

**Accessible Movements: Developing a Vision of Social Justice with  
Aboriginal Disability and Feminist Organizations in Winnipeg Manitoba**

by

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of  
The University of Manitoba  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

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Department of Disability Studies  
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**Of**

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**Claire Atherton©2009**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis investigates the connection between the interests and visions of social justice held by the Aboriginal, feminist and disability movements. Focusing on three organizations involved in these movements in Winnipeg Manitoba it identifies their common interests, tactics and philosophy and barriers to cooperation. Using a participatory action research model the process began by identifying facilitators and barriers based on the academic literature, an organizational policy review, and three interviews of staff members. The research culminated with a group meeting that brought the groups together to discuss their work. Overall, this research found these organizations and their respective communities have more in common than they have barriers dividing them. A lack of contact and information about each other, cultural differences between the Aboriginal and disability communities and the ongoing perception of disability as an individual rather than systemic issue are the main barriers to developing a common vision of justice.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The tendency in our society to view issues of social justice as distinct areas of concern to be dealt with by separate groups of people with different tactics and competing goals is a major barrier to the realisation of social justice for any group. A segregated, often identity based, politics in civil society is a product of liberal capitalism that reproduces isolation and individualism. Galvin argues, "Essentialism is responsible for keeping the possibilities for collective action, and redefinition ensnared within the oppressive binaries that negate the value of difference and diversity" (Galvin, 2003. p678). This leads to a focus on access to the right to consume while eschewing possibilities for transformation. Groups tend to compete against each other for limited resources the state doles out to placate their demands while avoiding structural change (Meyer and Whittier, 1994). No movement of the marginalized can ever be truly successful or avoid deep contradiction and alienation (reproducing the very systems they resist) without recognizing a commonality between them. An alternative, which works with the recognition of personal experience as a legitimate source of knowledge and systemic understandings of the sources of oppression, must be sought to facilitate a cooperative and dynamic processes of pursuing social justice. The Aboriginal, feminist and disability movements in Canada are three examples of segregated movements that face similar issues of exclusion and oppression on which a common vision of justice could be built.

### **Purpose:**

This research project aims to elucidate how barriers to successful cooperation between social movements in Canada, including different understandings of common issues, tactics and priorities, are erected and addressed. By opening up the intersectional discursive space between organizations engaged in realizing the goals of the feminist, disability and Aboriginal movements in Winnipeg Manitoba this research aims to identify facilitators, including shared language, values, and activities, upon which a more inclusive understanding of their role in the pursuit of social justice can be built.



**Research questions:**

What are the connections between the issues faced and visions of social justice held by three organizations involved in the Aboriginal, feminist and disability movements in Winnipeg, Manitoba?

What common interests, language, values and activities held by their organizations can be built upon to develop a common vision and facilitate cooperation between them?

What barriers to creating this common vision exist? What would it take to overcome these?

**Situating myself as a researcher:**

As a non-disabled, white, woman I have struggled with my 'normie' status and sought to reconcile my knowledge that disability, i.e. the significant consequences in people's lives being defined as normal or abnormal has, with my privileged position within this hierarchy. I have always struggled to name an identity within any social movement beyond my identity as an academic. I do identify as a feminist critical theorist, and as such the contradictions and rigidity of identity politics are evident to me. Being aware of my own privileged position, however, I have found it difficult to identify any means through which I could, in good conscious, pursue social change without undermining the agency of others for whom social change may be a more pressing issue but, due to major structural barriers, more difficult to pursue. I have felt bound by identity politics to take action toward social justice. It has become evident to me that one does not have to belong to a particular identity group to help pursue social change. We are all implicated in the systems that cause marginalization and oppression, and it is therefore imperative that we each work toward changing those systems that bestow privilege and impose oppression. If meaningful and inclusive social change is ever going to occur it is important for everyone, regardless of their position within hierarchies, to both understand the issues raised by identity based social movements and find a way contribute to them. As a result, rather than choosing which identity group I identify with and pursuing social justice for that group, thereby reinforcing the boundaries enforced by identity politics, I have sought instead to dedicate my

work as an academic to all oppressed persons, including myself, and work with organizations to understand how systems and discourses intersect to divide us, and reproduce oppression.

**Theoretical framework:**

There is no singular, static, definition of justice, or just society to which we can aspire that does not limit some possibilities or foreclose some conversations and ultimately exclude and marginalize certain perspectives. Working toward social justice must therefore focus on processes, particularly discourses that support the ability of everyone in society to contribute to definitions of justice and to shape society. The methods and topic for this research project are grounded in the belief that social justice is a process consisting of practices and conversations in which everyone's participation is valued and supported.

There are five component pieces of the definition of social justice as a process on which this project is based, including: supporting all citizens to exercise their capacities and realize their choices; developing an open dialogue about similarities, differences and personal experiences; understanding that identities are a product of cultural processes; combining struggles for recognition with an understanding of sources of economic inequality; and working through organizations in civil society as a means to pursue social justice. The theoretical framework that forms the basis for the methods and analysis in this research project includes critical feminist theory, the social model of disability, discourse ethics, and a combination of economic and identity based understandings of oppression.

**Supporting capacities: Feminist Critical Theory and the Social Model**

The vision of social justice toward which this project is working is based on the recognition in critical theory that everything is political; power dynamics inhere in all social processes, systems, and institutions. To define "justice" or "the good life" according to one particular standard is more likely to reflect the values and socio-historical location of the person wielding the power to make that definition than it will an objective or universally agreed upon

standard of good human life. Critical theory does not propose a singular definition but instead focuses on a critical self reflection process that leads toward an understanding of the nature of the power dynamics at play in any situation and attempts to avoid their negative effects on any specific group or individual.

A critical feminist perspective demands we recognise gender and sexuality, and their ongoing social construction, are a basic element of all political processes. Critical feminism argues gender works to marginalize and justify social control by privileging the masculine, the “public,” and the heterosexual, while devaluing the feminine, the sexually deviant, and the “private.” Reflecting on the myriad ways these values result in the marginalization and the social control of groups who are deemed to live outside socially prescribed norms is a central element of critical feminist theory. Iris Marion Young (1990) defines the purpose of social justice as social equality, not only in the distribution of social goods, but “the full participation and inclusion of everyone in a society’s major institutions, and the socially-supported substantive opportunity for all to develop and exercise their capacities and realize their choices” (p6). From a similar perspective, Nancy Fraser (2000, p113) suggests a model of social justice aimed “at overcoming subordination by establishing the misrecognized party as a full member of society, capable of participating on a par with the rest.” This view is compatible with the social model of disability which also focuses on the way that people with impairments, bodies, minds and emotions that differ too widely from their society’s norm, are controlled economically, physically marginalized, and culturally devalued.

In the social model, disability is seen as the consequences in people’s lives of barriers, (physical, social and economic) to the full participation of people with impairments or physical, sensory, intellectual or emotional differences outside society’s expectation of normal (Kitchen, 2000). Barriers come not only in the form of physical obstacles to spaces but also in negative attitudes and representations of the lives, capabilities and worth of people with disabilities. A vision of social justice based on this understanding not only requires the removal of barriers to

participation, but also that the interests, voices, perspectives and needs of people with disabilities are included in the design of spaces, policies, programs and cultural activities. The social model demands people with disabilities have power in decision making processes, and implementation of services, supports and cultural representations that affect their lives.

### **Justice as a process: Discourse Ethics**

The second component of this theoretical framework is the recognition of justice as a process consisting of open and inclusive discourses in which everyone's participation is supported. These are fundamentally democratic and most likely to lead to just and wise outcomes because they require "groups and individuals (to) construct their arguments based on their perspective in a way that others will recognize as compatible with justice" (Young, 2000, p30). Engaging in the conversation not only helps one to recognize and understand the perspectives of others but also helps one understand and articulate one's own perspective. Young argues public discourse, particularly in civil society, acts as a mechanism for producing just outcomes because "discussion participants...develop a collective account of the sources of the problems they are trying to solve, and will develop the social knowledge necessary to predict likely consequences of alternative courses of action meant to address them" (Young, 2000, p30).

Benhabib (2002) argues discourse ethics is a normative system for judging the justness of institutions and processes, which I also propose to employ in the methods of this research project. The basic tenets of discourse ethics, as outlined by Benhabib (2002, p13), include: first, the freedom to introduce into the dialogue "life-world dilemmas" without having to prove one's experience as valid. Second, fluidity between the public and private, meaning that personal experience including needs, life stories, group affinities, and values are all relevant, though participants are never required to disclose personal information. Thirdly, a lack of assumptions about how or what form discourse should take. "The boundaries of moral discourses are indeterminate; they include all beings, and not just rational humans, whose interest can be

affected by the consequences of one's actions" (Benhabib, 2002, p13). I will therefore focus on developing communication among participants on the issues identified by all three groups in hopes that this will generate insight into how a common understanding and possibly common activity can be realised.

**The role of social groups in identity formation:**

Social groups, including gender, race and ethnicity, class, and disability are central factors in the struggle for inclusion and social participation. We do not choose the social groups into which we are placed; identification with groups is a result of where and when you are born along with predetermined cultural values and social systems (Young, 1990; Benhabib, 2002; Honneth, 1996). Social groups are salient in the lives of all human beings, but for some who belong to "misrecognized groups," politicizing their identity or culture becomes a source of empowerment and resistance to marginalization once the cultural values that privilege certain groups over theirs are identified (Fraser, 2003). For members of privileged identities, group belonging goes unnamed because of the power to define the norm that delineate expected human behavior and capacities.

Parsons (1999) points out that social movements, such as the feminist, disability and Aboriginal movements are radical in that, not only do they ask for a larger piece of the pie in terms of power (redistribution), they demand a reformulation of the way we think about power, so that the pie itself is made differently. This requires us to consider how power is distributed inequitably, not only in terms of money and resources, but also in cultural representations and fundamental values. The recognition of the role of cultural representations in the construction and maintenance of unequal relations between social groups has led many "identity based" social movements seeking justice to focus on culture and representation within it as a site of political resistance.

For these reasons social groups, understood relationally, in that “what makes a group a group is less a set of attributes its members share than the relations in which they stand to others” (Young, 2000), are a central part of social justice struggles.

