Although Lawrence's research focused on issues of nationhood and the inclusion of mixed ancestry people in ongoing negotiations her findings are of importance in increasing the understanding of the experience of mixed ancestry Aboriginal people in an urban setting. In her interviews with thirty people she found that the impact of the outside and Colonial control of who is an Indian and who is not via that Indian Act has been profound with long term effects on the identity development of the study participants.

Deborah Davis Jackson (2001), associate professor of Anthropology at Earlham College, Richmond, Indiana also interviewed individuals of mixed ancestry in the urban context. She recalls the childhood of one informant:

There were other ways in which Michelle's father hinted at...Native ancestry without actually telling her the family background...tells of her fathers' response when she...was upset because an older boy...had said to her "You're nothing but a dirty little squaw, and the only thing you're good for is to throw down on your back." Michelle went home crying and told her father, who said, "You're going to run across that...All you can do is just hold your head up high, be proud of who you are." And her response, thinking back...to what she could not express at the time, is to say, "But wait a minute, Dad. I don't *know* who I am. What *am* I? Am I White or *am* I that dirty little squaw?" Michelle continued to be confused about this question for many years (p.193). (Emphasis original)

Jackson's (2001) work with urban born Aboriginal people found that all the interviewees expressed "their confusion and frustration at their parent's reluctance, unwillingness, or inability to really speak about being Indian" (p.192). Several of the participants in this research expressed similar sentiments in that they grew up with little to no knowledge of their heritage. Jackson suggests some underlying reasons for this silence on the part of the parents of the first urban raised generation may have been shame, racism, social ostracism, and a strong desire to shield their children from the discrimination they themselves had suffered (p.194-198). Indeed, the factors suggested by Adams (2001) could also be at play here, in that "because of white supremacy, some natives attempt to abandon their culture and people" (p.15).

Debra Merskin, professor of Journalism and Communication at University of Oregon, in her autobiographical essay, *What Does One Look Like?* (1996) explored Aboriginal identity of mixed ancestry people. As Merskin states, "As a mixed-blood woman I am suspect, walking a narrow trail between worlds ... Not fitting a stereotype carries its own kind of burden, but being invisible carries its own kind of pain" (p.283). Looking white is seen as having the best of both worlds, you do not look it yet you have all the rights and benefits. Thus implying that by virtue of being able to hide under a bed sheet with a status card, the person has been "spared the tragedies reserved for really Native looking Natives" (Taylor, 2002, p. 102). Images from the past shape images in the present and "these images also apply to mixed-race women, perhaps even more so. Although genes fall where they may, even those with mixed parentage are expected to look like one" (Merskin, 1996, p.283).

Willit (2005) discussed the experience of growing up within a small town with little attention to his background. Willett states, "the fact that my ethnic heritage was not acknowledged or celebrated, as if it were something to be ashamed of, was racism"(p.119) but at the same time, those of us of mixed ancestry "must also acknowledge our European heritage. The search for our truth is often marred with inaccurate images and representations that diminish or ignore our cultural identity. Many Aboriginal peoples experience internal chaos, conflict and confusion about who they really are. It is as if they are being torn in two" (p.119).

In an examination of the literature on Aboriginal urbanisation in the Canadian context, Evelyn Peters uncovers several of the themes that I have discussed above, in particular the underlying motives behind images of Aboriginal peoples and ideas of “where ‘authentic’ Aboriginal cultures belong in space and time” (1996, p.48), emerging in the discourse on Aboriginal urbanisation. What emerges is a contradictory, paralysing and seemingly futile discourse. The social construction of the “real” Aboriginal is non-urban, historic or “trapped in history”, exotic and embodies Western fears and temptations. The urban Aboriginal, the one who the dominant members of society encounter on a daily basis, is not a “real Indian”, in other words, is one who has assimilated. Yet in order to survive in the city, Aboriginal peoples must retain their culture. This is the “betwixt” place contemporary urban Aboriginal people face and have faced since urbanisation began to “snowball” in the 1960’s.

As shown above, Euro-Canadian thought places Aboriginal culture and urban culture as “incompatible” and is expressed in two now classic works, those of Mark Nagler (1970) and Edgar Dosman (1972), and though dated, both deserve a brief examination. This school of thought on Aboriginal urbanisation requires the Aboriginal person to adapt their cultures to urban life, and in so doing, become “something other than authentic” (Peters, 1996, p.60). In other words, no longer “an Indian”. As argued by Evelyn Peters, both Nagler and Dosman see Aboriginal cultures



as being things of the past, and thus irrelevant, yet both utilise the issue of culture in their arguments.

Mark Nagler's take on Native culture and urban life in his 1970 book *Indians in the City* is one of how "Indians become urbanised and assimilated" (p.1-2). In his opinion, "true" Native culture is a dead thing, "nothing more than a patchwork of meaningless and unrelated pieces" (p.20), mainly as a result of the "alien" influence of the dominant society. Nagler's view sees Native values and cultural practices as working against adaptation to urban life and requires total cultural change in order for Natives to successfully adapt. In Nagler's view, "The absence of generally accepted values among Indians leads to chaos...Indians thus experience difficulty in adjusting to a new environment because their conceptions of living do not involve punctuality, responsibility, hurry, impersonality, frugality, and the other social practices which are part of the urban environment" (p.25). Oddly enough, he also advocates the development of ethnic enclaves and a "pan-Indian identity" though there is "no shared culture on which to build urban adaptations" (p.89). So not only does one get a limited, and stereotypical perspective of the urbanization process for Aboriginal peoples, as Evelyn Peters argues, "the result is a sense of complete futility in formulating any response to aboriginal peoples' migration to the city. Every initiative is either internally contradictory or doomed to failure" (Peters, 1996, p.52).

Edgar Dosman's 1972 work *Indians: The Urban Dilemma* divides urban Natives into three groups, "affluent, anomic, and welfare" (Peters, 1996, p.53). Obviously, the "affluent" group has achieved stable secure employment and middle class status and has, in Dosman's view, assimilated. Though Dosman uncovered evidence of these families maintaining cultural practices, he saw it not as "reflections of aboriginal culture but as contemporary adaptations and therefore not 'authentic'" (Peters, 1996, p.53). This group, because they have "assimilated", face no difficulty in adapting to urban life. Dosman's "welfare" group is seen as representing a total "rejection of urban/industrial values (and) lives a similar life on the reserve as in the city" (Peters, 1996, p.53) and also successfully adapt to urban life by simply rejecting it. The "anomic" group are those that face the greatest problems in adapting to urban life. Though Dosman does not go into detail about how urban life and Aboriginal culture contradict, it is his opinion that "attachment to aboriginal culture is a major source of difficulty, for in the city they suffer personal disorientation, anxiety and social isolation" (Dosman, 1970, p.84). This group wants to maintain their culture and adapt it to urban life. Dosman states it is this cultural contradiction and the accompanying "anomie" that forces them into welfare or back to the reserve.

Like Nagler, Dosman suggests the creation of a separate Aboriginal community within the city as a solution for this “anomic” group. Not only would this idea “help” Aboriginal people to adapt to urban life, it would “safeguard a racial heritage different from that of the larger society” (Peters, 1996, p.53-4). His solution, as Peters puts it, “is based on distancing-the creation of a separate urban community until aboriginal residents have adapted their culture to urban life” (Peters, 1996, p.54). It would seem that Dosman supports racist segregation, and the continuance of Euro-Canadian “othering” of Aboriginal people and control of “authentic culture”.

Two other works offer a different view than Nagler or Dosman. *Without Reserve*, a series of interviews interspersed with interviewer/author commentary by Lynda Shorten (1991) asserts the maintenance of an Aboriginal cultural identity as essential for survival in the city, yet this work also regulates “authentic culture” to the past and to the rural landscape. Though in Shorten’s opinion it is those who fail to maintain their culture that do not adapt to urban life, not those who keep it, her analysis nonetheless requires the urban Aboriginal to make frequent trips “back” to their own or another rural Aboriginal community in order to maintain “culture”. Thus, Shorten is perpetuating the Euro-Canadian “standards” of where Aboriginal peoples “belong”. Those that are “least linked to their culture” (Peters, 1996, p.56) characterise those who find a life of crime, prostitution and drug addiction on the streets. Shorten’s

analysis place Aboriginal people in an impossible situation and gives a sense of futility similar to Nagler. Shorten places Aboriginal culture both in the past and at a geographical distance yet puts regaining that culture at the forefront of successful adaptation to urban life. Thus, urban Aboriginal people are faced with the impossible task of “regaining a damaged and non-urban culture in order to survive as healthy people in the city” (Peters, 1996, p.56).

*Urban Indians: The Strangers in Canada's Cities*, a work done by Larry Krotz in 1980 presents Aboriginal culture as being neither a “dead thing” nor as an impediment to urban life. In a series of interviews, Krotz found Aboriginal peoples as successfully integrating urban and aboriginal culture. According to Krotz, maintenance of Aboriginal cultures is done by keeping close ties with the home reserve community, participating in powwows and other celebrations, eating country food and working for Aboriginal organisations to name a few. Krotz is careful to not present the urban Aboriginal population as a homogenous group; rather they are identified as Cree, Ojibway, and Métis from a specific reserve or community. Thus, Krotz attempts to show that urbanisation and Aboriginal culture are not necessarily contradictory and urban life does not necessitate the destruction of ties to their “communities or cultures of origin” (Peters, 1996, p.55). However, all of the individuals interviewed by Krotz had stable, secure employment, thus presenting a rather one-sided view. Additionally, this study also implies the required distancing,

i.e.: continued connection to a rural / reserve community, in order to access “authentic culture”.

In Peters (1996) analysis of the above works she proposed that there was an underlying sense of fear on the part of the dominant society regarding Aboriginal migration or alternatively, a sense that it posed no threat as Aboriginal peoples are seen as “destroying themselves (and do not) threaten the cultural fabric of urban life” (Peters, 1996, p.59). The fear is mainly grounded in the fear of creating a large, dispossessed, poor minority that “lies outside the socio-economic structure of the city” (Peters, 1996, p.57). The spectre of poverty and its accompanying social and economic problems, as well as the fact that the Aboriginal population continues to grow at a rapid rate also raises concerns about a city’s ability to “absorb”, “cope with” and “integrate” the Aboriginal population. However, in the case of Krotz’s work, the fear seems to stem from the strong maintenance of Aboriginal culture, as this does threaten the fabric of urban Euro-Canadian culture as it threatens and challenges Euro-Canadian “constructions of aboriginality” (Peters, 1996, p.59).

Indeed, Krotz asserts that Native migration to the cities is a reclamation of the cities, as “the cities too are part of their birthright. As the reserves and land was once theirs, so will the cities be theirs” (Krotz, 1980, p.157).

Peters (1996) argues that to those who see Aboriginal urbanisation as requiring cultural adaptation to such an extent as to remove any shred of “authenticity”, the fear becomes one of poverty and the drain on services and the economy. If Aboriginal culture and identity is seen “as strong and authentic in an urban setting”, we threaten the city as the dominant society knows it (Peters, 1996, p.60). As Aboriginal peoples, we are seen by the dominant society as either adapting to urban life or becoming something “other than authentic” or we maintain our “authenticity” by “failing” to adapt to urban life. In either case, urban Aboriginal peoples must battle the fact that the Euro-Canadian social construction and systems of meaning surrounding Aboriginal “authenticity” allow it to flourish only outside the urban setting. As Peters suggests, Aboriginal people “are confronted again and again with explicit or implicit messages that cities are not where they belong as people with vibrant and living cultures”(1996, p.60).

It would seem that the path of developing Aboriginal identity in the urban setting is fraught with difficulty. The path for those of mixed ancestry in an urban context can be influenced by appearance, the political climate and their location is even more complex.

### **Aboriginal Identity in the City of Winnipeg**

Interestingly, a disproportionate amount of the existing research into the Canadian Aboriginal urbanization process focuses on housing and employment issues, although none of these readings examine urban social issues from the post-colonial/ deconstructionist viewpoint. As the Aboriginal population continues to grow at a higher rate than the Canadian population in general, especially in the Prairies, understanding between the larger society and Aboriginal society will be important for both social and economic reasons. The larger society needs to understand the history of Aboriginal peoples in order to understand the contemporary situation. As more Aboriginal people obtain a higher education and move into the larger economy, more non-Aboriginal people will come into social and economic contact with them. While Canadian society is generally tolerant, racism and stereotyping still exists. Canadian society has certain ideas and expectations of Aboriginal people, a situation that also works in reverse.

The 2001 Census puts the total Aboriginal population of Canada (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) at 976,305 people, both on and off reserve. This is an increase of 22.2% over the 1996 figure of 799,010 in comparison to the non-Aboriginal growth rate of 3.4% between the 1996 and 2001 census reports and indicates the Aboriginal population of Canada now accounts for 3.3% of the total population. The Canada wide urban population of all Aboriginal groups in 2001 was 494,095 persons, (or 49%) of which 245,000 (or 25%) were living in one of 10 of the 27

census metropolitan areas (CMA's). Winnipeg has the greatest number, while Saskatoon has the highest concentration accounting for 8% and 9% of the cities' populations respectively as compared to Toronto and Montreal at 0.4 % and 0.3% respectively ([www12.statcan.ca](http://www12.statcan.ca)). In addition, well over half of the urban Aboriginal population lives far below the poverty line. (Frideres & Gadacz, 2001, p.146-8).

The 1991 Census placed Winnipeg's Aboriginal population at 44,970 and by 2001 it had grown to 55,760 people and Aboriginal people account for 14% of the total provincial population. Note that these statistics do not take into account high mobility rates and the very real possibility that many urban Aboriginal people did not participate in the census. Research indicates that over half of all inner city households in Winnipeg had incomes below the poverty line in 1996, and four out of every five Aboriginal households were below this economic threshold. Some two-thirds or 64.7% of Aboriginal households in Winnipeg as a whole live below the poverty line. In the inner city, this jumps to over four-fifths, or 80.3%. (Lezubski, Silver, & Black, 2001, p.26-39).