### **Combining Struggles for Recognition and Economic Inequality:**

The third component of this theoretical framework is the recognition of both cultural and economic sources of marginalization. Groups that work to rectify the oppression of individuals and groups in society tend to organize around identity and cultural practices (new social movements) or around economics (labour movements, anti-capitalists or socialist). However, focusing either solely on identity or on economic sources of marginalization is insufficient on its own.

Problems with a lack of recognition of differing identities and cultures have undermined the efforts of the Left, while in identity based social movements an over emphasis on the primacy of identity and personal experience as the source of legitimate knowledge tends to reinforce boundaries between people and enforce a norm that silences those who do not fit into the norm. It is often on the point of identity and culture where discussions about social justice break down. In addition, over-emphasis on culture diverts attention away from capitalism, class relations and the mode of production as sources of oppression. However, having the material resources to participate on par with the rest of society is a fundamental, first step toward a socially just, open and inclusive discourse. It is therefore essential that we address poverty and the physical realities of social exclusion as central elements of social justice and the process of inclusive and democratic discourse.

To address this tension Fraser argues for a dual tack approach, incorporating cultural and economic strategies to untangle the threads that bind individuals and produce social injustice. Benhabib (2002) describes Fraser’s approach as combining a twofold paradigm of structural and cultural oppression with four main types of collective identity formation: class, gender, “race” and “despised” sexualities. In addition to these four categories disability will be

added as both a structural and cultural form of oppression (Carroll and Ratner, 2001). This involves both a redistribution of wealth in society alongside a focus of a revision of prevailing values and cultural representations of devalued groups in society.

**Working with Civil Society:**

The final component of this theoretical framework is working with organizations in civil society associated with social movements to develop new concepts of social justice. The purpose of working with organizations associated with social movements is to facilitate open discourse between these groups, to bring together the issues they face and transform each participant's conception of themselves by learning about the "who-ness of others through narratives of self identification" (Benhabib, 2002, p14). As those who implement the goals, vision and theory developed within the broader social movement, and theory associated with these, community based organizations are pivotal places to begin an understanding of the issues faced by the groups they attempt to represent and to develop a common vision relevant to that real life experience.

Using Fraser's framework for social change, which incorporates both economic and cultural sources of oppression, Carroll and Ratner (2001, p607) argue "It is only through the construction of alternative forms of identity and community, alternative modes of living, and alternative forms of political action, within the context of social movements implanted in the everyday world, that people might be weaned from hegemonic constructions of their interests and identities." These conceptions of social justice and action will provide the basis for an understanding of inclusion in the Manitoba League of Persons with Disabilities (MLPD), the West Central Women's Centre, and the Indian and Métis Friendship Center of Winnipeg (IMFCW), in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

## **Methodology**

This research project has sought to develop a vision, or better understanding of social justice, within these organizations based on the recognition of the importance of group membership and politicized identity as well as cultural and economic oppression, by identifying the connections between the issues faced by the identity based groups participating in the project. The methods used here reflect the vision of justice outlined in the theoretical framework that sees justice as a process or open discussion in which the participation of everyone is supported.

### **Participatory Action Research:**

All three of the movements discussed here have worked to develop a methodology of resistance to mainstream, objectifying research, and this work will seek to contribute to that effort (Smith, 2004; Kenny, 2004; Barnes and Mercer, 2004). This research reflects holistic values in Aboriginal research methods in the use of qualitative research methods that “deconstruct the political context to reveal how all issues...are interrelated. These differing perspectives share an understanding of unifying relationships and the indivisibility of the human, material and spiritual” (Kenney, 2004, p22).

This project aspires to a Participatory Action Research methods (PAR) model. PAR is particularly suited to Disability Studies, which is allied with the disability movement, because it aims to address the power imbalance that has structured the history of research on people with disabilities. PAR is also a research methodology compatible with both Aboriginal and feminist research methods because of the focus on equality, reciprocity, and empowerment of both researcher and participants. PAR has a number of characteristics reflected in this project:

1. It attempts to disrupt unequal or exploitative power relations between researcher and participant through reciprocity;
2. It involves an empowering, action oriented outcome that benefits the participants;
3. It comes out of an analysis of social events and structures in relation to macro and micro-level forces;



4. It produces critical knowledge aimed at social transformation.

Because Disability Studies is the product of a social movement it is necessary that research in the field contribute to the movement by establishing new means through which the rights and inclusion of people with disabilities in all areas of social interaction can be realized. Therefore, with a knowledge of the history of oppression faced by these groups, and seeking to give voice to alternative understandings of the “deviance” to which their oppression has historically been ascribed, I have asked participants to help guide me in the research process, provide constant feedback and decide how the outcome of the research could be used to benefit them.

Participatory action research exists on a continuum of participatory-ness, with complete control over deciding the question, methods and researcher in the hands of the community for which the research is done, on one end. On the other end of the spectrum is the traditional form of research, in which the researcher chooses the question, the methods and owns the outcome. At this end, the participants have no say in the form the research takes and are likely never to hear about the results of their participation. The research proposed in this thesis lies somewhere in the middle of these two ends of the spectrum.

Overall, the values identified in the theoretical framework of inclusion, accessibility, open and supported dialogue, and reciprocity structure the research process itself. Throughout the research process I have tried to connect the experiences of people working in these social movements with what I have found in the literature, using the principles of discourse ethics and feminist research methods, in which all forms of communication are included, there is freedom to introduce into the dialogue “life-world dilemmas”, and there is fluidity between the public and private. I have tried to maintain open communication and provide multiple opportunities to give feedback, make objections or suggestions on the process and the outcome of the research, and participate in the approval of the final thesis.

To ensure reciprocity, I produced a piece of artwork inspired by the research findings as an offering of thanks for their participation.

To ensure accessibility, participants were asked to make known any accessibility requirements they may have, be they physical, intellectual, emotional or economic. I attempted to ensure participation in the process was as easy and comfortable for the participants as possible, within the framework of my limited resources. All research activities took place in a physically accessible, central location in the community in which the participants work.

### **Methods:**

I began the research project with a literature review covering the concept of social justice, identity politics, the feminist, Aboriginal and disability movements, including their goals and the literature on their methods of pursuing social justice and evaluated the literature based on my theoretical framework. I have used this theoretical framework and the findings of the literature review to analyze the findings in the data I collected from the participating organizations.

After completing the literature I recruited three participating organizations, one from the disability, the feminist and the Aboriginal communities in Winnipeg that conformed to my criteria of a community based organization (See Appendix 1 for a description of these organizations).

### **The criteria for choosing the three organizations were:**

1. They are all located in Winnipeg Manitoba;
2. They pursue social change at the local level through collective action that seeks to enable members of their respective constituencies to participate more fully in society;
3. They are connected to the communities they claim to represent, including one from the disability, the feminist and the Aboriginal communities;
4. Their work involves either the provision of services that meet the needs of their community, or campaigns aimed at social change;

I sent each organization an email describing the goals of the research and what participation would involve on their part (See appendix 2). I followed this up with a number of phone calls and emails, to further clarify what their participation would entail and eventually secured their participation.

I then completed one interview with a staff member of each organization which focused on uncovering the philosophy of the organization, their goals, what problems they are trying to address and their methods of doing so (see Appendix 3). Before each interview the participants were given the questions to be asked, along with detailed information about the goals of the research project overall. In the interview I also attempted to uncover what each of the participants knew about the other two movements in the study and to what degree they might include either the philosophy or individuals from the other two communities in their work. I recorded the interviews with the participant's written consent (see appendix 4) and sent the transcripts back to them for their approval. I later sent any quotes of them used in the final thesis to them for their approval.

I supplemented the interviews with a policy review of each of the organizations in which I investigated the organization's philosophy, goals, and methods of pursuing social justice or addressing social problems they have identified. I also looked for evidence of cooperation between these three movements in the documents I reviewed. For all three organizations I reviewed at least three policy documents including website, newsletters, program pamphlets and one constitution, and an annual review which they offered to me as examples of policy that reflected the areas of philosophy, goals, and methods.

I followed the interviews and policy review with a three hour group meeting to which I invited one participant from each of the organizations. Prior to the meeting each of the participants was given a summary document, based on the organization descriptions in Appendix 1, outlining the other organizations' philosophy, goals, and methods to help them

understand who would be participating in the meeting. I also ensured all participants were aware of the topic of discussion, what questions would be asked and the goals of the overall research project. Unfortunately, due to an emergency, the participant from the Indian and Métis Friendship Center was unable to attend the group meeting which drastically reduced the amount of data collected from the Aboriginal organization's perspective. I nevertheless continued the meeting with the two participants from the WCWRC and the MLPD and had a fruitful discussion about their individual work, their organization's work, their experiences as well as possibilities for cooperation and barriers between these three groups. I recorded the proceedings of the meeting with the participants' consent, transcribed it and later sent quotes of each participant back to them for their approval for inclusion in this thesis.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Defining social justice:**

The purpose of this research project is to explore a conception of justice that recognizes both the sanctity of individuals in our society and the basic need of all human beings to associate in groups. The first step in working toward an inclusive vision of social justice is recognizing where previous theories of justice have been inadequate in addressing this tension. However, many theories of justice, particularly those of the liberal tradition, focus on the individual and attempt to explain why an individual would consent to join in to society and surrender some of their natural autonomy (See Rawls *Theory of Justice*, 1971). The focus of this literature review, is not on liberal conceptions of justice but instead on developing a model of *social* justice. There is little literature that attempts to define what we mean by “social justice”, though there is a general assumption within the literature discussing the marginalization of specific groups that social justice is different from “justice” as found in the judicial system. Social justice generally is used to refer to struggles of social groups, including ethnic or racial minorities, women, people with disabilities, and “the sexually deviant” to participate more fully in society. Novak (2000) defines social justice as distinct from ‘justice’ in general based on two main characteristics. First, it is social because it involves working with, organizing and inspiring others to work together to accomplish ‘justice.’ Second, it is social in the sense that it is aimed at the benefit of a specific group, collectivity, or society in general. “Its object, as well as its form, primarily involves the good of others” (Novak, 2000, p3). I would argue social justice is also aimed at the good of society as a whole as well as oneself. Overall, definitions of social justice tend to bleed into models of a just society to which we should aspire. Therefore some discussion of methods of pursuing justice and values on which to build a more inclusive society is necessary.

### **The role of theories of justice in shaping society:**

Ideas about justice, and the means through which justice is pursued, are related to the ideological and theoretical stance of actors who shape institutions and hold positions of power.

This research project is also aimed at investigating how ideologies or sets of beliefs about the 'good life' structures societies, and the role of organizations in making that happen. Carlton (2006, p11) argues,

sets of beliefs that constitute ideologies purport to tell us how things are or were, or – more specifically- how things ought to be...Ideologies are the ways in which a society explains itself to itself, and they are the ways in which societies articulate their future or ideal aspirations... They contribute to the construction of social realities, and help to define and legitimize a society's moral and intellectual structures.

By building on the social contract theory of justice, a few theorists have attempted to further develop the concept of justice to which our society currently aspires within the liberal, individualist, values of Western states (Rawls, 1999; Nussbaum, 2006). However these theories of justice build on and reaffirm an individualist model of human nature and fail to recognize the importance of group affinity which this research project is attempting to address. Although Nussbaum (2006) has attempted to address the tendency of the individualist rational conception of human nature that underpin social contract models to exclude people with disabilities, her vision of justice fails to incorporate the role of group affinity and the right to cultural protection which has become a central characteristic of political conflict since the civil rights movement of the 1960s (Fraser, 2001).

Young and Nussbaum both argue humans are *social* animals first, rather than self-seeking, rational subjects, which is a central assumption of social contract theories. Nussbaum, as a liberal, does not expand on the importance of group affinity and social relations in human subjectivity, while Young (1990) argues that ignoring the importance of social groups obscures not only the importance of group affinity in human life, but also institutional and cultural forms of domination. Contemporary and historical claims for social justice can be classified into two different types: redistributive claims, and claims for recognition (Fraser, 2001). Redistributive claims are the most familiar while claims for recognition, or identity based demands, have

become dominant more recently (Fraser, 2001, p1). The types of claims for social justice that predominate in contemporary social struggles are important indicators of the ways in which people and groups experience marginalization, and therefore how we should shape a just society.

### **Distributive justice:**

Theories that focus on redistribution or economics have tended to dominate in socialism, communism, and liberalism. According to Cohen's (1987) review of theories and research he assumes that justice always means the redistribution of goods. Cohen identifies four central dimensions to all distributive justice models: "There are (i) things allotted-which I call receipts—to (ii) persons-or recipient units-whose relative shares can be described (iii) by some functional rule and judged (iv) by some standard" (1987, p20). The items to be distributed are seen as separate from the individual, but to be owned or controlled by them and can be material or social goods, including rights, opportunities, power, or roles (Cohen, 1987; Young, 1990).

John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* (1971) is frequently cited (Nussbaum, 2006; Cohen, 1987; Benhabib, 2002; Miller, 1992; Brighouse, 2001) as the most recent and comprehensive reformulation of the social contract theory, based on a distributive model of justice. Rawls' theory builds on a tradition of social contract theories beginning with Hobbes, Rousseau, Locke and Kant (Nussbaum, 2006). One of Nussbaum's (2006) most fundamental criticisms of Rawls' theory is his reliance on economic measures (distribution) alone as indicators of social position. Not only is this an inadequate measure of the oppression experienced by many social groups, but Rawls' theory is also explicitly formulated on the assumption that no one experiences extreme impairment (Brighouse, 2001). Nussbaum (2006) points out for people with disabilities the equation of income to injustice experienced is not straightforward and the distributive paradigm upon which Rawls' theory is based is not adequate to address the injustice or exclusion faced by people with disabilities and their caregivers. Young (1990) also criticizes the redistributive model of justice because it not only neglects group affinity, which can reinforce

group oppression, but also assumes the individual exists independently of social conditions. Distributive theories of justice tend to be overextended to things that cannot necessarily be possessed and portrays humans as merely possessors, diverting attention away from what people *are doing*, and what people are *able* to do (Young, 1990, p24).

The redistributive model is also reinforced by a rights based approach to social justice, which tends to create an adversarial system that compares and quantifies rights held by individual while ignoring the overall structure of inequality and marginalization. A rights based approach constructs power as zero sum, with some groups holding more of the pie than others. However, if we listen to demands for a restructuring of how we understand power made by social movements the point is not to control a larger piece of the pie, but to change the pie itself (Parsons, 1999).

**Identity politics/cultural approach:**

Identity politics and the role of cultural recognition is a significant phenomenon in this project, within a framework of social justice that focuses on discussions that draw together the experiences of people who are members of different cultures and identities. Identity politics has become a defining feature of radical and even mainstream politics since the 1960's and the growth of new social movements (Fraser, 2000, 2003; Young, 1990, 2000; Butler, 1997, 1999). Identities are made up of group affiliation along with individual subjectivity including culture, ethnicity or race, religion, class, sex, sexual orientation, gender, and disability. All of these categories are social constructs, some of which are more recognized than others; for example one's race is usually more readily recognized with than is disability as an identity. How we identify with different social groups, either by our own choosing, by our birth, or the choosing of others, contributes to our status, power, well-being, self esteem, self determination and self-development.

The claims of cultural recognition have led to the development of a significant body of literature (Mollow, 2004). Authors who argue for the importance of the politicization of identity



include authors from the disability movement Rosemarie Garland Thomson (1997), Fran Branfield(1998), Simi Linton (1998), Lennard J. Davis (2002). In the feminist movement one of the most famous examples of identity as a source of objective knowledge of oppression is found in standpoint theory, first discussed by Nancy Hartsock in 1988 (reprinted in McCann and Kim, 2002). Simone de Beauvoir's (1949) *The Second Sex* is also frequently cited as the earliest and most influential text in radical feminism which advocates women should reclaim the feminine through lesbianism, separation from male dominated society, and employing alternative forms of reproduction (Ouellette, 2002). Although there is some discussion of Indigenous standpoints on social phenomenon and research (Smith, 2006), there has been less emphasis on asserting any specific viewpoint as primary because of the vast diversity of Indigenous cultures in Canada and globally.

Many political theorists have discussed the efficacy of pursuing social change based on identity politics. Organizing politically around identity has come under attack from both the Left and the Right as a divisive force (Butler, 1997). Conservatives tend to characterize identity based movements as "special interests" while Leftist arguments have called for a refocus on the universalist, materialist project of Marxism and questions of economic equity and distribution (Hobsbawm, 1996: Kauffman, 1990). Divisions within the left, and within identity groups, tend to undermine the ability to discuss what we may have in common. Instead the tendency to "other" each other or to compare levels of oppression with other groups to establish 'who has it worse,' becomes the focus of discussions rather than how to build a better society together and what concrete actions we can take (Severson and Stanhope, 1998). Galvin (2003) also identifies a fundamental contradiction in identity politics: it tends to reproduce the same exclusionary practices which characterize modernist liberal society. From this perspective a class based analysis, unlike identity politics which seeks justice only for members of a specific group, encompasses *all* people. However, Butler (1997, p268) criticizes this socialist orthodoxy that denies the importance of group affiliations and cultural forms of oppression, because this

demands “a unity that would paradoxically redivide the Left in precisely the way that orthodoxy purports to lament.”

Despite the problems associated with identity politics, a number of theorists (Galvin, 2003; Benhabib, 2002; Butler, 1997; Garland-Thomson, 2002; Fraser, 1997, 2001; Rorty, 1994; Tilly, 1984; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) agree the recognition of difference and the impact of group affinity in subject formation is an essential element of seeking social justice, though a focus on an exclusive identity can be divisive and even reproduce the very systems being questioned. The politicization of an identity and assertion of its validity in mainstream institutions including research, legal systems and cultural production is seen as an important facet of political resistance (Fusco, 1995; Kauffman, 1990). Charles Taylor’s essay, *The Politics of Recognition* (1994) and Axel Honneth’s, *The Struggle for Recognition* (1996) have contributed to this debate (Benhabib, 2002; Fraser 2001; Rorty, 1994; Habermas, 1995). Both take a neo-Hegelian stance on the eminence of cultural and identity politics in contemporary social conflict in which social relations and group affinity exist before the individual, which is a product of those social relations. Both argue justice requires the state to support cultural recognition and group affinity along with individual rights.

Because social movements are made up of a plurality of subject positions they cannot be seen as unitary actors as is sometimes suggested in the literature (Dowse, 2001). Though the idea of a universal cause based on class, and a critique of capitalism as an economic system alone, is tempting in its simplicity, the assumed distinction between the economic and cultural is not consistent across everyone’s experience of oppression (Butler, 1997, p.267). The literature suggests ignoring difference within movements can lead to conflict and disenfranchisement of certain individuals. Embracing diversity within movements may make them less coherent but stronger in their inclusivity (Dowse, 2001; Fraser, 2000; Young, 1990, 2000; Benhabib, 2002; Gabel and Peters, 2004).

Although liberal distributional theories, left wing egalitarian arguments, and new social movements dominate the field, a few theorists have worked to incorporate the demands for cultural and identity reevaluation, demands for redistribution of wealth and goods and the rights of the individual to self-determination and development (Young 1990, 2000; Fraser, 2000; Benhabib, 2002).

The capabilities approach to social justice, proposed by Martha Nussbaum (2006), makes an explicit attempt to include people with disabilities in a liberal social contract theory. Her extension of the social contract is based on providing citizens with the means to realize their capacities in 10 specific areas including: *Life; Bodily health and integrity; Senses; Imagination and Thought; Emotions; Practical reason; Affiliation; Other species; Play; and Control over one's environment*. However, Nussbaum's analysis also involves a cut off level of capacity below which she no longer considers a person to be functioning as a human (Nussbaum, 2006, p193). She argues, in order for justice to occur, if we were able to cure the conditions of people with impairments that impede them from attaining the 10 capacities, we should (p193). This is significant for persons with severe disabilities, because it implies they are a lesser segment of the human community. It allows us to question their inherent humanity if they do not display certain predetermined "human" traits.

Like Nussbaum, Benhabib (2002) attempts to build on a liberal paradigm and address the claims for recognition in contemporary social justice struggles. Using discourse theory of ethics and a deliberative democratic model she combines the right to cultural protection and individual rights. However, she reinforces a rational, individualist model of human nature based on equality and reciprocity. As Nussbaum (2006) points out, the principles of equality and reciprocity breakdown when applied to people with intellectual disabilities because it is not reasonable to assume that all citizens are equal in power, strength or ability.