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1993) indicates a "desperate need for culturally appropriate housing in many cities" (p.23). In reality, safe, clean adequate housing of any kind is in short supply for a significant portion of the urban Aboriginal population whether it is culturally appropriate or not. Suggestions put forward by the RCAP regarding urban Aboriginal housing included Canada Mortgage and



Housing Corporation (CMHC) support for Aboriginal owned and operated student housing, rent-to-own options and co-ops. Affordable housing for Aboriginal people with disabilities is also in short supply despite the necessity for the disabled Aboriginal person to leave their home community to live in urban centres in order to access medical care (RCAP, p.24-25). Because poor quality housing and community services are both a cause and reflection of poverty and deep social malaise, actions to improve living conditions are a vital part of community building (RCAP, p.419). However, with the exception of brief mentions of “culturally appropriate” housing and social services none of these studies address the issue of how urbanization impacts identity and the sense of self worth.

Additional ideas put forward to improve the urban experience for Winnipeg’s Aboriginal population, and one of the few that does address identity issues, however briefly, were presented in the 1997 *Towards a Strategy for Aboriginal People Living in Winnipeg* report by the Manitoba Round Table on Environment and Economy. This report recognizes that the cultural diversity of Winnipeg’s Aboriginal population and the participation of this segment of the population in the life of the city are essential to building self-esteem for the individual as well as fostering more positive relations with the rest of the city. It calls upon the media to take a leading role in this by presenting a balanced view of Winnipeg’s Aboriginal people (p.24) rather than the tendency to focus only on the negative. In order to reduce barriers facing Aboriginal people such as

racism and other social and cultural barriers to full participation in urban society, the report recommends greater respect for cultural diversity and the fostering of harmonious cultural relationships. All humans should be able to participate fully in society and still maintain their cultural identity in an atmosphere of respect (p.41). Grassroots community workshops conducted by the Round Table revealed that urban Aboriginal peoples participating in the workshops all indicated a need for education and training that lead to real jobs and adequate pay without resulting in the feeling of dependency on the non-Aboriginal community many urban Aboriginal people experience. Some of the more interesting recommendations made by the workshop participants were better access to mortgages, home repair loans, down payments and alternative financing, home buying and housing programs for single parents, low-income families and seniors (p.31).

As John Loxley (2001) in his study *Aboriginal Economic Development on Winnipeg* points out, the Aboriginal population of Winnipeg is not homogenous. He found that in 1996, approximately 10% of Aboriginal males and 3% of Aboriginal females earned over \$40,000 annually, around 1300 owned businesses and over 4,000 were employed in “supervisory, semi-professional, professional, and managerial positions (of which) 51% were women” (p.90). Therefore economic success was accessible to a proportion of the Aboriginal population and that Aboriginal people desire secure, well paying employment just as much as anyone.

Aboriginal people are human beings like anyone else, capable of hate, love, desire and despair. Like the rest of humanity, we are facing and adapting to change with the same wants and needs as anyone yet we do not wish to “sacrifice their Indianness, their unique heritage, in order to have the basic necessities of life” (LaRocque, 1975, p.43-44). This point of view directly contradicts Dosman’s assertion that those Aboriginal people who attain a middle class socio-economic position are “assimilated” and “inauthentic”.

Additionally, it is important to keep in mind that poverty in Winnipeg is not just a “Native thing”. Single parent households and the working poor of all ethnic backgrounds constitute a large portion of Winnipeg’s poor. In addition, poverty is spreading throughout the city, many living outside the core are experiencing poverty and many are neither single parents nor Aboriginal. However, using 1991 Census data, Leo Driedger (1996) charts ethnic residential concentrations which indicates that the Aboriginal population is indeed still heavily concentrated in the core area, the oldest part of the city with the “least desirable housing” (p.212). The Social Planning Council of Winnipeg’s 2001 *Community Plan on Homelessness and Housing* found that Aboriginal individuals and families represented a disproportionately high percentage of persons “seeking housing and outreach services” (p.12).

Institutional completeness addresses the creation and maintenance of institutions such as schools, churches, and services that meet the social,

cultural and economic needs of an ethnic group. Frideres and Gadacz (2001) and Peters (2002) found the urban Aboriginal population has not yet achieved this. Frideres and Gadacz (2001) point out a number of reasons for this, such as the preoccupation of Aboriginal leaders with the on-reserve situation and unwillingness on the part of governments to act due to jurisdictional arguments and legal ambiguities too complex to treat here. Additionally, urban Aboriginal organizations are forced to operate in “crisis mode” and therefore cannot focus on the long term social and economic needs of their clientele (Frideres & Gadacz, 2001, p.152). The recent situation in Winnipeg fits this theory as Winnipeg has been, and still is continuing to develop institutions to address basic, culturally appropriate services in schools, churches and services, commercial and social / non-profit organizations. Some examples of institutions that have been developed over the last twenty years are Children of the Earth School, Indian Métis Friendship Centre, Thunderbird House, and Native run Social Service Agencies such as Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata and so on. This is not to say however that the situation faced by Aboriginal peoples in Winnipeg is ideal, rather, far from it. What it does say is that significant progress has been made, and continues to be made in Winnipeg in terms of the urban Aboriginal population participating as full members of society.

A recent *First Nations, Métis, Inuit Mobility Study* (2004) conducted by the University of Winnipeg’s Institute of Urban Studies in partnership with the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and the Manitoba

Métis Federation has reached the same conclusions and has made the same recommendations as all of the above existing research cited. This recent study concludes the primary reasons for relocating to an urban centre are healthcare, education and employment (Distasio, 2004, p.18), reasons that have been known to academics and government policy makers since the 1960's (see Stewart, Clatworthy). The study states that safe, affordable housing is the primary issue for new arrivals to the city and that many Aboriginal peoples experience a housing crisis upon relocation to an urban centre (Distasio, p.18-9). Such studies continue to place the urban Aboriginal into the sphere of "social problems", focus on the negative economic impact on the larger society and do not address issues of culture, heritage, identity or spirituality.

It can however be seen that the city of Winnipeg is addressing the issues faced by Aboriginal people and although progress is slow there has been progress. It is interesting to note that the issues of identity among mixed ancestry Aboriginal people in Winnipeg were not addressed.

## Chapter Three

### Research Methodology

Brown and Stegler (2005) in *Research as Resistance* addressed the issues, in the Canadian context, faced by researchers who use research methods that are outside of the traditional academia. They have provided a framework for critical, feminist, indigenous and anti-oppressive research through a text outlining theoretical and practical explanations of critical, Indigenous and anti-oppressive research. They note that, “most of the authors in this volume, all of whom exist in one way or another on “the margins”, experienced difficulties as they searched for research methodologies that were congruent with their commitments to social justice and anti-oppressive practice, and to their cultural traditions and life experiences” (p. 5). They referred to marginalization as life experiences where discrimination, injustice, inequality and lack of access to resources are the common existence. They contended that marginalization was also evident in academic research where

In the research context, knowledge production has long been organized, as have assessments of the ways producing knowledge can be “legitimate”, so that only certain information, generated by certain people in certain ways, is accepted or can qualify as “truth”. Historically this has meant that those on the margins have been objects but rarely the authors of the research, and the discomfort that those on the margins feel about adopting traditional research processes and knowledge creation has been interpreted as their personal inability or failings. (p. 7)

Brown and Stegler further proposed that research approaches that explored power relationships, that acknowledged and challenged the status quo and

systemic oppressive practices in society, and addressed whose interests were met through the research could lead to solutions for changing the lives of those living on the margins of society.

Maori scholar Linda Smith (1999) explored the research process from the position of a person who was not a part of the white, mainstream, academic of New Zealand. She pointed out that researchers who work within Aboriginal communities must understand the complex and multiple layers of imperialism and colonialism and how these have shaped what is referred to as “the pursuit of knowledge”. Research is not a detached, impartial, non-political exercise; rather it is “an activity that has something at stake and that occurs in a set of political and social conditions” (Smith, 1999, p.4-5). Instead, it is to coming to know theory and research from the Aboriginal perspective and for Aboriginal purposes (Smith, 1999, p.39).

Absolon and Willit (2005 in Brown and Stegler) proposed that a basic principle of Aboriginal research and methodology was for the researcher to identify their world view and knowledge or location at the outset of the research. They defined location as experiences that have shaped those things, and our intentions for the work we plan to do. Hence, “location” in Indigenous research, as in life, is a critical starting point. The authors further proposed that research methodologies that foster knowledge creation based on cultural, colonial, historical, traditional and

current realities from the perspective of the researcher and the researched is necessary in ensuring meaningful research within an Aboriginal context.

Research from the perspective of the marginalized person including Aboriginal peoples was examined by Moos-Mitha (2005, in Brown and Stegler). She argued that Anti-Oppressive theories with their basis in social oriented theories allow for an examination of differences thus supporting shifting of boundaries and fluidity in defining and shaping the theoretical approach to research. Further she proposed that difference centered theories support and acknowledges the experience and knowing of the participants voice as a critique or challenge is placed before the mainstream truths and representations of the Other who does not fit the societal norm.

An autobiographical sketch of my own life experience as a mixed ancestry Aboriginal was thus included as a way of self analysis and to present my voice and experience as part of the exploration in this study. Kimpson (2004) in *Stepping off the Road: A Narrative (of) Inquiry* discusses the creative benefits of autobiographical studies in bringing forward voices, experiences and realities in different form. Critical self reflective personal narratives, “provides researchers with a method that illuminates the partial and perspective nature of knowledge and the texts that we as researchers create (p.75). The method began in feminist research in order to study and make known the day to day reality of women’s lives. The self reflective process involves focusing on what is



known and has been learned by the researcher and the process of reforming new thoughts, new language and new knowledge. My personal journey in searching for my identity as a mixed ancestry Aboriginal was seen as an important component of the study. My experiences were similar to the participants and the literature and as such added to the overall picture. Inclusion of self also allowed for reflection on personal bias, and anger in exploring the issues around mixed ancestry identity. Through this process new ways of developing identity can be sought. As Garrouette suggests research that reflects the knowledge and perspective of Aboriginal people has “the potential to elucidate ways of thinking that would reorder our understandings of the world and everything in it” (p.151).

A self reflective autobiographical narrative provided me with the opportunity to share my experience through analysis of my personal development of identity as a mixed ancestry Aboriginal person. The second reason for including my personal story in the research was grounded in the need for Aboriginal researchers to take control of the research process and pursue research from the knowledge base and perspective of Aboriginal people and that a fundamental principle for Aboriginal research was for the researcher to proclaim who they were as a crucial part of the research process. (Absolon and Willitt, 2005, Deloria, 1998, Garouette, 2003, Kovach, 2005, Smith, 2001). “As Aboriginal researchers, we write about ourselves and position ourselves at the outset

of our work because the only thing we can write about with authority is ourselves” (Absolon & Willet, 2005, p.97). Moosa-Mitha (2005, in Brown and Stegler) proposed that research methods using a difference centered approach can use a narrative as a way to hear the voice of the researcher in exploring “mainstream or dominant perceived truths and representations of the Other” (p.67). Weber-Pillwas (2001) proposed that the use of indigenous research methodologies allowed for the researcher to actively participate in the research process as themselves in order to facilitate the creation of new perceptions and knowledge that would become part of the community (p.174).

The intent of self inclusion was not to present myself as an “authentic voice” of the “urban Indian” but to put a single human face on what is a shared experience, though one that is experienced differently by each individual. As argued by Absolon and Willet, “one of the most fundamental principles of Aboriginal research methodology is the necessity for the researcher to locate himself or herself. Identifying, at the outset, the location from which the voice of the researcher emanates is an Aboriginal way of ensuring that those who study, write and participate in knowledge creation are accountable for their own positionality” (p.97). LaRocque states that, “Native scholars and writers are demonstrating that ‘voice’ can be, must be, used within academic studies not only as an expression of cultural integrity but also as an attempt to begin to balance the legacy of dehumanization and bias entrenched in Canadian studies

about Native peoples” (1996, p.13). The knowledge, words and perceptions of the study participants and the researcher in exploring urban mixed ancestry Aboriginal identity form the voices of this research study.

### **Research Paradigm**

It was seen as important in developing this exploratory research to seek a research paradigm that reflected the beliefs, values and principles of Aboriginal people. A research paradigm was defined as “ a set of beliefs about the world and about gaining knowledge that go together to guide people’s actions as to how they are going to go about doing their research (Wilson, 2001, p.175). He further described this approach as including belief’s about the nature of reality, what is the reality, how you think about the reality, how you operationalize reality and your set of beliefs.

As previously presented theoretical approaches for conducting Aboriginal research in Canada are gradually developing. Kovach (2005) writing in *Research as Resistance* (Brown and Strega) proposed that indigenous research link Aboriginal epistemology with an indigenous theoretical framework. She drew four assumptions from Aboriginal epistemology to guide research: “(a) experience as a legitimate way of knowing; (b) Indigenous methods, such as storytelling, as a legitimate way of sharing knowledge; (c) receptivity and relationship between researcher and participants as a natural part of the research “methodology”; and (d) collectively as a way of knowing assumes reciprocity to the community” (p.28). She proposed that indigenous theory provides a particular

perspective on the research methodology that includes Aboriginal ways of knowing, is founded in research principles, respects the research process protocols and ethics, is respectful of the natural world and incorporates looking back at the history of colonization.