Both Fraser (2000) and Young (1990, 2000) recognize the importance of group affinity while affirming the need for the redistribution of goods and the importance of individual capacity

and choice. These authors bring together the contemporary discourse of cultural or group recognition with more traditional leftist arguments for the redistribution of wealth and power. These authors maintain the importance of individual autonomy and development, which is often put at odds with collective rights and recognition, while avoiding defining “humanness” that excludes people with disabilities.

Iris Marion Young’s (2000) vision of social justice appeals to two ideals of social justice “self-development and self-determination... (which) correspond to two general conditions of injustice: *oppression*, institutional constraint on development and *domination*, institutional constraint on self-determination” (p31). Young defines the purpose of social justice as social *equality*, not only in the distribution of social goods, but “the full participation and inclusion of everyone in a society’s major institutions, and the socially-supported substantive opportunity for all to develop and exercise their capacities and realize their choices” (p6). Ultimately social equality does not mean making everyone the same or bringing people to the same level of ability in all areas, but instead supporting people to realize what capacities they have.

Although Young recognizes the fundamental importance of meeting people’s basic needs for shelter, food and healthcare, etc. she argues a focus on the distribution of goods or income alone is too narrow. The institutional organization of power, status, and communication is not reducible to distributions (Young 2000, p32). Though self-development may often be dependant on access to wealth, issues of institutionalized power also significantly impact individual’s choices and their ability to develop capacities. Young’s vision of social justice also requires a focus on how institutions work to restrict people’s choices and self determination.

Nancy Fraser’s (2000) vision of justice combines the revaluation of identities *and* redistribution of wealth and resources thereby incorporating the claims of identity based and cultural groups for justice with traditional materialism. However, she makes an important distinction between simply validating all the cultural practices of a group, which have been known to be particularly detrimental to women or people with disabilities, or arguing for a

“common good” at the expense of certain individuals. We should not simply accept something as a cultural practice, and therefore a right, if it violates the autonomy, choice or equality of individuals. Instead the focus should be on valuing diversity itself and recognizing cultural specificity. This means that “remedies for recognition ‘could involve upwardly revaluing disrespected identities and cultural products of maligned groups, or transforming wholesale social patterns of representation, interpretation and communication in ways that would change everyone’s social identity” (Fraser 2000, p7 quoted in Benhabib 2002, p70). Fraser emphasises a combination of the redistribution of wealth and resources along with efforts to reformulate values and cultural representations of disempowered groups in order to achieve social justice. The vision of justice on which this project is based combines Fraser’s emphasis on economic and cultural sources of oppression with Young’s approach of supporting capacities toward self determination and inclusion in society’s major institutions.

### **The disability, feminist and Aboriginal movements: identity and justice**

The following sections of this literature review summarize the goals and theories on the origins of oppression found in the disability, feminist, and Aboriginal movements. These sections identify areas of convergence and divergence between these movements in order to build an idea of what a vision of a just society, which takes all of their experiences and values seriously, might entail. Each section will discuss the role identity and/or culture plays in these movements. The review is based on the assumption, established in the previous section, that identity based claims are the main point of divergence between these social movements, which simply cannot be ignored.

### **Disability movement, justice, and the social model:**

The social model of disability has been a driving force in the disability movement, particularly in England, the United States and Canada, since its inception by activists (Shakespeare and Watson, 2002) and academics (Finkelstein, 1980, 1981; Barnes, 1991; Oliver, 1990, 1996).

Dowse (2001) argues the social model has provided the 'collective action frame' or shared interpretation of the world for the disability movement (p124). The social model reveals the difference between impairment (associated with the body), and disability, which is the result of prejudice and discrimination (Morris, 2001; Hughes, 2000; Brisenden, 1986). In the social model the onus is no longer placed on the 'deviant individual' to conform, but instead on society to accommodate a variety of human lives and capacities. The emphasis is placed on collective, structural and social causes of disability, understood as a separate phenomenon from impairment (Hughes, 2000). Disability is manifest in the lives of individuals in the form of poverty, geographic isolation and inaccessibility of public spaces, institutionalization, disenfranchisement, physical and sexual violence (Grekul et al, 2004; Nosek et al., 2001; Ticoll, 1994), unemployment (Jongbloed, 2003, In Unison, 2000), lower levels and quality of education and higher rates of imprisonment (Endicott, 1991) . The social model has produced a critique of capitalist societies, exposed the socially constructed nature of disability, and provided a methodology for remedying the exclusion of people with disabilities in practice (Tregaskis, 2001).

The politicization of, and pride in, identity is a central part of recognizing that marginalization and oppression are not the result of personal failings or inadequacy (Parsons, 1999). The disability movement has historically developed out of the politicization of a disabled identity (Gabel and Peters, 2004; Mollow, 2004) empowering individuals with disabilities to take control of services and supports and develop organizations to advocate for their own needs and rights (Branfield, 1993). Questioning the individualized medical model of disability through the social model has been pivotal in enabling a disability movement and activism to flourish around the world (Dowse, 2001). People with disabilities form organizations and gather together in groups all over the world, and as a result, feel a sense of identity and empowerment (Peters, 2000; Galvin, 2003; Murphy, 1990).

On one hand the social model of disability offers a radical critique of the status quo, particularly the medical model, in its emphasis on the social, structural, and collective causes of

marginalization and oppression of people with disabilities. Some of the most influential authors in the development of the social model in Britain draw on a socialist paradigm and make a strong connection between the high rates of poverty and unemployment experienced by people with disabilities to the capitalist mode of production (Danermark and Gellerstedt, 2004; Tregaskis, 2002).

However, the social model has also been associated with less radical visions of justice within the disability movement (Danermark and Gellerstedt, 2004; Parsons, 1999). The disability movement has a tendency to focus on formal justice and the equalization of opportunities. For example, for Silvers (1998), a key concept is 'access to opportunities,' based in a formal justice perspective taken up by many social model theorists and activists, also reflects a liberal, redistributive strain of justice theories, focusing on the redistribution of opportunities to equalize people with disabilities to the rest of society. For example, Shakespeare (1993) critiques the idea that the disability movement is a "new social movement" and argues the struggles of the disability movement are not about the post-material values embodied in new social movement theory but about resource allocation; disabled people are "crucially concerned with their economic exploitation and poverty" (p258). Justice, from this perspective, does not require a restructuring of society, but accepts the values and norms of capitalism while trying to reverse the widespread perception that people with disabilities are unable to conform (Danermark and Gellerstedt, 2004). This perspective is questionable as a means of achieving social justice for multiple marginalized and oppressed groups, including women and Aboriginal peoples along with people with intellectual disabilities or invisible disabilities because it does not question fundamental biases toward the white, male, rational, citizen that underpins liberal, capitalist society.

**The social model and identity:**

The existence of groups and organizations of people with disabilities all over the world suggest there is such a thing as disability culture, tied to a disability identity (Galvin, 2003). Many

authors in disability studies use the concept of a disabled identity as a privileged standpoint for understanding the oppression of ableism (Linton, 1998; Garland-Thomson, 1997; Davis, 2002). Branfield (1998) draws a strict distinction between the disabled and non-disabled in her discussion of the role of the non-disabled in the disability movement. As a result, the disability movement is often seen as a movement of and for people with disabilities, with goals that cannot be pursued by anyone who is not disabled, while paradoxically calling for the recognition of disability as a universal category.

However, dissent from within the movement, and influences from social theory such as post-structuralism, and theories developed out of other identity based movements, such as feminism, and post-colonialism along with the perspectives of people with invisible or intellectual disabilities, have had an effect in broadening the concept and experience of a “disability identity.” These groups have argued the “strong social model” (Shakespeare and Watson, 2002), based on an objectivist, structuralist understanding of society that emphasizes disability as a social phenomenon and neglects an analysis of impairment, has a tendency to privilege the perspective of the mostly white, physically disabled educated males who developed the theory (Tregaskis, 2002; Mollow, 2004; Dowse, 2001).

Gabel and Peters (2004) and Danermark and Gellerstadt (2004) have identified a trend toward post-structuralist analysis within disability studies, in which both economic, social and cultural representations along with physical corporeal realities become important constituent elements of society and individual identity (Tremain, 2005). From a post-structuralist perspective, identity, social location and social change occur as a result of discourses. There is no singular structure, like class, or disability, that determines an individual’s place in society. Mollow (2004) points out the pitfalls of a rigid disability identity: that discourages class analysis, reinforces oppressive identity categories, privileges some disabilities over others, and creates antagonism with other minority groups. Corker and Shakespeare (2002, p3) question the adequacy of explaining the marginalization of people with disabilities based solely on economic



structures. According to Danermark and Gellerstedt (2004), “they endorse deconstruction and situated knowledge, and de-centering the subject. In doing this, they give culture a privileged role” (2004, p340). Shakespeare and Watson (2002) have criticized the “strong social model” as formulated in Britain, as an “outdated ideology” whose main weakness stems from the rigid dichotomy between disability and impairment it creates, and inconsistency with the reality of the lives of people with disabilities and work in the movement. They contend that the social model is a meta-narrative that fails to encompass the quintessential post-modern concept of disability, which cannot be reduced to a single identity. Dowse (2001) identifies a similar trend and argues social movement theory, which reads identity as a fluid process rather than a static property, could benefit theorists in disability studies.

However, post-structuralism has come under heavy criticism and is often seen as an individualizing, and paralyzing way of approaching social change. Specifically in regard to disability, post-structuralism has been said to ignore the physical reality of disability (Davis, 2002; Mollow, 2004). Carlton (2006) points out the difficulty of using a post-structuralist epistemology to construct a vision of justice or common understanding in society because it does not provide basic values or rules to build on, and requires endless negotiation without a fundamental consensus. Notwithstanding these criticisms, the usefulness of a post-structuralist critique is not necessarily to offer a model society to which we should aspire. Instead it offers an attention to processes of marginalization and means of understanding how culture becomes both a source of oppression and resistance. In understanding social justice as a process, a post-structuralist analysis of disablement illuminates the discursive sources of oppression which cannot be removed by simply redistributing resources or leveling a set of stairs. It helps to explain why, despite the fact that we are aware that the oppression of people with disabilities persists, major changes have still not occurred.

A post-structuralist analysis brings into question, not only the belief that the individual's objective characteristics are the source of their own marginalization, but also the idea of a static

identity. Discourses that reinforce oppression are fluid and adaptable, while the identity categories individuals ascribe to are overlapping. Post-structuralism and social movement theory turn our attention to the role culture, and underlying values such as normality, rationality and masculinity, play in our understanding of personhood as well as how they contribute to processes of othering those who display characteristics outside these socially prescribed norms.

Criticism from within the movement of the lack of recognition of other standpoints has led a number of authors to draw parallels with other social movements including connections between disability and racism, the social construction of sexual identity, and heterosexism (Tregaskis, 2002). Practices in the disability movement also indicate that a division between the disability movement and other identity based movements is neither possible nor desirable. The disability movement grew out of the civil rights and feminist movements of the 60's (Shakespeare, 1993) and it appears the future of the movement lies in building alliances with other movements and recognizing diversity within it (Molharta, 2001; Tragakis, 2002; Gabel and Peters, 2004).

This research project is aimed at exploring what can be gained from identity based social movements being open to the contributions, lessons, tactics, and similar issues faced by other identity based social movements. The distinction between the "disabled" and the "non-disabled" that often structures tactics and discourses in disability studies and activism assumes disability is the only source of oppression people with disabilities experience. Focusing on a singular identity forecloses conversations about the meaning of a more inclusive society for all, not just for the identity group one identifies with. Valorizing a singular identity tends to reproduce a system where various groups struggle against each other for a larger share of a limited stock of power rather than reshaping the pie to resolve power inequalities throughout society. A strong delineation between the disabled and non-disabled in the movement is particularly problematic when the definition of disability is itself contested (Duckett, 1998; Peters, 2000). If social justice for people with disabilities requires broader society to change, it is necessary to show how such

change is not only good for a specific group of people, but how it can benefit others, and how they can contribute to it.

### **The Feminist movement:**

Feminism can be understood to be broadly concerned with gender equality and politicizing what has traditionally been considered “private” including such things as, housework, sexuality, gendered division of labour, the nature of feminine and masculine practices and values, domestic violence, reproduction, and the body itself (Ryan, 2001). Feminism has come to be defined more by the plurality of perspectives articulated within it than by any singular perspective. However, there are five main areas of discourse that run through feminist theory and activism including liberal, materialist, radical, post-structuralist, and the perspectives of women of colour (Parsons, 1999; Ouellette, 2002).

The dominance of white, able bodied, heterosexual, middle class women in the second wave feminist movement has been criticized from the perspectives of “third world” women, black women, lesbian, queer and transgendered persons, and women with disabilities (Ryan, 2001). The discussion of difference and the critique of the mainstream feminist movement have come most strongly from lesbian communities and women of colour. As a result, woman identified women and women of colour have felt the need to organize separately from the mainstream feminist movement (Ryan, 2001).

### **Women of colour, intersections of gender and race:**

As a black lesbian feminist Audre Lorde (1984, reprinted in Ryan, 2001) points out though there are some issues black and white women share, there are many they don't. Feminist women of colour question the universal category of “Woman” and sisterhood in the movement on the basis of racism, and the dehumanization that results, which needs to be brought to the center of the movement (Lorde, 1984). Women of colour problematize the pre-eminence of gender equality between the sexes in the feminist movement because it is

impossible to compare “women” to men, when the division of race between them means they have always been identified as something other than Women (Ryan, 2001; Razack 2001).

Emberly argues (1993), “In Canada...Native women, struggling for self determination from Canadian colonial interests, (have) challenged the validity of feminist theories and practices” (pxiv). The representation of women, sexual difference, and the gendering of male and female subjectivities are the major areas of concern in feminism, while in contemporary discourse of decolonization issues of racism, economic dispossession, cultural autonomy, and self determination tend to be foregrounded (Emberly, 1993; Green, 2006; Ouellette, 2002). Specifically, Indigenous women’s concerns focus on “their home environments, land dispossession and displacement, loss of traditional economics and customs, the rights to self determination and self government and other societal problems affecting their communities as a whole, (more) than with male domination” (Ouellette, 2002, p 42). Divergence between post-colonial theory and feminists theories indicates not only a need to decolonize imperialist assumptions in feminism, but also the need to investigate the gendered nature of colonization and decolonization.

Whether there is such a thing as “Aboriginal Feminism” in Canada is not clear (Green, 2006) although Aboriginal women in Canada have been organizing to defend their rights, resist discrimination in the *Indian Act*, and work with male dominated Aboriginal organizations toward self-determination, community development and cultural preservation (Ouellette, 1999; Emberley 1993). According to Green (2006), some argue “feminism is un-traditional, inauthentic, non-liberatory for Aboriginal women and illegitimate as an ideological position, political analysis and organization process” (p20). Aboriginal women have criticized the lack of acknowledgement of racism and colonialism, the way gender roles are understood in the feminist movement, and the ability of the state, as the agent of colonization, to bring about change for Aboriginal women in the Canadian feminist movement (Emberly, 1993; Turpel-Lafond, 1997; Deiter and Rude, 2005). Indigenous feminist perspectives offer a powerful critique of the ways gender and sexuality

interact with colonial systems to reinforce each other. Through colonization, and the imposition of European values, relations between the sexes in Aboriginal communities have changed dramatically (Anderson, 2000). Aboriginal women's critique of white centered Anglo-American feminism stems from a very different positioning within a traditional culture where gender relations are based on a hunting and gathering mode of production. Most authors agree, though there is probably some idealization of traditional culture, traditional Aboriginal communities tend to have greater reciprocity between men and women than those that have lost their traditional structures and reflect the total domination of women's production in capitalism (Emberly, 1993; Kinney, 2004; Anderson, 2000).

There are a number of barriers to the participation of Aboriginal women in the Canadian women's movement discussed in the literature including an underlying lack of trust of white women amongst Aboriginal women, and tendency to ignore the issues of racism and colonialism in the mainstream women's movement (Deiter and Rude, 2005; Green, 2006). Green (2006) also points out a major gap in feminist literature coming from an explicitly Aboriginal feminist perspective. She argues the lack of discussion of Aboriginal women's perspectives in feminism points to the unconscious racist assumptions on which the movement is based (p21). The literature suggests, though there are major barriers to the participation of Indigenous women in the mainstream feminist movement, the critique of Indigenous feminism is a valuable and relevant perspective on the intersection of systems of oppression and identity categories that divide women and undermine social change.

One of the major divisions between white and women of colour discussed in the literature by both Aboriginal women and Black feminists is the imperative to present a united front against racism and colonialism. Specifically, Aboriginal women discuss feeling pressure to maintain internal allegiance, and "sustain traditional social practices of authenticity, resistance and solidarity in the face of colonial assimilative forces" (Green, 2006, p25). Green argues this creates a tendency to celebrate an historic, romantic or mythical gender construct and silence

feminist critique of oppressive practices in the community. Feminism offers a critique of “traditional” practices today that may or may not have been influenced by colonization, but nevertheless oppress Indigenous women. The disempowerment of Aboriginal women has had a significant impact on the foundations of Aboriginal societies in Canada because when women were deprived of their traditional role and responsibilities, traditional structures and systems were eradicated and whole Aboriginal nations were weakened (Kinny, 2004; Fiske *et al.*, 2001). Women’s participation is essential to strong healthy communities. However, through colonization, mainstream decision making structures in Aboriginal communities in Canada today are male dominated, despite the fact that Aboriginal women are very active in community development and sustaining Aboriginal cultures (Deiter and Rude, 2005; Sayers and Macdonald, 2001; Silver *et al.*, 2006a). Though this is seen to be a product of colonization, it is nevertheless an existing structure that needs to be resisted through an Aboriginal feminist critique (Green, 2006).

The intersection of Indigenous resistance and feminist critique highlights the way that identity categories can compete against each other to reinforce marginalization and undermine conversations that are essential to addressing social injustice. Despite the need to more fully integrate Aboriginal perspectives into the feminist movement in Canada and overcome barriers to Aboriginal women’s participation in it, a feminist critique is still relevant to Indigenous communities. Effective decolonization and justice requires identifying and rectifying the ways Indigenous communities continue to be affected by the imposition of patriarchal, western values and systems.

#### **Intersections of gender and disability:**

Disability tends to intersect with gender in the lives of women with disabilities in a way that increases the impact of both. The impact of ableism and patriarchy on sexuality, body image, reproduction, and exposure to abuse are all political experiences of disablement that

affect the psyche, emotional wellbeing and self-esteem of women with disabilities (Odette, 1994; Nosek, *et al.* 2001; Ticoll, 1994.) These are important areas of overlap between the interests of women with disabilities and the mainstream feminist movement, which indicate important possibilities for mutual understanding in the pursuit of social justice.

It is important to recognize that people with disabilities face marginalization within other social movements either because disability is considered their “master status,” because people with disabilities are assumed to be apolitical, excessively deviant, or because the accessibility requirements of people with disabilities are overlooked. Both feminist and queer movements have asserted their difference from people with disabilities in ways that reinforce the oppressive, negative assumptions about people with disabilities that proliferate in our society.

Although a disability perspective is included in discussions of diversity in the feminist movement (for example, Bonnie Sher Klein, 1992, re-printed in Ryan, 2001; Razack, 2001, p130) a disability perspective is not seen as a major part of the “trouble with identity” in the women’s movement. The difficulty women with disabilities have had being heard within feminist movements is indicative of the prevalence and power of ableist attitudes. A number of feminist writers with disabilities (Lloyd, 2001; Morris, 1991; Fine and Asche, 1988) argue the women’s movement excludes the voices of people with disabilities because they assume they are weak, dependant, childlike and victimized and therefore reinforce stereotypes of women. Lloyd (2001) and Morris (1991) also point out the tendency to exploit a fear of disability to support reproductive rights in the women’s movement. The pervasiveness of ableist attitudes cultivated by the medical model and liberal values of autonomy and equality are evident in the feminist debate about the nature of care giving, which has tended to reinforce the belief the interests of the caregiver and the person who receives support are opposed and excludes women with disabilities from the identity category of ‘Women’ and mothers (Lloyd, 2001, p720; Morris, 2001).