Wilson (2001) proposed that the process in the development of Indigenous research methods began with the Aboriginal researcher gaining an understanding of Western frameworks for research, conducting research within this framework and ended with the Aboriginal researcher challenging and beginning to search for their own approaches to research that would fit an Indigenous paradigm.

Weber-Pillwax (2001) proposed that in developing an indigenous research framework it must include the community and must benefit the community. This concept was supported by Kovach (2005, in Brown and Stegler) "Indigenous methodology must meet the criteria of collective responsibility and accountability...and hear a voice whispering" Are you helping us?" (p.31). Wilson (2001) proposed that:

An Indigenous paradigm comes from the fundamental belief that this knowledge is relational. Knowledge is shared with all creation. It is not just interpersonal relationships, or just with research subjects I may be working with, but it is a relationship with all of creation...It goes beyond the idea of individual knowledge to the concept of relational knowledge. (p.177)

Cherokee scholar Eva Garroutte (2003) presented an alternative to the crafting of new American Indian scholarship that she termed Radical Indigenism. She recognised the contributions of post-colonial theorists and also acknowledged the limitations of post-colonial theory in the North American context. While such theorists

have taught us that non-Western peoples all over the world had – and *have* – viable intellectual traditions [...] One persistent complaint [...] is that they have had difficulty really separating themselves from the categories of knowledge provided by the ‘academic colonialists’. The most serious criticism [...] concern’s the post colonialists’ failure to grapple with very fundamental assumptions regulating the conduct of inquiry, and the difficulty is especially apparent when one considers indigenous philosophies of knowledge. (p.102)

Garroutte suggests that “a central goal of a new, American Indian scholarship [must be] resistance to the [...] academic discourses that strip Native intellectual traditions of their spiritual and sacred elements [...] on the grounds that sacred elements are absolutely central to the coherence of our knowledge traditions” (p.103-4). In Garroutte’s view, researchers need to “enter tribal philosophies” which in turn requires the researcher to “enter tribal relations”, or “Radical Indigenism” (p.107). To embrace tribal philosophies in developing a research method she suggests that researchers “abandon any notion that mainstream academic philosophies, and approaches based on them are, in principle, superior. It asks them instead, to accept tribal philosophies as containing articulable rationalities alternative to those of the conventional academic disciplines... and to accept the methods and goals of inquiry toward which indigenous

philosophical assumptions direct us” (p.107-108). Garroute described entering tribal philosophies as being able to reframe a world view from the perspective of the community, what the ceremonies, beliefs, and practices tell about the individuals and their community. Garroute proposed that entering tribal relations or the ability to develop and maintain respect for the values and beliefs of the community was the second important aspect of radical indigenism. She also emphasized that an important aspect of indigenous research was “to seek knowledge because one is prepared to use it” (p.114) for the betterment of the community.

Hart (2007) identified the following principles for Indigenous research that summarizes the literature;

1. A respect for individuals and communities, which can be demonstrated by a researcher seeking and holding knowledge and being considerate of community and the diversity and unique nature that each individual brings to the community;
2. Reciprocity and responsibility, which can be demonstrated in the ways a researcher would relate and act within a community such as a researcher sharing a presenting ideas with the intent of supporting a community;
3. Respect and safety, which can be evident when the research participants feel safe and are safe. This includes addressing confidentiality in a manner desired by the research participants;
4. Non-intrusive observation, where on, such as the researcher, would be quietly aware and watching;
5. Deep listening and hearing with more than the ears. Where one would carefully listen and pay attention to how his/her heart and sense of being is emotionally and spiritually moved;
6. Reflective non-judgement, where one would consider that is being seen and heard without immediately placing a sense of right or wrong on what is shared, and where one would consider what is said within the context presented by the speaker;
7. To honour what is shared, which can be translated to fulfilling the responsibility to act with fidelity to the relationship and to what has been heard, observed, and learned;

8. An awareness and connection between logic of mind and the feelings of the heart, where both the emotional and cognitive experiences would be incorporated in all actions ;
9. Self awareness, where one would listen and observe oneself, as well as oneself in relationship with others during the research process;
10. Subjectivity, where the researcher acknowledges she or he brings to the research process his or her subjective self. (p.132)

The concepts of indigenous research presented in this section form the approach used this research study.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the study was to explore how an individual of mixed Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian ancestry living in the urban setting of Winnipeg, Manitoba develops their sense of identity. The goal was to establish a basis for the understanding of the process development of identity for individuals who are of mixed Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian ancestry.

### **Research questions**

The research question was what factors influence the development of identity for individuals living in the urban setting of Winnipeg of mixed Aboriginal and European ancestry? It was anticipated that additional understandings of the complex questions around identity development for urban born mixed ancestry individuals would result from this research.

Two approaches were used to examine the research question, first an autobiographical story of my own personal search and second, interviews with mixed ancestry individuals living in the city of Winnipeg. Interview questions were developed to address the factors identified as

potentially influencing identity development (Appendix A). The interviews ranged from one to two hours. The atmosphere created was a friendly conversation exploring a topic of mutual interest. Participants felt free to express their life story and shared information that expanded on the research questions.

As the researcher I came to the interviews with my own life history and experience, values and beliefs. In looking toward new learning's and understandings of my own experiences and that of the participants connection with each person's story was a part of the interview process.

A basic assumption of this research was the perception that development of identity for those individuals of mixed ancestry is fraught with a multitude of difficulties. Lawrence (2004) proposed that the urban mixed ancestry Aboriginal individual must reconstruct their history "around the once-silenced voices of their parents and grandparents. In the process they have been reshaping their own lives to challenge the assumptions that their families' Native identities are going to vanish. ..(they) struggle with the realities of both invisibility and placelessness." (p. xvii). Lawrence's basic assumption was that identity for mixed ancestry Native peoples could only be understood through a legacy of genocide.



## **Method**

The study was designed as an exploratory examination of the development of identity among individuals of mixed Aboriginal /Euro-Canadian ancestry living in the urban setting of Winnipeg, Manitoba. The participants were obtained through word of mouth and a notice inviting participants was placed in the Aboriginal Student Centre and the ACCESS Program offices at the University of Manitoba. The criteria for inclusion in the study were willingness to participate and having mixed Aboriginal /Euro-Canadian heritage.

Prior to each interview the purpose of the study, nature of the questions, need for tape recording the interviews, rights of the participants and the time involvement was explained and questions answered. Each person was informed of the right to refuse to participate, to answer any questions, or to withdraw from the study at any time without recrimination. The participants were informed there were no wrong or right answers to the questions. The participants were informed their anonymity and confidentiality were protected. The responses of the participants were for the sole use of the researcher. Identity of participants would not be revealed in the study and following completion of the research the raw data would be destroyed. The participants were informed they could ask questions and how to contact the researcher. Prior to the implementation of the study approval was received from the Joint Faculty Research Ethics Board, University of Manitoba.

## Participants

There were a total of nine participant's, eight females and one male, not including the researcher. The age range was from 20 to 37. Of these nine, one female participant was eliminated from the study as both parents were of Aboriginal ancestry, one status, one Métis, which was outside of the parameters set for the purposes of this study. All participants had been raised in an urban setting (British Columbia, Ontario and Manitoba). One individual held treaty status from birth, one person identified as Inuit, three identified as Métis and three were Bill C-31 status. Of these last three, two were adoptees raised in non-Aboriginal homes. In all cases, the interviewees were raised in urban settings with little to no contact with their home or other Aboriginal communities until adulthood. Of these, only two have what could be seen as a "strong" connection to their communities of origin, one being the sole Inuit participant, the other being one of the Bill C-31 status participants. Of the four "status" interviewees, all had an Aboriginal mother, hence the loss of status with the exception of one, who indicated that her mother knew she would lose her status and hence did not legally marry her father (Interview 5). Of the two adoptees, paternity was unknown. Three of the four had parents who experienced either the residential school system and / or the child welfare system and all but one indicated that their parents did not provide them with the information or skills to negotiate an Aboriginal

identity as they grew up. Of the Métis participants, two had a Métis father while one had a Métis mother.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There were several limitations in the study. The sample size was small and reflected a fairly homogenous group and therefore may not be representative of the general population of individuals of mixed ancestry. The sample participants were primarily drawn from the University community which could present a bias in the sample. The research reflects only the voices of the community of individuals who participated in the study. Through these voices a window into the dynamics of a sample of contemporary mixed ancestry peoples in an urban community will be heard. However, given the diversity of the urban Aboriginal population in Winnipeg, both culturally and in terms of socio-economics, this study was not, and nor was it intended to be, representative of the entire urban Aboriginal mixed ancestry population. Further, the participants may have responded with answers they believe were acceptable rather than with answers that accurately reflect their beliefs. As the nature of the interviews was open-ended and conversation was allowed to flow naturally, the researcher may have inadvertently influenced the answers. The study provided a preliminary insight into how these eight individuals and the researcher are developing their sense of identity as mixed Aboriginal/European people. It was anticipated that additional

understandings of the complex questions around identity development for urban born mixed ancestry individuals would result from this research.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results of the Study**

There were several themes that influenced identity that emerged from the study. The themes that are discussed are; importance of a connection to a home community, socio-economic status, family, legal, government control of identity, physical appearance, post secondary education and Aboriginal spirituality and culture.

#### **Connection to Home Community**

There were three questions that focused on the home community; do you know why your family left their home community, are you, or your family still connected to your home community; and, how important, in your opinion, is a continuous connection to your home community?

The primary reason given by the participants for their family moving to an urban centre was the need for a job. The two participants who were adopted and the Bill C31 participant were not aware of the reason for their parents move to a city. All but one participant felt it was important to establish or maintain a connection to a home community. One stated;

It is important now, like I am searching for my identity. I was kind of scared as my mom always told me horror stories of reserves. I was always scared of reserves because of the bad things that were going on there. (Interview 5)

Two of the participants, one who identified Métis, and one who identified as Inuit had connections to their home community as children and continued to have connections.

One individual who established contact with her home community as an adult stated:

The first time I met my grandmother she scared the crap out of me. I went up to the reserve and I guess I resembled my mom so I noticed this old couple watching me so I went over to ask them what is the matter and they asked me if my mom's name was..... and she said that's my sister and they just kind of accepted me back with open arms. It is really, really important to me. That's my most important thing is the sense of belonging because growing up I didn't feel that I belonged anywhere. (Interview 1)

The remaining five participants had not established a connection with their home community. One individual who had been adopted stated "It's not very important to go home, but would be interested to see it" (Interview 6). The other adopted participant expressed fear about establishing a connection.

I've been really shy. It is really hard for me, because my mom's gone...she took her own life and I can't get over it for some reason...I always imagined going back with her. Like I want it but... (Interview 7).

Most participants indicated that the effort to re-claim or maintain their identity as Aboriginal was seen as being more difficult in an urban setting than if they resided in rural Aboriginal communities. One participant stated that it was harder to;

maintain a balance in the city, I think it's really hard to remember who you are and to be proud of who you are especially if you don't have that, I don't know, home base to go home to (Interview 9).

However, there was also a sense of pride and resistance to the idea that one *must* have a rural / reserve base in that “I can survive in the main society you know? I don’t feel like I’m at a lesser position than anybody else. If anything, I feel more empowered being a Métis person in the city” (Interview 9). Another participant also expressed the idea of a “land base” when asked if they saw any inherent contradictions in being both urban and Aboriginal.

Well, urban you think of colonialist, you know, whole totally European notion and then on top of that you’ve got Aboriginal. And ... it’s like, an oxymoron I guess in it. I’m sure we could adapt, and it’s been shown that we can. But I think Aboriginality is tied to....I know Inuitness at least is tied to land. And I know I feel a deep, deep ... pull, right around this time of year when you know, we’d be starting to go out back from the settlement...back to the land and I just feel a deep connection. Which I don’t have here because I don’t have any connection to this land. I can’t hunt you know, unless I get a licence. I can’t fish I can’t do those things... so I just don’t feel any connection to the land here (Interview 6).

Another expressed how despite the fact that they had yet to return to their community of origin they nonetheless felt a deep spiritual connection to the land, in that they felt they were a part of something bigger regardless of where they lived (Interview 7).

The one status participant with a strong connection to her home community indicated that the maintenance of an Aboriginal identity in the city was more of an effort;

because on the reserve, well everybody's an Indian, so you're just surrounded by, by your own people, so it's never a question. So in the city, I just find that if you don't look Aboriginal right away, then people assume you're not, so you have to let it be known, and you have to make a point of going out and finding it (Interview 1).

Another participant's commentary reflects the importance of a 'feeling' a connection to a home community.

I don't think that ... any setting will stop you from being who you are. Identity is identity whether you're on the mountains by yourself or if you're on the city street, you know? Like, if you have a strong enough sense of who you are and where you come from, it shouldn't matter where you are if you know who you are...It's so easy to get caught up in city life...you...lose sight of what's really important and what really matters, so, yeah, I mean if you're in communities surrounded with people with your own beliefs, your own culture, and...you are connected to the heartbeat of that, like, the community and the way of life is really what I want to find, like, I want to be a part of that and I'm not, I don't feel like I have any heartbeat here. I think it makes it harder for me to be more myself (Interview 5).

As someone who did not grow up with a meaningful connection to my home community I too found it difficult to feel a sense of belonging. A major obstacle for me is the geographical distance to my home community so ongoing contact is difficult. I also do not have any family connections left in the home community and therefore it is difficult to begin to establish ties.