A further analysis of marginalized sexuality among people with disabilities requires going beyond women’s experience to include that of gays and lesbians with disabilities and its

relationship to queer theory (Ryan, 2001). In particular queer theory focuses on deconstructing how identity is “understood to be represented in an authentic way through one’s body” (Ryan, 2001 p325). This questioning of the role of the body in constructing identity reveals a confluence between disability and queer theory. Wilkerson (2002), Mccruer (2003), Samuels (2003), and Shakespeare (1999), have argued disability and queer theory experience coincide in important ways. While queer perspectives politicize the control of sexual identities and practices in the areas of the social construction of sex, disability perspectives politicize cultural norms around idealized bodies, and have brought to light the way ‘deviant’ bodies are de or hyper-sexualized and brought under social control (Wilkerson, 2002). Together they highlight how the deviance ascribed to the sexuality of oppressed groups is a central part of oppression and the achievement of sexual agency as a primary goal of social change (Mccruer, 2003; Samuels, 2003, p233-255). Queer and disability theory and movements attempt to re-insert people with disabilities or lesbian, gay, trans and bisexual people into discourse as subjects rather than objects of medical or psychological inquiry (Mccruer, 2003).

However, there are a number of practices through which people with disabilities continue to be othered in queer communities. Mccruer (2003) points out that the assumed able-bodied identity of heterosexuals has been neglected in queer theory. In practice, gay and lesbian spaces tend to reinforce an assumed able-bodied identity of sexually active people because of a common attitude toward perfect bodies in these communities and the lack of accessibility accommodations (Lloyd, 2001). Because homosexuality was defined as a mental illness in the International Classification of Impairments and the American Psychiatric Association’s list of Mental Disorders as late as 1980, the gay and lesbian movements have insisted they are ‘not disabled,’ reinforcing the dominant “assumption that disability is equivalent to a lack, a weakness, or a character flaw” (Shakespeare, 1999; Mccruer, 2003, p.98).



### **Post-structuralist critique of Woman as identity:**

Like in the disability movement, post-structuralism has influenced the feminist movement (Butler, 1999; Emberly, 1993). Butler deconstructs the conception of 'Woman' as a common identity that transcends class, race, nationality and sexuality of second wave of feminism. Butler argues the feminist 'we' is a linguistic construction, which has its purposes, but which denies the internal complexity of the constituency it seeks to represent (1999, p81). Butler critiques the efforts of feminist identity based politics and theory based on class, sex, race or able-bodiedness, to fix an identity that can never truly be identified as separate from the social discourses that give them significance. She argues for a shift of focus from knowledge of the other to practices of signification and resignification and understanding how these work. Again this perspective reinforces the conception of social justice as a process, in which participants engage in self reflection and develop mutual recognition through open and supported dialogue.

### **Aboriginal Identity and Culture:**

Like people with disabilities, Aboriginal people are disproportionately represented among the poor in Canadian society. This is a similarly complex and deep form of poverty that cannot be simply explained as a shortage of income. Aboriginal poverty and marginalization is largely attributable to the process of colonization, in which Aboriginal people were dispossessed of their lands, had their economic and political systems destroyed and replaced by western hierarchical, paternalistic ones through the Indian Act and the Indian Agent. In this process Aboriginal people in Canada were denied the basic rights of other Canadian citizens to vote or participate in the political system, had their cultures and languages and some of their spiritual practices outlawed, had their children forcibly seized by the state and institutionalized for the purpose of breaking up families to prevent the intergenerational transmission of their cultures. The process of colonization was predicated on the false assumption that Aboriginal people and their cultures were inferior to European people and cultures. This belief has woven its way deep into Canadian culture and values such that many or some Aboriginal people have internalized these beliefs

causing colossal damage and inhibiting the development of organized resistance today. Loss of self-confidence, and self-esteem, a sense of worthlessness and displacement are prevalent among Aboriginal people today, and these are key elements of self determination, the ability to realize ones choices and participate fully in society, as social justice demands. Part of the solution to this is rebuilding Aboriginal cultures and Aboriginal peoples' understanding of and respect for their own cultures.

Today the boundaries of Aboriginal identities, and the size of these identity groups as a part of the Canadian population, are complex. In Canada, Aboriginal identity, and Indian status has become dominated by the legal "Indian" status based on the terms laid out in *The Indian Act* of 1867 (Guimond, 2003; Frideres and Gadacz, 2001). *The Indian Act* places persons who can prove descent from a band that signed a treaty with the Canadian government under the jurisdiction of the federal government. According to Frideres and Gadacz (2001) "culture and race no longer affect the definitions of an Indian: Today's definition is a legal one" (p26).

Guimond (2003), in his description of the complexity of defining the boundaries of Aboriginal identity in Canada, explains "The concepts of Aboriginal origin, Aboriginal identity, and Indian registration define seven subsets of varying sizes." In addition, the census of 2001 provided 8 different possibilities: "North American Indian, Métis, Inuit, non- Aboriginal and four multiples (e.g., Indian and Métis)." According to this system, there are 119 different ways of being Aboriginal in Canada (p 38). Within these broader categories Aboriginal nations in Canada are also culturally diverse and the degree to which persons identify with one of those cultures also varies. However, there is a growing collective Aboriginal identity and pride in Aboriginal ancestry in Canada, though this development is nascent and fragile (Silver *et al.* 2006a; Frideres, & Gadacz, 2001; Newhouse & Peters, 2003).

Aboriginal peoples in Canada are concerned with preserving and rejuvenating a way of life that is understood as fundamentally different in terms of values, practices, and social relations from the dominant western culture that has been imposed through colonization.

Although there is a need to recognize the diversity between and among Aboriginal communities in terms of cultural practices, broad generalizations about the similarities between Aboriginal world views, in contrast with the dominant Western understanding of the world, have been made. For example, Frideres, and Gadacz (2001) argue Aboriginal cultures and world views are characterized as more cyclical, holistic and cosmocentric; the world has no beginning or end, all parts are equally important to the system's functioning and humans are not a particularly privileged element in this system. Western philosophical perspectives, in contrast, are linear and particularist. They argue, "Contrary to the western philosophical position (which emerged out of feudalism) Aboriginal people were not grounded in state institutions nor in relationships that supports vertical, hierarchical arrangements" (p154). The difference between Aboriginal and Western cultures provides the basis for a radical critique of the reigning capitalist, Eurocentric, normalizing, patriarchal system of institutions and values. The Aboriginal world view described here appears more compatible with the world views proposed by certain segments of the feminist and disability movements and suggests a promising field for collaboration and mutual recognition.

### **Canadian Aboriginal Resistance:**

The international social movement of Indigenous peoples "contains many features which reflect both a huge diversity of interests and objectives, of approaches and ways of working and a unity of purpose and spirit" (Smith, 1999, p110). According to Smith the international movement has three broad objectives: "revitalizations and reformulation of culture and tradition, an increased participation in and articulate rejection of Western institutions, a focus on strategic relations and alliances with non-Indigenous groups" (1999, p11). Indigenous struggles all over the world question the legitimacy of the nation state (Niezen, 2000), particularly one that is "hierarchical, incorporative, coercive" and "exists, in part, to facilitate the process of creating economic surplus on an international scale" (Smith, 1999, p11; Niezen, 2000). The international Indigenous movement has also worked in alliances with other marginalized groups in society, including

“white feminists, socialists, communists, ant-racists, church activists and labour unions,” who together have formed part of a broader crisis of legitimacy faced by modern nation states (Smith, 1999, p111). However, the role of non-Indigenous people and their ability to contribute to the movement is widely debated (Smith, 1999).

There is a wide array of tactics and issues to be addressed through Aboriginal resistance and decolonization in Canadian society. Aboriginal resistance in Canada generally reflects the broad goals of the international movement of Indigenous peoples, but the focus tends to be on the local, specific and immediate. There are, however, a number of broad goals and themes that give rise to Aboriginal resistance in Canada. Justice, from the perspective of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, is tied to undoing the wrongs of a history of colonization, the recognition of Aboriginal rights to self-determination/government, the honouring of treaties between groups of Aboriginal peoples and the colonial government, integration as valued, Aboriginal members of society, and the preservation and revitalization of Aboriginal cultures and traditions (Dupuis, 2002; Frideres and Gadacz, 2001).

Aboriginal people in Canada have suffered from the coercive and violent forces of a colonial system that have sought to eradicate and then assimilate them into mainstream, white Canadian society. The system of colonial domination, cultural devaluation and geographic segregation has established Aboriginal people as second class citizens in Canadian society. According to Findlay and Wuttunee, “Canada enjoys a high standing in the United Nations Human Development Index (UNHDI), while the Aboriginal population would rank 48th, behind Panama, or as low as 78th by some accounts” (2007, p6). This has been manifest in the lives of Aboriginal peoples in the form of physical segregation on reserves, ghettoization in cities, high rates of poverty, illiteracy, imprisonment, unemployment, high suicide rates, substance abuse and violence (Silver, *et al*, 2006a; Dupuis, 2002; Frideres and Gadacz, 2001).

The legacy wrought from experiences of abuse and violence in the residential school system is an important focus of claims for justice among Aboriginal people in Canada today. The

residential school system, in which children were removed from their families and their native language, cultural and social practices were repressed, is frequently cited as having an enduring detrimental impact on Aboriginal individuals and on the foundations of their communities (Dupuis, 2002; Frideres and Gadacz, 2001; Comeau, 1995; Fournier and Crey, 1997; Grant, 1996; Miller, 1996).

Aboriginal people also question the legitimacy of the Canadian state due to the historical denial of the right to vote (Dupuis, 2002), along with the unwillingness on the state's part to recognize and honour commitments made in treaties (Frideres & Gadacz, 2001; Dupuis, 2002). The legitimacy of the state is also brought into question based on the occupation of unceded land historically inhabited by First Nations. The state system is based on coercive values and power hierarchies at odds with most traditional Aboriginal societies. Forms of cultural oppression, which have been central to the state's colonial policy, are perhaps the most difficult to remedy, and have made Aboriginal people question the state's legitimacy (Silver *et al.*, 2006a).

The conditions under which Aboriginal people in Canada live are largely invisible or ignored within mainstream consciousness in Canada, despite a rising awareness due to Aboriginal organizing since the 1960s (Comeau, 1995). According to a 2003 Centre for Research and Information in Canada (CRIC) survey of Canadians' attitudes and awareness of Aboriginal issues a significant percentage of Canadians surveyed (49%) do not recognize Aboriginal land claims and 42% would dispense with Aboriginal rights altogether. An astonishing 51% believe Aboriginal Canadians are as well or better off than other Canadians (cited in Findlay and Wuttunee, 2007, p6). This lack of awareness and misinformation is likely a result both of biased and incomplete historical accounts of the repression and disenfranchisement of Aboriginal peoples (Dupuis, 2002) and racist representations of Aboriginal peoples in the media (Findely, 2007). As a result, the desire to re-write history and include the perspectives and contributions of Aboriginal people to Canadian society, as well as take account of the atrocities

and violations committed against Aboriginal peoples, is another major focus of Aboriginal resistances (Dupius, 2002; Smith, 1999; Oikawa, 2006).

Ultimately Aboriginal people in Canada, and world wide, seek self determination and self government. This has specific meaning in specific communities, but fundamentally requires that Aboriginal people have the freedom and necessary resources to evaluate and address their own needs, provides their own services and practice and cultivate their culture and way of life (Gladue, 2006; Frideres and Gadacz, 2001). However, it is important to point out that this is not the same as ethnic separatism, but instead is what Niezen (2000) terms "Indigenism". For many Aboriginal people, self determination does not necessarily mean a separate state; they also want inclusion in the mainstream system, but inclusion as Aboriginal people, who are respected as Aboriginal people. This would mean Aboriginal values and cultures are seen as another, central constituent element of Canadian culture.

**Urban issues:**

The urbanization of Aboriginal people in Canada has been a growing phenomenon since the Second World War (Silver *et al.*, 2006b). Over half of the Aboriginal population in Canada now resides in urban centre for at least part of the year (Comeau, 1995; Anderson and Denis, 2003; Frideres and Gadacz, 2001). The issues faced by Aboriginal people in urban centres are a major source of social inequality. Because this research project is situated in Winnipeg Manitoba, which has the largest urban Aboriginal population in Canada, an exploration of the issues faced by Aboriginal people in urban centres in Canada is necessary (Silver *et al.*, 2006a, 2006b; Frideres and Gadacz, 2001; Newhouse and Peters, 2003).

The literature demonstrates the social dislocation of Aboriginal people due to geographic isolation, poor housing, education, health and employment opportunities on reserves leads many to move to the city (Comeau, 1995; Frideres, and Gadacz, 2001). However, the conditions on the reserve spill over into the living conditions of Aboriginal people in urban centers, and are compounded by racism and the difficulties of conforming to a radically different way of life

(Silver, *et al.* 2006a). Aboriginal people who move to the city face a new and hostile environment, and are likely to live in ghettoized sections of the city, in poverty, with poor housing, and few employment opportunities (Comeau, 1995; Frideres and Gadacz, 2001; Findley, 2007; Walker, 2008). "In western cities, four times as many Aboriginal people as other Canadians live below the poverty line" (Findley, 2007, p6). In addition, the unemployment rates of urban Aboriginal Canadians "is five to six times higher than for non-Aboriginal people living in the urban area" (Frideres and Gadacz, 2001, p148). In terms of demographics, within the group of Aboriginal people in urban centres, the research indicates a significant proportion are women, (about 10%) and single mothers, and a higher percentage are under 30 years old (Frideres and Gadacz, 2001).

Silver et al. (2006a) argue developing a strong sense of Aboriginal identity and pride, and Aboriginal organizations, is central to Aboriginal community economic development. Social justice for urban Aboriginal people requires addressing all of these issues, and nurturing an urban community of Aboriginal people with institutional completeness, made up of organizations controlled by Aboriginal people and tailored to address the needs of Aboriginal people transitioning into an industrialized, urban lifestyle that maintain a strong sense of culture, and social support (Silver et al, 2006a; Frideres and Gadacz, 2001; Dupuis, 2002; CPHI, 2003).

### **Aboriginal Women:**

When comparing the demographics and human development indicators of Aboriginal women in Canada to non-Aboriginal women or Aboriginal men, there are significant and negative differences in the lives of Aboriginal women (Hull, 2006). Twice as many Aboriginal women in Canada live in poverty compared to non-Aboriginal women (Findlay and Wuttunee, 2007, p6). Aboriginal women have a younger average age than non-Aboriginal women, are more likely to be the head of a single parent household and have more children than non-Aboriginal women (Kinney, 2004, p11). On top of this, "Aboriginal women are five times more likely to die as a result of violence than any other group of Canadian women" (Findlay and Wuttunee, 2007, p6).

Despite the fact that registered Indian women are more likely than their male counterparts to achieve higher levels of education and live longer, they continue to earn less (Findlay and Wuttunee, 2007, p6). This is likely related to lower workforce participation rates resulting from the responsibilities of heading a single parent household and larger family sizes (Kinney, 2004, p11).

A history of colonization and the interaction of patriarchy and racism have contributed significantly to the marginalization and disenfranchisement of Aboriginal women in Canadian society. The literature on Aboriginal women in Canada indicates relations between the sexes in most Aboriginal cultures before colonization were more reciprocal than those that exist today. The imposition of the values of missionaries and a number of sexist policies that privileged men and undermined the contributions of women have had a devastating effect on Aboriginal cultures as a whole (Kinney, 2004, p12). Historically, the most common way of losing Indian status was a result of section 12(1)(b) of the *Indian Act*, in which any legally Indian female who married a non-Indian male lost Indian status for herself and for her children. Registered Indian males who married a non-Indian female, on the other hand, retained their status and gained legal Indian status for their wife and any resulting offspring (Frideres and Gadacz, 2001, p30-31; Green, 2006; Sayers and MacDonald, 2001). The changing of this law in 1985 is considered one of the most significant achievements of the women's movement in Canada to date. However, the lobbying to change this law only partially supported by mainstream feminist organizations, and hardly at all by male dominated Aboriginal organizations (Wine and Ristock, 1991; Adamson *et al.*, 1988).

Finally, although women may be under represented in the decision making structures and institutions created during colonization (Sayers and MacDonald, 2001), Aboriginal women continue to take an active role in community development in Aboriginal self government both in the city and on reserves (Kinney, 2004, p13; Silver *et al.*, 2006b; Gladue, 2006; Sayers and MacDonald, 2001).



**Aboriginal People with disabilities:**

The issues faced by Aboriginal people with disabilities in Canada are an important area of concern not only because this group of people is often overlooked in discussions of policy and in Aboriginal resistance (Shackel, 2008), but also because Aboriginal people in Canada experience a higher rate of disability than non-Aboriginal people. According to Statistics Canada, "the age-standardized disability rate among the adult Aboriginal population in 1991 was more than double the national rate: 31% versus 13%" (Ng, 1991). Though no further comprehensive survey of rates of disability among Aboriginal people in Canada exists, the literature indicates that high rates of disability among Aboriginal people in Canada remain unchanged (Demas, 2006).

There are a number of similarities in the historical and current experiences of Aboriginal people and people with disabilities in Canada. Shackel argues, "Prior to and throughout the entire past century, both the First Nations and persons with disabilities have been subject to public, medical and religious 'interventions' aimed at fixing 'inherent flaws'" (2008, p 27). Both groups have experienced forms of racist or ableist genocide through institutionalization, and eugenics. Both groups have a history of separation from the broader community and geographic isolation through institutionalization, segregated or specialized schooling, reserves and ghettos in urban areas. Both groups now experience increased interaction with and control by government systems and institutions through either legislation like the Indian Act or child and welfare services, and as a result of all of these forms of oppression both experience high rates of violence, poverty, and unemployment.

The barriers faced by Aboriginal people with disabilities in Canada seem to be the product of a compounding of the same jurisdictional disputes experienced by Aboriginal people in urban areas, and the general lack of supports to facilitate community living experienced by all people with disabilities in Canada (Federal Task Force on Disability Issues, 1996, p10). According to the Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD) there are "three major issues confronting the community of First Nations persons with disabilities: jurisdictional problems,

confusion between health and social issues...and the continued institutionalization of Aboriginal children with disabilities” (CCD, 1996). Aboriginal people with disabilities in Canada from the North often face a choice between having to move away from their communities in order to receive supports, medical treatment and other basic necessities, or remain in their community mostly in isolation due to a lack of transportation and other supports for daily living (Shackel, 2008). However, given the existing disagreement over which level of government is responsible for providing services to Aboriginal people in urban areas, if they do move to the city they may still be denied services, or have to pay themselves (Federal Task Force on Disability Issues, 1996, p10; Shackel, 2008). Given that Aboriginal people in Canada generally have higher poverty rates and are more likely to rely on social support for incomes, Aboriginal people with disabilities are exceptionally disadvantaged in finding employment, paying for the extra costs of disability supports or accessing appropriate education and training (Elias and Dumas, 2001; Shackel, 2008).

According to Shackel’s (2008) review of the literature, Aboriginal culture has an impact on the experience of disability in First Nations communities. Shackel argues the words used in Indigenous languages in Canada are less negatively value laden than English terminology, and reflect an attitude toward disability that emphasises the ability of people with disabilities to teach their community, or a more spiritual understanding of disability, or conversely, disability as a manifestation of sin (Shackel, 2008, p36). Shackel’s review of the literature found that the voices of First Nations persons with disabilities are not represented in the few studies that have been done on the provision of services for people with disabilities in Canada and that the existing does not reflect a social model of disability in its focus on the provision of services through the health care system (2008, p37).

### **Methods of Organizing in Feminist, Aboriginal and Disability Organizations:**

Social movements are essentially made up of organizations of people who understand themselves to have a common experience of oppression and interest in social change. These

organizations grow out of a discontent with the existing system of service provision, cultural and political representation, or economic distribution and are intended to address the problems identified by providing a better service, lobbying the government for change, redistributing social goods or simply providing support and developing the political consciousness of the constituency they attempt to represent (Carroll and Ratner, 2001; Boyce *et al.*, 2001). These types of organizations make up a significant part of civil society, which are a major focus of deliberative democracy and the model of social justice being pursued in this project (Benhabib, 2002). Organizations engaged in social change at the community level are an essential element of cultivating diversity in movements while cultivating a collective identity and culture (Parsons, 1999). For this reason an investigation into the role of local organizations in implementing social change, developing dialogue about the sources of oppressions, and the influence their understanding of the nature of oppression has on the methods and issues they choose to address is necessary.