As Garroutte (2003. p.74) proposed identity includes the relationship to the land. Weaver (1998. p.20) described this relationship for Aboriginal people being more “spatially oriented rather than temporally oriented. Their cultures, spirituality, and identity are connected to the land- and not simply land in a generalized sense, but their land.” Garroutte also proposed that connection to the land in establishing identity can be seen as a spiritual connection and does not relate to a specific geographical area. It is manifested in daily living by the ways that people treat themselves, each other and the earth. (p.128). Garroutte (2003) further proposed that the notion of ‘memory in the blood’ which she described as an intimate physical connection through the genes or the blood that supports a knowledge of the past memories of the tribal community. She proposed that exploration of traditional stories and narratives can provide some insight into the meaning of blood memory in developing a concept of identity as an Aboriginal person. (p. 119-120). While I myself understand the difficulty of academically defending the notion of “blood memory”, I cannot deny the experience of it. During my undergraduate years I was in a class lead by Sakoieta Widrick, a Mohawk Faithkeeper from New York who told us a story about where Creator would hide wisdom from humanity. As I have indicated, I did not grow up with these stories or traditions and at this point in my life, had not yet begun to research the spiritual or traditional stories. However, somehow I *knew* how the story ended and Sakoieta knew it, looked at me, smiled and

said as much in front of the whole class. To this day, I cannot explain it, but I have since had similar experiences and have been told by every person I have met from my home territory that I “need to go home”. It appeared that for the majority of the study participant the sense of attachment to a home community was of concept of importance. Exploration of identity through a spiritual connection to the home community as described by Garrouette was a journey that many of the participants had not yet embarked upon.

### **Socio-Economic Status and Identity**

The research question asked what role your socio economic status had on the development of your identity. Only two participants identified that they grew up in a home that was not middle class. As one person put it;

My family I would say was marginalized, but they are all really hard workers. I wouldn't say we were poor, but not very rich, very hard working. My dad would always say I know one thing, I'm a hard worker, I am a hard working Métis (Interview 9).

The impact of being poor for the other participant appears to have influenced her life choices. As she stated;

I went to school, I think just because of my hardships. I know what it is like to be not knowing where you are going to go to sleep that night, and I know what it is like to be hungry. And so I went to school because I thought I had to do better. (Interview 1).

The majority of the participants in this study, as well as the researcher, indicated a middle class economic background and thus they did *not* experience many of the issues that are reflected in the literature on the urban Aboriginal experience. This seems to indicate support for the idea of a growing Aboriginal middle class (Loxley, 2001; Wotherspoon, 2003) and highlights the fact that the sub-group of Aboriginal people who are economically successful has been seriously under-studied. Growing up economically middle class and of “mixed” ancestry does seem to have an impact on identity formation. One participant stated;

My adoptive family was well educated middle class. I always felt that I didn't belong. I just remember that growing up I always felt like that. Something was not right, something was missing. (Interview 7)

It would seem that there may be more pressure to “blend in”, or to attempt to hide their Aboriginality in higher or middle class Aboriginal families, however the study sample is too small to form any real conclusions As one participant stated

I grew up in a middle class household, and...me and my brother were always the only Aboriginal people in the schools and, we were kind of...unique I guess you could say and that's how people identified us. We were the Inuit kids...or the Eskimo girl and boy and that's just how we told you know, how we were identified and we...we were really accepted. I think it really helped to be in a community, well in the neighbourhood that we were in where they really didn't show their hostility outright. You know, there were little underlying, I dunno, prejudices? But they didn't, it wasn't really in your face. So...we didn't care; we just went on and did what we needed to do (Interview 6).

Another participant strove to deny her Aboriginal background as she perceived being Aboriginal as negative. She expressed that for her, “success” was embodied in White men. For this individual, the basic knowledge of her Aboriginality coupled with the messages growing up that she could very well “end up on Main Street” *simply because* she was Aboriginal led her to reach for all things non-Aboriginal.

While realizing now as an adult that the messages given growing up were stereotypes, such as all Native people are drunks, this individual stated that;

Anyone who was Aboriginal I was afraid of. I was afraid of Indians because well, not so much of what my parents told me, but what the environment of the upbringing with all the other people in my school teaching me, you know, go back where you come from, we don't want no Indians around here. You know, go wash with bleach it might change your skin colour. Stuff like that. So I learned that you know, I learned at a young age that you really don't want to associate with Aboriginal people because that's when other people start ..., making assumptions of who you are. (Interview 8)

When asked how this made the interviewee feel and how those feelings were dealt with, the interviewee indicated feeling conflicted and guilty, and chose to further remove herself from any aspects, real or stereotypical, of Aboriginality.

I dealt with it the way that I thought was the right way to deal with it as you know, don't really socialize with them. I've tried, but you know, like I've seen their way of living and I didn't like it. Like, tiles missing out of the flooring, that's acceptable to them like, windows broken, that's fine. That's not how I was brought up, you don't have to settle for that because you settled for it, like, get something a little bigger and better. No, to them that was the white man's way. You know, like well ok, we only got cold water. And I think, like, washing in cold water? To them it's acceptable. I

wasn't going down that path. I didn't want to be satisfied with cold water. I didn't want to be satisfied with you know, holes in my floors, tiles missing, holes in my windows, you know, bathroom really dirty, dishes not done. Poverty. I didn't want that because I didn't live it and I didn't want to be another one of those statistics. I wanted to change myself to see if you know, if I do good by myself, do good financially, and am a successful Aboriginal person then maybe you know I can show people. But you can't show them because they have this view in their mind of you, you were raised by a white family, this is why you are the way you are. (Interview 8)

In many ways, this statement echoes Adams depiction of 'the white ideal' where life is better, cleaner and a person is successful (Adams, 1989, p. 141-9) and the internal conflict expressed by some of the people interviewed. "Every native person has this inclination towards acceptance and success in white society. Because it operates subconsciously, it is not clearly understood at the conscious level.....Everything white is beautiful and superior" (Adams, 1989, p.144). Like Adams story of his love for a white woman and what she represented, "led me to seek white success" and that "as soon as a native girl was successful she would marry a white man" (p.142), this participant also expressed the idea of "whiteness" equating success.

Socio economic status also impacted on identity through relationships with members of family from their Aboriginal side as one participant stated;

My parents had good jobs...So, we had money. We took lots of trips as kids and my Mom has relatives in the States there. I just, you know, I think about it now and I have so much family...I think maybe at one point my Dad might have, sort of cut his younger siblings off when my grandparents died...And I realize now that with all the family around, that I don't know how money

really played into that, I just, like I said before, I never saw any of these people. I remember one time...one of my Dad's uncles, like my Grandpa's brothers, he was a commercial fisherman, he's Métis and ... sometimes they would ... stop by and leave us fish, right? But I remember one of the uncles showing up when I was a little kid and him standing in our doorway and I remember just looking at him, at the way he was dressed, and, like he seemed really imposing but I remember thinking too that he was, he looked really dirty. And I think about it now too, even with my one aunt, my Dad's one sister, he did keep a pretty close relationship with, when she'd come over with her husband and my cousins, like, some weekends...like I really, just hated those guys (laughter). And you know, they probably looked similar in feature to me and everything but I really looked down on them, you know? And it's funny because they lived in a trailer. They lived in a trailer court...which was originally my Grandparents' trailer and I remember even thinking that stuff like that, they were just, you know trailer park boys. (Interview 4).

Another participant whose Aboriginal parent worked as a teacher in several First Nations communities indicated that when she would visit friends on the reserves, she would "Feel better about myself because I did have things that other people didn't." When asked if this resulted in feeling "less Aboriginal", the participant indicated that

I wouldn't say less Aboriginal, I just think I had a...stronger role model like...my Mom, someone who took it upon herself to get the education and do something. So I thought I was fortunate to have the opportunities and to have done something, whereas other people I just, I could see why they didn't have what we had because of the education their parents didn't have, you know. I never felt like I was ever better than anyone else but I just thought I can see the courses of two different lives whether, you know, like you choose your education or you don't and where my life would end up if I continued on or if I didn't, you know, this is what you'll have. (Interview 5).

From my personal experience, while my family certainly was not in a comparable income bracket as our neighbours, we did not perceive ourselves as “poor” as we always had enough to meet our needs, although I was also aware that we did not have all that my peers and schoolmates did. I was aware that my peers looked down on us for not having the same material goods as they did. So there was also a large degree of classism and there may have been some undercurrents of racism at play. My father did not drive a fancy car and my sister and I did not wear the latest designer clothes, as we simply could not afford it. I remember my father talking about the importance of working hard and working harder than the ‘White man’ in order to succeed. However, like the majority of the research participants, I grew up with a sense of our family being “comfortably well-off”. I also grew up with a sense of not belonging and wondering where and how I did belong.

It appears that for this group the impact of experiencing a “middle class” socio-economic status in developing identity was mixed. The participants perceived that living in poverty with inadequate housing or employment appeared to be the condition for many Aboriginal people in the urban setting or the Aboriginal members of their family and this was undesirable. The standard of living achieved by the other members of the community was what they had experienced and continued to experience. Although the participants did not state their socio-economic status as a major factor in identifying self as Aboriginal for some of the participants,

who did not feel a sense of belonging it would seem to be one of the underlying factors in their search. Fear of poverty and negative stereotyping of Aboriginal people was part of the reason for one person to reject their Aboriginal heritage.

### **The Role of Family and Identity**

The participants were asked what role their family played in the development of their identity as an Aboriginal. The results showed an interesting mix of responses. The experience of the two participants who were adopted portrays the difficulties children may experience when they do not grow up within their own culture. Both adoptees indicated that they had limited knowledge of their biological families, and both were the children of Aboriginal mothers and unknown paternity. Both indicated that they had been taken due to claims of neglect and / or abuse. Neither adoptee knew if their biological mothers or their families had experienced the residential school system although participant 7 indicated that her biological mother had been in the foster care system.

The first person did not know who her birth father was and did not have a relationship with her birth mother. She met her twice and commented, "It was very strange to meet her, never moved on with her life." (Interview 8) Her adoptive family provided some encouragement to develop a sense of self as Aboriginal such as telling her a bit about Aboriginal life, taking her to a powwow and to see the reserve. This information however was mixed with the message that it was "better" to



be in a non-Aboriginal home. "This is what it is like, this is how it is for you, and this is what it is like to be Aboriginal, aren't you glad you are not living in those circumstances?" (Interview 8). Interestingly, this participant indicated that her identity as Aboriginal was a "background thing" and that if someone asks; she will say she is Aboriginal but does nothing to express that on a daily basis. The participant stated that "I don't think there's anything that I can do. Because I wasn't raised that way, so I don't know, I'm completely clueless".

The other adopted person's biological father is also unknown. She found her birth mother's family but never met her mother because she never got the chance to meet her. She commented

No... my mom was part of the sixties scoop...back in the day when it was OK to tear apart families. She took her own life...and I guess I see the dominant society as having taken away my mom, my chance to be with my mom and to learn about my people and to learn my language and to learn my ways and to know who my cousins are. I don't know if you noticed but I have a lot of anger for being taken away from my mom...what I would have given to have the chance. Like most other kids do, to just hug my mom and tell her I love her...it's not fair...I'd rather be with my mom with no food in the cupboard than be with a non native white family getting smacked around and psychologically just messed up.  
(Interview 7).

She indicated that she began questioning her identity at a young age (around 12 years), asking her parents why she looked a lot like the First Nation kids at school and not understanding what "adopted" meant. This participant expressed an awareness of "not belonging" and when questioned if her adoptive parents supported or encouraged her

development of identity as Aboriginal, the participant stated that it was something she did on her own but that her parents;

bought me a picture once...to give me a sense of my Aboriginal culture and to show that I should be proud of it. It was an eagle, and a moon and a wolf. It was actually really pretty...But...it just didn't cut it. It was just very stereotypical. (Interview 7).

For this participant, a sense of not belonging led her to explore her heritage as Aboriginal. She indicated that while outwardly her adoptive parents were supportive, subtle comments made her think otherwise. One example given when the participant expressed her desire for a University education to her parents, was the comment "so few of *your people* ever go, that's good that you want to go" (Interview 7). An additional example was while discussing the experiences of the Dene in Northern Manitoba the participant stated her adoptive mother commented "well that had a lot to do with the way *those people* treated their children" (Interview 7, emphasis original). This participant indicated that her parents' use of subtly racist terms such as "your people" or "those people" coupled with her perception of being treated less favourably than her biological child contributed to her sense of not belonging and reinforced her desire to find out about her Aboriginal heritage. This participant indicated that growing up in a predominantly non-Aboriginal world, few people could understand the issues she was struggling with, let alone support her in her search for belonging. Perhaps the most interesting example given was one that leads us back to the notion of "blood quantum" and biological measures of "Indianness" in that her parents have said comments such as

“oh but you’re only a quarter so why bother. You’re more white than anything else.” (Interview 7). The participant stated that such comments only reinforced her desire to learn more about who she was and where she came from.

One participant indicated her mother had spent much of her childhood in foster care and was unable to share information about her heritage with her. Her one quote about her mother was “When my mom would be drunk... and she’d say don’t let anyone push you around...you are an Indian” (Interview 1). This participant established contact with her mother’s family as an adult and has been able to learn of her heritage through family members.

It would seem that in the case of the two participants who grew up in non-Native homes, two different responses to the impact were found in that one participant reduced her Aboriginality to a “background thing” and expressed little interest in re-claiming her Aboriginal identity, language or culture while the other was actively searching. The participant whose mother was raised in foster homes was also actively seeking her Aboriginal heritage. Massive removal of Aboriginal children from their homes, called the “sixties scoop” occurred during the period of 1960 to 1980. Children were often placed in adoptive or foster homes out of their home province as well as being placed in the United States. Statistics from the Department of Indian affairs indicates approximately seventeen thousand or five percent of Aboriginal children were removed from their

biological homes (Johnston, 1983, p.107). For Aboriginal families the resulting suffering frequently resulted in self destructive behaviours such as drug abuse and alcoholism. As Lawrence (2004) notes "For the adoptees themselves, the statistics from correctional institutions and psychiatric hospital records record the toll, in terms of suicide, substance abuse, and extreme overrepresentation in prison" (p.114). For one of the participants who has lost both her mother and maternal grandmother to violence this impact is real and as previously noted she holds the dominant society responsible for her loss. The experience of being adopted out has thus impacted the lives of these two individuals. As Lawrence (2004) comments, "Even when children were placed in good homes, they were raised in ignorance of their culture, with no knowledge of their own identity, and few defences against the racism of others" (p.114).

All of the participants indicated they had been provided with little to no knowledge of their Aboriginal heritage from their families. One participant indicated his father did not talk about his Aboriginal heritage except in a negative way;

Like you could go downtown...and see just people literally lying in corners and around malls drunk, right? And my Dad would just, you know, like, he would do it jokingly, but, you know, he'd shit on these people, he'd just like oh God what's, you know, what the fuck's with them...he'd still joke about it, right? So I mean obviously I think my sister and I internalized that sort of mentality too, you know? That it just wasn't, because I think maybe if, whether he actually made the decision for himself or not he, because I think he does and I want to identify with his communities I'll call them. That just never really passed on to us, you know (Interview 4)

When questioned as to how this impacted on his sense of identity as

Aboriginal, this participant indicated that

I guess ... it just never fazed me, you know. I was considering my Dad an Indian but I never really saw it as any sort of having any implication on me I guess. I know that I identify with my Mother, like more readily, I mean...So, I know that when it came to interacting or being around, or whatever, being around other Native people, I just didn't feel that connection, and you know, I'd internalize things like, you know, I was...culturally deficient, I guess the whole notion too that, you know, if you want to start talking about race, then I wasn't pure right? So, in terms of identity... as ridiculous as it sounds, I just did not consider myself a Native person. (Interview 4).

Another participant identified that her mother talked about her experiences growing up but a lot of it was the horror stories of life on the reserve. She perceived that the values her mother taught her were not necessarily Aboriginal values, "they were just universal to me" (Interview 5). She further commented, "They didn't encourage it much, I was always surrounded by it but my parents never pushed it. It wasn't until later on in life that I wanted to be a part of it" (Interview 5).

For another participant it was her grandmother who talked to her about being Métis. Her father was unwilling to talk to her and as the participant stated; "Papa was a lot more resistant and now like at age 69 years old he will say he is Métis but for a long time he would say he was French but he couldn't speak a word of French." ((Interview 9)

Another participant who identifies as Métis commented that her family did not talk about it other than to say it was important to go to things like Festival de Voyageur because it would be a good experience. She recalled one incident where she was being teased and her parents told her “You don’t want to listen to them and it’s nothing to be ashamed of” (Interview 3).

The participant who identified as Inuit indicated that her family played a major role in who she was as an Inuit and that both parents were adamant that she knew her heritage.

We would be taken out on the land, they would speak Inukutuk to us, we would eat wild food, be told stories. We were raised like that in the summer. My mom, when we would be home during the school year she raised us like an Inuit mother would. (Interview 6)

My personal experience in learning about my identity from my family was mixed. My father taught me to be hard, tough and cold while my mother taught me how to “move” within the dominant society. I have a report card from Grade five where my teacher wrote, “Karen is very proud of her Native heritage” so there must have been an effort to make me proud of who I was. I remember being told to be proud that I was Mohawk, but to not ‘advertise it’ since I did not “look” Aboriginal, so this was a confusing mixed message for me as a child. I was aware of the hostile reaction of my father on the occasions when some poor soul would foolishly call him “chief”, but I did not understand why he reacted as such at the time. I suspect that it was similar to what Adams discusses as being

a result “of white supremacy, some Natives attempt to abandon their parents and relatives and lose themselves in the mainstream” (1989, p.15). I am now able to understand why my father was unable and unwilling to pass on any “Aboriginality” to me as I learn of my father’s life experiences, that his family ceased speaking Mohawk when he was very young, his experience in residential school and then moving on his own into the mainstream world of Toronto as a young teenager in the 1960’s, he simply did not have the knowledge that I desired. Interestingly, with the exception of the researcher herself, none of the participants indicated knowledge of parents or grandparents attending residential schools.

There were several participants who indicated a profound unwillingness on the part of their families to discuss their Aboriginal backgrounds, though few were willing or able to speculate as to why this was so. One indicated that the exploration of her heritage was not encouraged, but neither was it discouraged (Interview 5). When questioned as to why they thought there was silence, one participant stated,

Cause there was so much racism. And there wasn’t really a lot of ..., a lot of outlets for Métis people. Before I was born especially. But yeah, I guess the racism from both, honestly, from both. From non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people, so....racism. And they never had pride in themselves; they didn’t know who they were. Because they didn’t talk about it and nobody said ....made themselves feel proud because they picked berries or proud because they were fishermen, not because they weren’t white enough, like they weren’t in university. I don’t think they had pride in what they did and who they were. There was no pride. So I think that’s why they denied who they were. Plus like I said,

nobody talked about it. And my papa will still yell that at me, “we didn’t know who we were!!!” and that’s what he’ll say (laughter). Nobody wanted to say that they were Aboriginal, and everybody wanted to hang onto that they were white for some reason, because I mean, in Canada, there’s that division. For some reason it’s imbedded into peoples’ minds that white is the best and Aboriginal is bad. But I mean, that came from top down from the government making people feel like shit and not knowing who they were. Like treating people and saying that their culture is wrong and they were bad from the time they were kids’ you know? They didn’t want to be dirty little Métis. That’s why....unfortunately...but like I said, times have changed so much that they can say who they are and be proud and not be embarrassed and ashamed. There is absolutely no reason to be embarrassed of who we are. (Interview 9)

Interestingly, this was the only Métis participant who indicated an awareness of the divide between Métis and First Nations people.

For this group, the ideals of the dominant society and the desire to “fit in” on the part of their parents overshadowed their Aboriginality growing up. For the majority of the participants whether adopted or living in their biological homes their family did not provide a strong sense of who they were as an Aboriginal person. Some of the participants responses reflects Howard Adams ideas of the “white ideal” in that “At some point in their lives they refuse to identify with the native masses...(and) express contempt for the rank and file natives who are struggling against racism and colonialism” (1989, p.146).



Lawrence (2004) speculates that the reasons for Aboriginal parents to discourage discussions about their Aboriginal heritage are complex:

Some were abjured to be silent about their identity as children, for their own protection in the face of racism, while others were told nothing about their heritage to make it easier for them to assimilate into a white identity. Some individuals came from families so disintegrated by alcohol and cycles of abuse that Nativeness has become too associated with pain and shame to be discussed. But for probably the majority of urban mixed-bloods, their parents and grandparents were silent about Nativeness simply because lifetime habits of silence, learned in childhood at residential schools, or in negotiating a racist society, have been almost impossible to break (p.xv-xvi).

Lawrence's comments could explain the experience for the researcher and those participants whose family did not share information related to their Aboriginal identity. The two participants who were adopted shared the experience of many Aboriginal people who were taken from their community and placed in white families. It is important to note that *all but one* of the participants as well as the researcher were on personal journeys of re-claiming what had been denied to them by the choices and circumstances of their parents. The exploration of identity sought as an adult by the participants is supported by Garrouette (2003. p.135) where she discusses the development of identity as a fluid and flexible process where acknowledging the dignity and personhood of the individual as they seek the connection with their ancestors in a shifting and changing society is a valid endeavour.

### **Influential Factors in the Development of Identity as an Aboriginal**

The interviews revealed a variety of responses to the question, what were the most influential factors in the development of your identity as an Aboriginal person. One participant reported her high school counsellor was the most influential person.

He got me in to a peer support group and it was a really good experience....he encouraged me to go find Aboriginal scholarships and bursaries, stuff like that so that's actually where I really started. (Interview 3)

Another participant felt that it was her own internal need to understand where she came from in order to become a whole person. She stated;

Well actually, it's something that is a part of you, like when one parent is and one isn't, like you can't ignore it. ...I found for me I could either turn my back or I could face it and learn about it and not be scared of it because before it was just me living off of society's stereotypes like all around me but why, what was stopping me from going and figuring it out for myself, and now that I have I am so thankful..(Interview 5).

One participant (Interview 7) who was adopted believed that searching for 'belonging' somewhere because she always knew she did not belong in her adoptive family was the most influential factor. The other adopted participant felt that "because I am Aboriginal I am going to be unsuccessful" and chose to keep her identity as a background thing. (Interview 8)

The majority of the participants cited post secondary education as being the most influential factor in the development of their identity as an Aboriginal person. Seven of the eight participants had attended a post-

secondary institution. Although all of the participants interviewed were aware of their Aboriginality throughout their lives, one of the more interesting findings from the research was that for most, it was not until they arrived in a University setting that they began to learn about their respective cultures and histories, setting in motion the desire to further develop their own sense of self as Aboriginal. One participant stated that growing up, she had more negative experiences with being Aboriginal than positive and when questioned as to how she had turned her experiences into something positive, the participant stated

I went to school, and I just think because of my hardships, I have a lot of compassion for people. ... I know what it's like to do not know where you're going to go, you know, that night to sleep, and I know what it's like to be hungry. And, so, I went to school because I thought I had to do better to show my son that no matter what happens you can, do better. Like you don't have to stay down there, you know. So I just think as long as I can keep being a role model for my children, because I am a single parent, and I think if they can see me as a single parent continuously like moving ahead as a Native person and keeping my culture and my history, and I tell them my history, I tell them our history I should say, and I take them to cultural events and I make sure they know who they are. I think that's my way of having, being positive with it. (Interview 1)

For others, attending University gave them a sense of pride in their identity and cultural heritage.

I started going to school there for my bachelor of science and it was the First Nations centre actually that probably saved me from flunking out or dropping out...and gave me a sense of identity, and it was through there and through their cultural ties, even though it wasn't my cultural ties that I began to find strength in that. Like, something began to grow a little bit. Colonialism at its best eh? (Interview 7).

Coming to University made me proud of who I was. For a long time I didn't really know... there was a big reluctance in our family to talk about it. And once I came to University I kind of embraced who I was and I think when I came to University that's when my family was willing to say who we were and to be proud. Once I came to University I was proud of who I was and then that came forth through my family, like my brothers now say they're Métis and yeah, so University was the big eye opener... and that's when I became proud of who I was cause before that I really didn't know. Like, we wouldn't really talk about it. (Interview 9).

I wasn't really even involved in the Aboriginal community or anything like that and even in high school like - I was interested by it and started growing towards it but once I got to the University of Manitoba I was in the ACCESS program in my first year and that was when I first really started to even explore what it was all about and what not. (Interview 3).

It's tied to the university bond. I know it's kind of a strange way to go about it I guess but it's just the way it happens, right? You know, I remember sort of toiling away at a job and thinking I was constantly aware of the fact that when I first got to university I didn't do anything with it. I didn't complete my degree and I wasn't in Native Studies. And I remember just getting fed up with that job. I mean after a number of years and thinking, I'm going to go back to school and finish my degree, and for some reason I went back. Well, when I went back, for some reason I switched to Native Studies as a major, right? And really, things just started falling into place. I think there's something really empowering there now. (Interview 4).

I shared the same experience as the research participants. It was not until adulthood and my entry into University that I began to know my history and to form a more positive and cohesive sense of my identity as an Aboriginal person. I found myself struggling to find out my history, who I was, what it *meant* to be Mohawk, especially in Manitoba, and being constantly challenged by my Aboriginal classmates to *prove* my

“Aboriginality”. I was ashamed to admit that I did not know my language, that I did not grow up on the reserve and that I really did not know anything. Further, to be pale and green eyed and assert an Aboriginal identity amongst classmates who were predominantly, though not exclusively, reserve-raised and “obviously” Aboriginal in the physical sense was an additional challenge. I found that rejection from my Aboriginal class mates hurt more than rejection from the white community and I struggled to understand and cope with these feelings.

All of the participants who had attended a post secondary institution told of how they felt they would not have graduated without such social supports as the Aboriginal students' centres / associations at the various institutions attended although none indicated a need for academic support. Most were aware to varying levels of the irony in having to attend a colonial / Western institution in order to learn about their own heritage. For most participants, as well as the researcher, University was the first time most came into social contact with large numbers of Aboriginal peoples and the University also became their main or only source of connection to other Aboriginal people.

The sample consisted primarily of individuals who had or were attending University thus the importance of education as an influencing factor cannot be generalized to the larger population of mixed ancestry Aboriginal people. The sample also reflects an age group where information about Aboriginal people from the Aboriginal perspective was not a component of the public education system therefore post secondary education may not have the same impact for future generations.

The exploration that this experience has had for this group of participants may provide support for Garrouette's hope that through the perspective of Radical Indigenism, "more personnel, more resources, more perspectives, [will be added] to the collective project of maintaining and restoring the intellectual and spiritual heritage of tribal peoples" (p.149).

## **Obstacles in maintaining an Aboriginal Identity in an Urban Environment**

The research question asked if the participant felt there were obstacles to maintaining an Aboriginal identity in the urban environment.

Language was of concern for one of the respondents.

I think language is a big thing to keeping your identity and that's hard to keep when everything is English or French or Chinese  
(Interview 3)

The majority of the respondents were unable to speak their language. One respondent had taken some courses at the university but did not find opportunities to speak the language in her day to day life. Language is often considered of importance in framing the worldview and understanding the culture. As Lawrence (2004) commented, "there is a relative lack of emphasis in most urban settings toward relearning Indigenous languages (which provides) the cultural world view encoded in the language-which is vital to any deeper understanding of what it means to be a member of an "Indigenous culture" (p.167).

Other respondents felt that an effort was required in the urban setting to overcome obstacles. One respondent stated;

Well, I think you have to make more of an effort in the urban area, because on the reserve, well everybody's an Indian, so you are just surrounded by, by your own people, so it's never a question. So in the city, I just find that if you don't look Aboriginal right away, then people assume you are not, so you have to let it be known, and you have to make a point of going out and finding it.  
(Interview 2)

Another respondent saw being in the urban setting in both positive and negative terms;

I don't think so, I think it would be nicer if we could go back to home communities and reserves, but I don't think that any setting will stop you from being who you are. Identity is identity whether you are on the mountains by yourself or if you are on the city street, you know. Like if you have a strong enough sense of who you are and where you come from, it shouldn't matter where you are if you know who you are...It is so easy to get caught up in city life...you...lose sight of what's really important and what really matters, so yeah, I mean or you're in communities surrounded with people, with your own beliefs, your own culture, and...you are connected to the heartbeat of that, like, the community and the way of life is what I want to find, like I want to be a part of that and I'm not, I don't feel like I have a heartbeat here. I think it makes it harder to be more myself (Interview 5)

Two of the respondents felt that the tie to the land remained important;

Absolutely. Especially being light skinned like myself...well urban you think of colonialism, you know, whole totally European notion and then on top of that you have got Aboriginal, and it's like an oxymoron...I'm sure we could adapt, and it's been shown that we can, but I think Aboriginalness is tied to...I know Inuitness, at least is tied to the land. (Interview 6)

Sure there are lots. ...I think it is really hard to remember who you are and to be proud of who you are especially if you do not have that home base to go to. Yeah, I think it is really hard to maintain a balance in the city, big time, especially when like a lot of Aboriginal people say you are not, you are not even a Métis, what are you, and I say like yes I am, I know who I am, you don't know who I am. So yeah it's hard (Interview 9)

The ability to continue to learn and adjust was of importance to one respondent;

I think to a certain degree it can be achieved, coming here I was told by my adoptive parents that it was the dirtiest city and the aboriginal drug uses and prostitution wasn't tucked away nicely like it is in the east side of Vancouver and that I would have real problems here..But I am always on the path of discovery. Like that is always going to be stuff I'm going to be learning and steps to go further and what not(Interview 7)



One of the respondents who had been adopted focused on what she saw was required to adapt to the urban setting;

Being successful, see that is what it is all about for me. Success, for people is, in order to succeed in life you have to work in a white man's world but everything else, the problems you have within your relationships, the problems you have with your job are the same issue across the board. Like, those don't change, but if you have financial success, well than you are looked up to. And that's like with everybody but more so if you are Aboriginal I find (Interview 8)

The responses supported the work of Lawrence (2004) who found that negotiation of identity for mixed ancestry Aboriginal people in the urban setting was fraught with difficulties. The majority of mixed ancestry people did not have the tools such as language and traditional knowledge to negotiate the Aboriginal community and combined with their 'white' skins were often distrusted by other Aboriginal people.

Lawrence also suggested that urban mixed ancestry Aboriginal people were aware of the tie to a specific land base i.e. reserve but this did not need interfere in the ability to be Aboriginal and live in the city.

### **The meaning and expression of being Aboriginal in an urban setting.**

The research questions asked the respondents to describe what being Aboriginal and urban meant to them and how they expressed their identity as an Aboriginal person. As with the other research questions there were a variety of responses.

For two of the respondents the ability to believe in themselves was of importance;

I think that no matter where we live and what we do or what occupation, we're still Aboriginal. It doesn't change what we are. The other thing is, that keeps me strong in my beliefs is my dreams. One time I had a dream that I was told by the grandfathers that mixed blood people are stronger than Aboriginal people or white people because we do have both, so we don't really belong in either so we have to find our own spots, and that is what makes us stronger. I think I am better equipped to educate non-Aboriginal people.

When I was about 26 I realized that I was half white. You know, I don't know why I never noticed that before but suddenly I did, and I did go through a little bit, of turmoil over that, I was really confused about it so...now I say I am half Cree and half English and I have my treaty status. (Interview 1)

It means that I know who I am, when I am in the city I can survive in the main society, you know. I don't feel that I'm at a lesser position than anybody else. If anything I feel more empowered being a Métis in the city. I think now that I'm proud to be Métis it makes a big difference because when I didn't know who I was, shit was I ever lost. I really like to work with kids and my grandparents always do this thing at the Métis Pavilion each year with fishing like a demonstration. (Interview 9)

Another participant appeared to express some ambivalence regarding her Métis heritage;

I feel I am Métis but sometimes I find myself saying they you know, that 'they' stuff and then I catch myself and I'm like no, 'we'. People know that I am Métis and when someone wants to go and raise an argument with me. Well I argue back. I have some moccasins (giggle). (Interview 3)

For some of the participant's adjustment to the urban setting as an Aboriginal person was a process of continual effort;

I think it is just a readiness to forward or promote the idea that I am, you know, It's maybe I am being little harsh but I don't feel the need to go around dressing in a certain way (Interview 4)

It means you have to try hard, I had to try hard to find that balance and to be...I think it makes it harder for me to be more myself, like, I want to learn what I can while I'm in society, but I am having a hard time. I just express myself by being me (Interview 5)

I just don't feel any connection to the land here. Well I try to speak Inuktitut. I understand it, I do a lot of speaking about the Inuit culture to schools, university classes, people, you know I throat sing and I try to be just as Inuit as I can. (Interview 6)

I don't know how to answer that. I guess I feel like, regardless of what is going on in the city I always feel connected to my, land have a bunch of art in my house (Laughter). I have a medicine wheel and a few books about Ojibwa people...all from a European context I guess. I tell people, especially when people don't want to know. I tell people I am proud. I dispute people when they say things against Aboriginal people...Just the way I live I guess. (Interview 7)

I am teaching my kids things I was never taught, that it is OK to be Aboriginal that it does not matter what you look like. But do I sell myself as an Aboriginal? No. I don't think there is anything I can do because I wasn't raised that way, so I don't know, I am completely clueless. (Interview 8)

Lawrence (2004) proposed that there was ambiguity in Aboriginal identity for those of mixed ancestry which can not necessarily be solved, but must simply be recognised. She saw survival in the urban setting as one where it was necessary for Aboriginal people including those of mixed ancestry to negotiate fluid boundaries and reject the notion that the person of mixed ancestry must choose between one side and the other. It would appear that the participants in this study were striving towards that objective.

### **Aboriginal Language, Culture and Spirituality**

The participants were asked how important the use of Aboriginal language, cultural knowledge and spirituality was to them and if they used any of the Aboriginal oriented services in Winnipeg. As previously noted, the majority of the participants were unable to speak their Aboriginal language. One participant stated

I think language is a big thing to keeping your identity, but you know like it's hard to keep an identity like cultural identity because lots of the stories are in an Aboriginal language ...and you can't pass down the knowledge if you don't know the language. (Interview 3)

Another participant stated that although she did not know the language that learning about the language and culture was very important to her:

I think Winnipeg is a very diverse place. Even the Forks, I mean that is so trivial, but the Forks have little Métis things in the summertime...people are embracing , learning how to speak Michif ,like my grandparents have a band and they go play traditional Métis music at seniors homes to like, old, predominately white people. I mean 30 years ago they would not have done that. (Interview 9)

Another participant expressed the following feelings about Aboriginal culture and

spirituality;

I think it's a foundation that's good for sort of centering people and identifying around you, I guess, right? But it seems lately I have been really torn about the whole idea of essentialism, you know, to go so far as fundamentalist, but, I think it's definitely something that is necessary as a group. (Interview 4)

Another respondent felt that language was important for the future. She had taken two University courses but "then you lose it because you have

no one to talk to” (Interview 1). This participant echoed the words of Garrouette and stated that spirituality and knowledge of culture was available to Aboriginal people “Because it is inside them. We have what is blood memory. So even if you try to deny it and run away from it, you can’t.” (Interview 1). In addition she stated she was a member of the Native American Church and she found peace in the prayers and the songs and music (Interview 1). Finally the maintenance of language, culture and spirituality was seen as a more integrated concept by two of the respondents.

I think it should be everything; a lot of different cultures should be integrated. I think that is very important and having Thunderbird House and what not (Interview 3).

It does not matter what race you are, you are still going to make a very good impression on the world. Every culture has the right for success, the minute we stop saying that this is a white man’s world that’s when we realize that everybody has the equal opportunity for success. That’s the only way, different cultures will succeed. It’s not a white man’s world anymore. (Interview 8)

The responses reflected the findings of Lawrence (2004) where the individuals she interviewed varied in their perceptions as well. Those who had grown up with a land base saw spirituality and culture as a land-based process that could be practiced in the urban setting but with difficulty. Others felt that spirituality could be learned through participation in local ceremonies. “The bulk of cultural practices related to living on the land are simply unavailable to urban Indians. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the strength of Indigenous spirituality lies precisely in its rootedness to the physical world we live in.” (Lawrence, 2004, p.166). This physical

world however does not need to be a specific rural reserve setting and urban Aboriginal can practice their culture and spirituality as a living practice.

There was a mixed response from the participants related to their use of Aboriginal services and Elders in the city. Seven of the eight participants had not accessed Aboriginal resources in the city. One respondent stated that although she had tried she did not like the politics at Thunderbird House and she had not really tried any of the other services. Another respondent stated "The Inuit Centre is really just for people on medical leave I don't go the Thunderbird House because I don't buy into the...it is not useful to me. (Interview 6) One respondent stated;

If I am going to go seek out help and learn more about my culture that that is where I am going to start, but..... told me you got to be careful because certain sweats you go into and stuff like that you don't know what their intention is or what their medicine is...but something is telling me I should hurry up and go look up some of those numbers and try and seek some counselling or something maybe along those lines. Because I have a lot of anger. (Interview 7)

The respondents who had attended or were attending University indicated they felt they had the support they required through the Access program and Aboriginal Student Centre at the University of Manitoba.

Three of the participants had sought the assistance of an Elder. One commented:

They had that I know everything attitude and they could be disrespectful, but you had to take their crap and I didn't think that was good, I don't agree with that. Some have really turned me off. I guess in one way they inspired me because I thought you know, I know they are wrong and I just have to have more faith in myself and I can pray, I know that the creator is listening to me so I can get my answers that way. I don't really need to go to an Elder. (Interview 1)

One person who had sought the assistance of an Elder stated;

There are a lot of Elders that I have been able to talk to. They make me happy; they make me solidify my pride in being Métis. But sometimes they are hard to find. Sometimes if you are not... some Elders are a little hesitant if you look a little too light and they fail to take you on but... (Interview 9).

The third participant who sought out an Elder felt that;

It was good and it was everything I expected and wanted and needed to get out of it, so it was very comforting because Elders are good teachers and reliable. (Interview 4)

These responses are supported by Lawrence's (2004) examination of mixed ancestry persons in an urban setting. Lawrence proposed that the approach to traditional values and knowledge was very individualistic, enabling the person to adopt the practices that could help them in understanding their identity.

There were several themes that arose from the interviews that were not part of the more formal interview questions. These themes were the impact of the legislated definitions of Aboriginal identity and intermarriage, and the impact of their physical appearance.

## Legislated Identity

The importance of the legal definitions of who is defined as an “Indian, Métis or Inuit, and the impact of holding ‘legal status’ was expressed by the several of the participants. Of most concern was the result of Bill C-31 in that not all status ‘Indians’ have the same ability to pass their status on to their children and the legal distinctions between “Indians” and other Aboriginal peoples, non-status and Métis, remains. Obviously, this has created significant divisions within the Aboriginal population down to the individual family level. (Holmes, p.12-13; Lawrence, p.64-5).

To illustrate this point, let us look at the example of my own family. Prior to 1985, my father and his sister both married non-Aboriginal people. My father was able to ‘give’ his status to my Euro-Canadian mother, and subsequently pass status and band membership on to myself and my sister at birth. Hence, I am registered under Section 6(1) of the post 1985 Indian Act though in gross biological terms I am “half Indian”. For my aunt and her children however, status was “lost” and given that under Bill C-31, only one parent (my aunt) was eligible for reinstatement, my cousins are registered under Section 6(2). As a Section 6(1) person, I was able to pass on status and band membership to my children, but since their father is non-Aboriginal, they are “one quarter ‘Indian’” and are registered under Section 6(2); hence my children will *not* pass on “Indian” status to their children if they *do not* marry a “status”



Aboriginal person. This is the case of my cousins, also “half Indian” who are Bill C-31 applicants registered under Section 6(2), however, they are unable to register their own children who like mine, have a non-Aboriginal father and are also ‘one quarter ‘Indian’. The descendants of my aunt have fewer rights as ‘Indian’ people than I and my children do, and despite the fact that our “degree of Indian ancestry is the same” (Holmes, p.22) status is lost a generation sooner in the case of my aunt’s descendants. Although Bill C-31 was partially intended to remove gender based discrimination in the Indian Act, it is clear that such discrimination along gender lines remains. “Since most of the women who regained their status will not be able to pass it down further than their mixed-blood children, restoration of status...has simply deferred Native families experiences of gender discrimination for a generation” (Lawrence, 2004, p.65).

As a result of government control over who is and is not an “Indian”, our “understanding of (our) own identities has been strongly affected by these government policies” (Lawrence, 2000, p.82). Lawrence raises the important point that in a way, to even discuss “mixed-race urban Native identity” is to fall into the trap of “weighing and measuring “Indianness” to see how well we fit” (2000, p.82). Rather than recognising that categories of “status”, “non-status”, and so on “were created by the settler government to divide us” we act as if these divisions have always existed (2000, p.76). Several participants in this research also expressed in

various ways how their "Indianness" was "measured" and the ramifications. As one stated,

Just as much as it is important for them (her children) to know that they're white also, they're both, equally, like ..., but because they have a status card they're labelled. I feel they're labelled, they're only a quarter, it says that on their cards, they're Bill C-31's....they'll get their status cards but their children won't. So I just find that quite hilarious you know, that you have to be a certain percentage and eventually what's going to happen is all the Aboriginal status or First Nations won't exist anymore. And that's what the government wants, so they can stop paying. (Interview 8).

Another participant told a story of how she felt she was essentially forced to marry the father of her third child, a status man, simply so she could ensure the child was registered under the Indian Act

Because being Bill C-31, you can't pass it on yourself. I just think it's still really unfair. Like I really do and it makes me angry at times because you see, like I said, 1/8 or 1/4 Indians and they're claiming to be full status, or even people that aren't even Indian at all, who married an Indian, and they're saying that they have full status. And yet, you know, even though my baby was  $\frac{3}{4}$ , I had to marry this guy, you know. (Interview 1).

Interestingly, of the three Bill C-31 status participants, this was only one who expressed being constantly reminded of her Aboriginality and was also the only one to place major importance on having status under the Indian Act.

We weren't status when I was younger and then we became status in 85, I guess, and then, ..., but before that my mom always brought us up to know that we were Indian and being the only Indians in the whole white community, we knew it every day. That's my most important thing is the sense of belonging because growing up I didn't feel that I belonged anywhere and I felt that sense of belonging when I got older, so for me, it's very important that all three of them (participant's children) have their treaty status. You know, like I always knew I was an Indian, I always

knew that, there was no doubt, but when I did get reinstated, it seemed to be really important to my mom. (Interview 1)

I have been made to feel by both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community that I could never “pull off” a wholly Aboriginal identity either even though I was born with my status. I have frequently been challenged by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to “prove” my “Indianness”, a phenomenon that also manifested in the interviews. As an “invisible Indian”, I am often challenged as to “how much Indian” I am by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. This is a ridiculous question when one considers that such a query would never be posed to a person of *obvious* Aboriginal or European heritage. In other words, nobody is going to ask me “how much White” I am, it is simply assumed that I am White and nothing more. Such sentiments are echoed in Debra Merskin’s (1996) *What Does One Look Like*, Marilyn Dumont’s (1993) poem *Leather and Naughahyde* and Drew Hayden Taylor’s (2002) *Pretty Like a White Boy*. This particular conundrum is one that is peculiar to the mixed ancestry Aboriginal population, and is partly a result of Canadian legislation regarding who is and is not “Aboriginal”.

Aboriginal identity is not only complex, but also politically and legally volatile. In the urban setting, the complexity is even more pronounced as over half of the Aboriginal population in Canada now live in urban settings (stats can, 2001 census) and provincial and municipal governments continue to argue with the federal government over fiscal responsibility for off-reserve Aboriginal peoples. Furthermore, as this

process of urbanisation has been ongoing since the end of World War II there are now second and third generation urban-born Aboriginal people whose identity is becoming more “intertribal and grounded in pan-Indian activities” (Gonzales, 2001, p. 170) to use American terms. Adding further complexity is the higher likelihood of marriage outside of one’s own ancestry group once the move to an urban centre is made, leading to peoples of multi-ancestry and or “multi-tribal” backgrounds (Gonzales, p.170). In Canada, Aboriginal marriage statistics from 1965 to 1985 show that about half of the marriages are to a non-Aboriginal person and that Aboriginal men and women are both equally as likely to “marry out” and given the impact of Bill C-31, the numbers of people able to pass on “Indian” status will decrease from generation to generation (Holmes, p. 25). Bill C-31 “has made Indian status much harder to keep. Intermarriage now represents a ‘ticking time bomb’ in Native communities” (Lawrence, 2004, p.67). Thus, the debate over who is and is not “Indian” in the urban context is not only a question of culture, but of biology as well.

### **Intermarriage**

Given that all participants were of mixed ancestry and all were aware to varying degrees of the issues resulting from legislated identity, the issue of intermarriage came up frequently during the interview process with mixed responses. In the interviews where the topic came up, participants were aware of the racial / racist connotations inherent to the topic of “intermarriage” and the researcher simply allowed the participant

to view their opinions without judgement. One participant, the only one who seemed highly aware of the problems surrounding legislated, legalized identity, when asked how they would feel if their child chose to marry a non-Aboriginal person expressed the following sentiments.

I may not like it, my wish may be that he would have married a native woman, but... it all comes down to the future generations again. Like, I'm worried about the future generations. If we, if everybody starts marrying non-native people, then where are the native people going to be? So I'm thinking of the future of our nation because we were almost wiped out at one time and I don't want that happening again just because of the choices we're going to be making (Interview 1).

Several participants were aware of the contradictions and internal conflict regarding the question of intermarriage and the "passing down" of cultural heritage and identity. Most had only tentatively considered the thought or the repercussions of intermarriage.

I would definitely enter into a mixed marriage but at the same time, like, I'm really trying to sort this out for myself, but, I guess with my, I don't know how to put this, with my new found interest in Native women, you know, it's just, I'm trying not to get drawn into the whole vanishing race theory, but I think there is a sense of, you know, connection and continuity...should I have kids with a Native woman or whatever, but I mean, on the other hand, I can easily go the other way, I mean, you know I can't deny my Mother's side. It's funny, you know, I was thinking about prior to all of this I guess my change of mind set that it didn't, you know, it didn't uh... dawn on me, like, I had two pretty serious relationships with Métis girls, women, you know. It's funny, I look at it now and neither of us in either relationship had any sort of idea as to, you know... that stuff like that (Interview 4).

Well, I was never concerned about who I would marry, whether they were status or not, so, I didn't really think about it going, you know, 3 or 4 generations down from me what, I mean, the world will be way different than, anyways and with the progress we're going at and things are going to change period, so, I don't know, I

don't think it's... that's a tough question because people shouldn't be losing their status and the identity with the intermarriage, so it's gonna happen, I don't know, I don't know what to think really. (Interview 5)

This sounds...kind of um, simple, but I don't want to marry a pure white man, I don't. I feel like I would lose a lot of my kids' heritage. I wouldn't be able to...I'd be able to pass on my own heritage but that'd make them....less Métis. So I'd love to marry a boy like myself, of mixed ancestry, you know? I think that's actually more important to me than anything. And to teach them where they came from, why they're... I mean my grandparents will probably be old and almost gone by that time but I want them to know how hardworking and wonderful their family was. I'd want them to be proud of who they are because it took me a long time to be proud of who I was and I don't want them to ever experience that. (Interview 9)

Only one participant indicated that it was essentially a non-issue although this participant was aware of the issues surrounding notions of "racial" or "ethnic purity".

I don't think it's a big deal at all but then we're totally we're losing all of our, like we're losing all of the I don't know how to say it, not purity that's not a good word to use, um, just somewhere down the line, everyone is going to be mixed that you're not going to have any real close real identity anymore but I don't I think.... as long as two people are happy that's all that matters. (Interview 3)

For the participants in the study the legal definitions were a major influence on their identity and in their future. Garrouette's (2003) theoretical notions of identity development based on kinship and redeveloping of knowledge and knowing is a process that the majority of the participants are just beginning to embark upon. The power of the legal and biological definitions of who and who is not First Nations or Métis or Inuit continue to control the definitions of identity for this small group.

### **The Colour of Milk: Physical Appearance and Identity**

Physical appearance was cited as an important factor in identifying as Aboriginal by several of the participants. In Lawrence's (2001, 2004) examination of the experiences of contemporary urban Natives, a number of issues manifested, such as anxiety over whether not the individual is "Indian enough" and issues over physical appearance in regards to the ability (or lack of) to pass as "white". Lawrence states that most of the individuals she interviewed "did not have much sense of the extent of the daily privilege they enjoyed from having white skin. Their concerns about not fitting in within the Native community at times appeared to overshadow their awareness of the fact that their lives were made much easier by virtue of not looking Native" (2001, pp.85-6). Such issues also manifested during the course of my own research as well in that several participants told of their own experiences of denial of their identity by both

Aboriginal and non Aboriginal people as well as their own confusion over their identity. Several expressed feeling as though they were "trapped between two worlds" and that the rejection of their Aboriginality by other Aboriginal people was the most emotionally painful. As one participant stated,

I notice that when some people first meet me, they don't really want to chat, but when they find out that I am First Nations, *then* they'll start chatting me up. And that makes me feel bad. It's like you're caught between two worlds, and you're not quite accepted. (Interview 7)

Another participant told of their experiences of rejection by Aboriginal people in that

This boy I dated, who is Aboriginal ... they're Salteaux from Hollow Water; they would say you're not, you're not even Métis, you're white. They'd call me white woman, and I'd be like bull, and they'd say Métis doesn't even exist (laughter) and I'd be like what?? And his dad and I, we argued a lot though, but we would laugh and we would be friends about it, but man, we argued big time and they would say that I was white, I was white more than anything. (Interview 9)

Another participant stated;

I feel horrible. I feel like I do not belong in the Aboriginal community at all, like, in a lot of ways, but why should I feel like a visitor in my own home community, I'm scared they are going to just look at me and, and laugh and throw me out. (Interview 5)

As Valaskakis (2005) noted battles over who is Indian, over the amount of Indian blood, over what constitutes a real Indian continues to disconnect people and divide communities. Lawrence (2001) proposed that unless such divisions over physical appearance are not addressed in a respectful manner, "the different circumstances that white-looking and dark Native people face will continue to be unspoken" (p.86).

Drew Hayden Taylor, an Aboriginal humorist reminds us that in the past "the lighter skinned Native people were more acceptable in the mainstream...but today, with the advent of political correctness, the reverse is becoming the norm. The darker you are, the more acceptable you are" (2002, p.103-4). In addition, just by virtue of being pale does not mean we are not just as affected and concerned about the same issues that



affect any dark haired Native person, nor do they “have to face the reverse preconceptions people like I must deal with” (2002, p.106). Taylor ends by commenting that if life really was that much simpler and easy for “white-looking” Natives, he would not have to write articles such as this. Indeed, the constant, day in and day out explaining I must do and the outright hostility and rejection I have experienced from both Native people and non-Native people is one that my darker sisters and brothers do not face. Some participants also expressed feeling as though they had to “choose” one identity over the other, essentially being required to deny one parent’s heritage in favour of the other. One participant stated that “sometimes I wish I could just paint my skin brown and deny my non-Native ancestry sometimes.” (Interview 7). One participant indicated that she felt she had no choice but to embrace only her Aboriginal heritage under pressure from her family, “I very much feel I have been forced to choose being Inuit and only Inuit” (Interview 6).

For the sole Inuit participant, several difficulties were perceived in regards to the maintenance of her identity, in particular her physical appearance.

Especially being light skinned myself, I ... people don't see an Aboriginal person when they look at me. And on top of that a lot of First Nations people don't see Inuit as Aboriginal in the first place so there's a lot of hostility from First Nations people. At school there's a couple guys who uh, who haven't said it to me but they've said it to my First Nations friends, not knowing that they were my friends, and you know, saying things, just saying things about my myself being not Aboriginal, or just another lowlife or Eskimo you know. So uh, it's really hard and I also, I also notice that there are a lot of misconstrued notions about Inuit people.

Even in First Nation communities. And also from non-Aboriginal people when they find out that you're Aboriginal, they can change, like um...just 2 weeks ago my son needed dental work. And the lady at the front desk was absolutely great, she was nice and she thought, you know, I was talking in my lawyer voice I call it, (laughter), and she, thought I was upper middle class woman and then when she asked me for my, insurance, which was First Nations health branch, it just, service just went down the drain. She's like, oh, you're another Indian so." (Interview 6)

Another participant stated that while she grew up in and around a variety of First Nations communities due to her mother's teaching career, she was;

ashamed of it because of the negative stereotypes that I heard and so I thought, well, I don't look like one of them necessarily, so maybe they won't know that I am and if I just keep quiet about it, it will never... I won't be hurt by them, you know, bad comments. It wasn't until later on in life I guess that I, it became more important to me, like, OK, who am I? what, what does it mean to be an Aboriginal person, like, what does it mean, and then, it just got me thinking a lot of things about race and culture and identity. (Interview 5)

For myself while growing up, once people at school discovered my ancestry, I also occasionally had the experience of being told to "go back to the reserve" and being called a "dirty half-breed squaw". In stark contrast to this, I also had the experience of denial based simply on my physical appearance. In other words, my green eyes and light brown hair gave me the ability to "hide" my heritage from my non-Native peers.

Because I do not fit the physical stereotype of "Native"; I am not dark haired, dark eyed and dark skinned I felt that I was suspect. Because I was urban and had no connection to my father's community I felt that I was "not real". Because I am classified as "mixed" and thus represent both

coloniser and colonised; which occasionally has raised the question of where my "allegiance" lays I am suspect. Being invisible is painful because *I* know who I am, but *proving it* is another matter. Many people, both Aboriginal and non perceive light-skinned Aboriginal peoples as having 'the best of both worlds' but fail to understand or 'see' how this is far from the being the case.

The participants in this study, people in similar situations as myself also had the feeling of being caught between two worlds, rather than having the "best of both" we are not "accepted" nor "belong" in either, a sentiment expressed by several of the research participants. Further, the fact that the "ethnic heritage was not acknowledged or celebrated, as if it were something to be ashamed of, was racism"(Absolon & Willet, 2005, p.119) but at the same time, those of us of mixed ancestry "must also acknowledge our European heritage. The search for our truth is often marred with inaccurate images and representations that diminish or ignore our cultural identity. Many Aboriginal peoples experience internal chaos, conflict and confusion about who they really are. It is as if they are being torn in two" (Absolon & Willet, 2005, p.119). Garrouette (2003) suggests that employing a method such as Radical Indigenism can provide individuals and communities with a tool to assist in the healing process. That by choosing to define identity as a flexible concept that embraces the uniqueness of each individual whether or not they are mixed blood is

necessary step in creating a community of Indian persons without an atmosphere of exclusion. (p.135).

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusions**

This study explored how the urban born and raised mixed ancestry Aboriginal person forms their sense of identity and what roles social, cultural and economic factors serve in this process. Although preliminary in its scope, this study has shown that there are a number of factors that influenced the identity choices of persons of “mixed” Aboriginal / Euro-Canadian ancestry in the urban setting of Winnipeg. .

The precepts of Indigenous research in developing new knowledge were described as lived experience and storytelling as a way of knowing, receptivity and relationship between the researcher and participants and reciprocity with the community. (Kovach, 2005, p.28) This research took me on a journey that was shared with the participants. Together we exchanged and explored our life experiences and stories. It has led to the awareness that there were both common and individualistic experiences in our search for identity as mixed ancestry Aboriginal people. It also led to the realization that for the urban raised Aboriginal person of mixed ancestry there are factors that can assist in the search and those that can inhibit the search. Our life stories can be shared in the ongoing examination of the search for identity among those of mixed ancestry living in an urban setting.

The study results indicated that the impact of colonization continue to impact on the identity of mixed ancestry peoples in every aspect of modern life. The major factor in a growing awareness of an Aboriginal identity that emerged from the research was exposure to courses in Native Studies in the University setting. Accessible information on Aboriginal thought, history, spirituality, culture and language has gradually become available within the academic community. Exploration of their Aboriginal heritage was an accepted activity and conducted in a safe setting. The services available on campus also appear to have played a role in exploration of identity for the study participants. Perhaps for the first time in their lives they felt supported in their search and this allowed them to explore their past. Education about Aboriginal history was not available in the general education system for this generation of researcher and the participants. Over the past decade more inclusive, accurate and positive information about Aboriginal people has been taught at the elementary school level in Winnipeg schools. A recommendation from this study is that the education systems at all levels continue to incorporate accurate and appropriate information about Aboriginal people from an Aboriginal perspective in order to dispel some of the current attitudes and beliefs.

A second major influencing factor for the study participants was the legal definitions of who is and who is not an Indian, who is Métis and who is Inuit. This historical and current control by the colonizers on the identification of individuals was of concern to the participants. It seemed

for some that if they did not hold a specific title such as Status Indian they were losing rights and validation of who they were. If they allowed their children to marry a non status person they were contributing to the destruction of Aboriginal people. This continued reliance on biological 'blood' markers also consigns recognition of who is Aboriginal to color and amount of blood as originally defined by the colonizers. It does not acknowledge the ambiguous reality of the lives of Aboriginal people whether they are in the rural or urban setting. As Valasakakis (2005) has observed;

Identities are enacted and expressed, and the relationships that situate our identities arise and move in the actions and exchanges of everyday life, in the conversations and conflicts, performances and practices that not only endorse identification but also negotiate the positioning of identity. (p.241-242)

Continued reliance on the colonizers definition of identity of who is and who is not Aboriginal and what is a 'real' Aboriginal also reinforces real and perceived differences between those that live on the land and those who live in the urban setting. This perception was seen as a major barrier in the search for an identity that is based on kinship as proposed by Garrouette (2003) where inclusion was a compassionate process for those of mixed ancestry was a basic concept. One must question if it is really in the best interest of Aboriginal communities to continue expending energy on the debate over identity (i.e.: Bill C-31 applicants) especially when one considers that it is based on one or more colonial constructs. To be considered "really Indian" one must conform to definitions based on blood

/ biology, physical appearance, government legislation, or on rigid and historical definitions of “culture”. While each certainly has its place in the debate, none can be used alone to determine identity and each has the potential to cause harm. Certainly to hold people to strict definitions of cultural competence as a determinant of their “Indianness” is to deny the historical fact that for many Aboriginal groups, colonisation has done irreparable harm to their culture. Many Aboriginal peoples have paid the social and economic price of being Aboriginal with little in the way of culture as compensation (Garrouette, 2003, p.79-81). It is recommended that further studies be conducted to explore meaningful ways to address the external controls of identity in ways that are positive for Aboriginal people.

The third major influencing factor for the researcher and the study participants was their physical appearance. The majority of the participants were light colored and thus did not fit the picture of dark skin, hair and brown eyes expected of Aboriginal people. The years of colonization with the inherent negative stereotyping by both Euro-Canadian and Aboriginal people towards those of mixed heritage impacted participants who identified as feeling hurt and living in a ‘no man’s land’. The distrust and rejection they experienced from other Aboriginal people was especially felt as deep betrayal.



Valaskakis (2005) noted that a tolerance for ambiguity and contradictions was necessary in negotiating identity among those of mixed ancestry. She stated

Like other Indian insider-outsiders, I always suspected that my mixed-blood Chippewa experience would synthesize into some imagined unified identity. I realize now that living on the borders lasts forever. There is no synthesis of cultures or social resolution, just the prism of positioning that empower being in-between. (p.252)

An approach of inclusiveness as suggested by Garrouette (2003) where definition of identity is shaped on a connection to the ancestral people that does not shame or diminish “either mixed-bloods or individuals who enter the life of a tribal community through a pathway other than birth” (p.135) was not the reality experienced by the study participants.

Family, socio economic status and Aboriginal spirituality and culture played a minor role in identity development for the majority of the study participants. As Lawrence (2004) pointed out, the economic benefits of a middle class life enable people to protect themselves from the negative aspects and daily stresses of Native urban life for many people. She proposed that for some mixed ancestry Aboriginal people economic success can lead to the need to distance themselves from other Aboriginal people. As one person stated, “In a sense we’re doing what our parents did with us. The only difference is that our parents were closer to the hardships that we are. I don’t want my children to have to deal with a lot of the stresses.” (Lawrence, 2004, p.158)

The results point to the need to further study the impact of socio economic status on the development of identity among mixed ancestry Aboriginal people as the study sample does not reflect a group in the lower economic group.

It is proposed that the minimal influence from the participant's families is rooted in the past. The practice of assimilation through the placement in foster care, the residential school system and adoption of children by Euro-Canadian families greatly reduced the ability of the Aboriginal parent to share a cultural history because of lack of knowledge, language and experience. Racism experienced by parents and the need for silence about who you were created parents who were unwilling and trying to protect their children from the negativity they suffered. Many parents adapted and assimilated with the broader society in order to survive. The study participants who lived with their biological families as well as those who were adopted all experienced a life that included the amenities of a 'middle-class' background. They did not experience the negativity of poverty. Experience growing up with knowledge of Aboriginal spirituality and culture was minimal in development of identity for the study participants and the researcher. It would appear that for this group the ability to explore and learn about this part of their heritage was primarily found in the post secondary university setting. As they are involved in academia they have had the opportunity to explore how concepts of identity development such as suggested by Garrouette (2003).

They perceived the university as a safe and non threatening environment for their personal searches. It may also have been the primary source for many of the participants who did not have contact with an Elder, family or a home community. The lack of use of existing community resources may reflect the dichotomy between those who are of mixed ancestry and those who are not. It may be that the current services available to Aboriginal people in Winnipeg are focused on the needs of Aboriginal people relocating to the city; those who are knowledgeable about their identity or are not seeking to learn who they are or those seeking social, non-cultural services such as income assistance. A recommendation of the research is to further explore how the current resources can better meet the needs of the urban mixed ancestry person.

As more Aboriginal people move to urban centres and as more grow up entirely within an urban context, the question of what it is and means to be "Indian" in the urban environment becomes ever more urgent for both Aboriginal society and the larger society. As has been pointed out, serious gaps exist in the research that look into such questions as what constitutes a contemporary urban Aboriginal identity and what is the cultural frame of reference while living in the midst of a society dominated by a foreign cultural group. This remains even more difficult for the person of mixed ancestry. It is important to not only "cease defining (ourselves) through the categories of colonizers" (Memmi, p.152), "we must understand what colonisation or abuse has done to us

before we can be truly decolonized or healed” (LaRocque, in Lutz, p.197). There are no simple answers; no guideposts, no all-encompassing theoretical framework and no one single guiding “Native experience” as we begin the ragged and uneven move towards decolonization. This study provided a glimpse into the experience of a small sample of mixed ancestry Aboriginal people who were exploring in their own way how to negotiate and maintain their identity as Aboriginal within an urban world. The majority of the participants remain ‘in process’. Some of the participants have been unable or unwilling to initiate contact with their home communities. Knowledge of the language and traditional cultural practices remains unknown to many of the participants. Some of the participants are still experiencing the ‘pain’ of the exploration and although the majority have embraced their ‘Aboriginal’ side, uncertainty about who they are was still a reality. Further research that explores the development of identity among those who have both Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian ancestry is still required.

I would like to end with a quote from Duke Redbird which, I think, sums up the goal for each of the participants rather nicely.

At one time, I really believed that to be an Indian I had to have all the Indian attachments. I believed that in order to be accepted as an Indian I would have to have an Indian wife and Indian children, and live with Indians, and reject all White values. But now, I can be completely free. I defy anyone to that I'm less of an Indian because I'm living in a White world. Comments like "you're a White man now", would have been devastating for me five years ago. Today I'd laugh at them. I know who I am, and whatever I do, I'm doing as an Indian. I no longer intend to live as other people want me to live-any other people. I'll live as I want to live (Dunn, 1971, p.118).

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## **Appendix A**

### **Interview Questions**

What is your name?

Where did you grow up?

How long has your family been in Winnipeg?

Do you know why your family left their home community?

Are you, or your family, still connected to your home community?

How important, in your opinion, is a continuous connection to your home community?

How would you describe your identity?

What role did your family play in the development of your identity as Aboriginal?

What role did your socio-economic status have on the development of your identity?

What were the most influential factors in the development of your identity as an Aboriginal person?

Do you feel there are obstacles to maintaining an Aboriginal identity in an urban environment?

What does being urban and Aboriginal mean to you?

How do you express your identity as Aboriginal?

How important is the use of Aboriginal language, culture and spirituality in the city to you?

Do you make use of any of the Aboriginal oriented services in the city such as the Friendship Centre, Thunderbird House or the Aboriginal Centre?

## Appendix B

### Statement of Informed Consent

Research Project Title:

**“The Undercover Indian”: Explorations in Urban, Mixed Ancestry Native Identity and Culture**

Researcher:

Karen Froman

Sponsors:

University of Manitoba, Department of Native Studies and the Grand River Post Secondary Education Authority

University of Manitoba Research License Protocol # J2004:131

**This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.**

The purpose of this research is to explore Aboriginal identity and culture among urban raised Aboriginal people, specifically how those of “mixed” ancestry form their sense of identity and what Aboriginal culture and identity means to them. What does being “Native” mean to multi-generation urban Native families, particularly in the Winnipeg context? Is there a difference in identification as Aboriginal among families who self define as “successfully” adapted? Is there substance to the belief that the successful urban Aboriginal person is no longer a “real Indian”, thus implying cultural assimilation?

The research will be limited to interviews of Aboriginal peoples of mixed ancestry living in the city of Winnipeg. Each interview will use a tape recorder to record the interviews for transcription. Each participant has the right to decline being interviewed or to participate in the study without prejudice or repercussion and to declare the direction and future use of the interview material and chose if the interview tapes and transcribed copies are to be stored in the University of Manitoba archives for future research or destroyed at the completion of the study. There is no risk involved in this study. Each participant will be given ample opportunity to read their transcribed interview for purposes of clarification and commentary. In addition, each participant will be provided with access to a copy of the final thesis. Confidentiality will be addressed and each interviewee will choose if they wish to have their names appear in the text of the thesis following their quote and in the acknowledgement section of the thesis. If they choose to remain anonymous then only the date of the interview and a number will be recorded on the tape cover for organizational purposes.



For the purposes of clarity, please circle the following:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| I agree to let the researcher use my name for the purposes of this study  | Y |
| N   |   |
| I would like to remain anonymous in this interview  | Y |
| N   |   |
| I agree to let the researcher use my name in the text of the thesis   | Y |
| N   |   |
| I agree to let the researcher transcribe and copy verbatim the text of this interview within the body of the thesis | Y |
| N   |   |
| I agree to let this interview to be stored for future research  | Y |
| N   |   |
| I agree to let this interview to be stored in the University of Manitoba Archives for future research               | Y |
| N   |   |
| I have read and understood this consent form  | Y |
| N   |   |

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

Researcher: Karen Froman

Department of Native Studies  
Faculty of Graduate Studies  
University of Manitoba  
(204) 474-6268

Supervisor: Dr. Peter  
Kulchyski

Department of Native Studies  
Faculty of Arts  
University of Manitoba  
(204) 474-6333

**This research has been approved by the University of Manitoba Joint Faculty Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project**

**you may contact any of the above named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122 or e-mail Margaret Bowman@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Karen Froman, researcher's  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

16 November 2004

**TO: Karen Froman** (Advisor P. Kulchyski)  
Principal Investigators

**FROM: Wayne Taylor, Chair**  
Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board (JFREB)

**Re: Protocol #J2004:131**  
**"The Undercover Indian: Explorations in Urban Mixed Ancestry Native Identity and Culture"**

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Please be advised that your above-referenced protocol has received human ethics approval by the **Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board**, which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement. This approval is valid for one year only.

Any significant changes of the protocol and/or informed consent form should be reported to the Human Ethics Secretariat in advance of implementation of such changes.

**Please note that, if you have received multi-year funding for this research, responsibility lies with you to apply for and obtain Renewal Approval at the expiry of the initial one-year approval; otherwise the account will be locked.**