The framework I employ for evaluating the ways organizations work to realize the goals of social movements is based on a combination the work of Mollow (2001) and Carroll and Ratner (2001), and the vision of social justice developed in the theoretical framework. In her analysis of the divergent theories that attempt to explain the development and actions of social movements Mollow (2001) argues social movements are processes rather than static groups, active in both the construction of personal and collective identities and political strategic action and organization. This view is supported by Carroll and Ratner (2001) who argue the role of such organizations, as the implementers of social movements in the real world, is threefold:

(1) community building, in the sense of elaborating collective identities and ethical-political frameworks that are oppositional to dominant conceptions; (2) meeting needs of constituents in ways that empower them and prefigure alternative ways of life; and (3) mobilising and engaging in collective action to press for tangible changes in cultural discourses and social relations (p67).

These three functions of locally based organizations work to wean individuals from “hegemonic constructions of their interests and identities” (p67). In addition, effective measures to pursue

social change involve working in coalitions with organizations from other movements across identity divisions, finding a balance between disengagement, or critique of the status quo, and mainstreaming, or problem solving, and cultivating diversity within movements (Parsons, 1999; Wine, 1991; Briskin, 1991; Anderson *et al.*, 1988). In looking at the ways organizations within these three movements have been working I will attempt to find examples of where coalitions have been formed across identity groups, where diversity in identity groups is recognized and incorporated into its functioning, alongside the functions of community and identity building, meeting needs and collective action. Areas that are not covered by these social movements may highlight areas of weakness or need for further development in the movement.

### **Feminist Organizations:**

Although there have been two “waves” of feminist activism in Canada and throughout North America and Europe, the focus in this review is on the second, in which issues of identity and diversity within the movement came to the fore. The literature on feminist organizing in Canada is very detailed in the analysis of how ideology and different streams of feminist theory have influenced the movement’s diverse range of tactics and issues tackled.

Beliefs about the root causes of women’s oppression determine, to some degree, what issues are focused on and what tactics are employed (Adamson *et al.*, 1988; Wine and Ristock, 1991). However, though it appears theory influences what issues and tactics are used, feminists in Canada have organized across these divisions around a number of issues, including abortion, pay equity, and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Wine and Ristock, 1991; Adamson, *et al.* 1988; Rebick, 2005). Some of the key ways feminists have organized began with consciousness-raising (CR) groups, women’s centers, feminist periodicals, lobbying the government for a Royal Commission on the status of women, pay equity, reproductive rights, providing services such as rape crisis centers, information and counselling centers, staging feminist cultural events, promoting feminist lifestyles, and establishing women and gender studies courses and programs in universities.

Overall, the feminist movement is understood to function on two main levels: institutionalized feminism and grass roots, with liberal feminists associated with the former and socialist and radical feminist associated with the later (Adamson *et al.*, 1988). Institutionalized, or mainstreaming feminism is understood as the extreme end of this spectrum of feminist organizing. In mainstreaming, feminists appeal to a broader audience of women addressing particular issues in real life (Adamson *et al.*, 1988). Mainstreaming becomes institutionalized when working within the current system, in the state particularly, comes to determine what issues will be addressed and tactics are shaped by the demands of the bureaucracy and institutions in which they work. The institutionalized arm of the Canadian feminist movement is understood to represent a liberal feminist understanding of the roots of oppression and methods of social change. Because of the willingness of major state oriented organizations, such as the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, to engage with the state, the media and with concrete issues, the liberal feminist perspective has come to represent the Canadian feminist movement in the eyes of the media, government and general population (Adamson *et al.*, 1988; Wine and Ristock, 1991).

With disengagement, feminists work outside the existing system because they believe it is fundamentally flawed, and attempt to create a separate alternative based on an idea of how the society would look if women were no longer oppressed. Disengagement is associated with the grass roots feminist movement in Canada, which is understood to represent a broader array of interests and identities, is less coherent, and more focused on critique of the system rather than fixing problems in real life. This approach is more closely associated with identity politics within feminism (Briskin, 1991).

The concept of leadership and how to organize using radically different non-patriarchal structures has been a major focus of feminist organizing and literature. Many feminist organizations outside of state institutions attempt to create an "authentic" politics, putting theory into practice in the form of small, non-hierarchical and consensus based organizations (Vickers,

1991; Ristock, 1991). The “feminist collective” grew out of consciousness raising groups which operated without leadership and had an open agenda for discussion. However, this organizational structure has been criticised because its failure to recognise that leadership inevitably occurs, and when it goes unrecognized can become manipulative (Doucette, 1991; Ademson, et al. 1988). Grass roots feminism is often hampered by a lack of funding to support alternatives and the need to conform to criteria and standards set by funding sources, particularly the state (Briskin, 1991; Mollow, 2004; Doucette, 1991).

A number of theorists argue for a reconciliation of these two approaches to feminist organizing because disengagement risks losing the ability to reach and activate people, while mainstreaming risks institutionalization and co-optation (Wine and Ristock, 1991; Briskin, 1991; Anderson *et al.*, 1988). This approach seeks a balance between the two, with an eye to critique of the system and vision of a better one, while relating to the issues faced by women in the real world.

The development of women’s and gender studies programs in universities across Canada was another major method of organizing in the second wave. Though the relationship between activist and academic feminists is sometimes uncomfortable, the development of gender studies within academia has led to the development of feminist theory, documentation of feminist history, and a re-articulation of the politics of research epistemologically and methodologically (Wine and Ristock, 1991).

Feminist organizing in Canada, particularly at the grass roots level, appears to follow the framework of developing community and identity through feminist cultural activities and consciousness raising, meeting the needs of constituents by providing alternatives. However, though collective political action across identity divisions and valuing those differences has occurred in the past this appears to be the greatest challenge for feminist organizations in Canada.

**Disability Organizations:**

There are three main types of disability organizations in Canada: professionally or charity run service oriented organizations, groups made up of family members also known as organizations *for* people with disabilities, and organizations *of* people with disabilities which are run and controlled by people with disabilities for people with disabilities that engage in advocacy or in service provision (or both) also referred to as “consumer based organizations” (Boyce *et al.*, 2001; Neufeldt, 2003; Hutchison *et al.*, 2004).

The focus of this review is on consumer based organizations which have arisen from the Independent Living movement and philosophy in Canada (Boyce, *et al.*, 2001). Independent Living philosophy is a direct reflection of the social model of disability, but is more directly practical in its application. The main goal of ILC is to facilitate individual advocacy, empower individuals to solve their problems and providing “information and referral, peer counseling, individual advocacy, service development capacity” (D’Aubin, ILI website).

The findings of a 2004 report on the role of consumer driven disability organizations in Canada, commissioned by a number of national advocacy organizations of people with disabilities, reflects the institutionalized and equality of opportunity understanding of justice (Martinez, 2003). These organizations focus on building networks with consumers; self advocacy, supporting consumer voice; information and referral; peer support; public awareness and community education; consumer directed consumer projects; advocacy on behalf of individuals; and lobbying government for policy change (Hutchison, *et al.*, 2004, p 9). These activities are focused on enabling individuals to cope in the existing inaccessible, hostile system. The focus on individual advocacy or lobbying at the government level indicates organizations in the Canadian disability movement engage less in developing a collective identity, or collective political action (disengagement), as much as they do service provision. Despite an increasing focus on advocating for rights and services from the government (Carroll and Ratener, 2001; Boyce *et al.*, 2001) there is little discussion of the ways organizations in Canada elucidate the

ways underlying values in existing system reinforce the exclusion of people with disabilities in Canada. Leaders within the movement see the provision of services as their main purpose, while advocacy for rights and social change come second (Boyce *et al.*, 2001, p128).

In terms of building alliances across identity groups and valuing diversity, it is argued the disability movement in Canada is hampered by diversity within the movement, or the presence of people who have issues “unrelated to disability.” Though the disability community does engage in coalitions with other movements these have only worked when they have had common goals (Boyce *et al.*, 2001). Hutchison, *et al.* (2004) also discuss the need for disability organizations to build connections both within their movement and with other organizations seeking social change to effectively form a movement and affect social change. Hutchison, *et al.* found three main challenges to the disability movement’s development in Canada: “the need for a common political agenda; the need to address turf struggles or competition; and a minority of service organizations that still believe single focus disability organization is most effective for advocacy and policy development” (2004, p 26).

The disability movement in Canada tends to be less radical than other movements in terms of its theoretical critique of the existing system and focus on providing services and supports for individuals rather than developing oppositional cultures. For example, despite major achievements during the UN Decade of Disabled Persons, the establishment of disability as prohibited grounds for discrimination in section 15 of the Charter of Human Rights, and the growth of an international movement of disability rights, the disability movement has declined in influence since the 1990s in Canada. Neufeldt (2003) explains this decline in terms of a general focus among provincial and federal governments in Canada toward fiscal balance that created an environment in which “disability advocacy organizations, when pressing their case, were at risk of being seen as never satisfied or ungrateful for advances made” (Neufeldt, 2003, p.27). Boyce *et al.* (2001) likewise found a tendency to avoid confrontation and a reluctance “to appear rude or offensive, to rock the boat.” Indeed, Boyce *et al.* argue it is only by becoming part of



government and other dominant social institutions, that marginalized groups such as people with disabilities can have their voices heard. However, I would argue a tendency to focus on institutionalization without a balance in developing oppositional cultures may reinforce the perception of disability as a non-political medical and service issue. This emphasis on institutionalization may also indicate an unquestioning acceptance of underlying oppressive, ableist, liberal values of the Canadian state. This tendency has also been confirmed by literature on disability movements in Australia and the United States (Parsons, 1999; Malhotra, 2001). Nevertheless Boyce *et al.* argue the ideological or philosophical positions of community organizations, which can be more radical or critical, help attract participants and lends them a “moral reputation” and authority when attempting to influence policy (Boyce *et al.*, 2001, p125).

#### **Aboriginal Organizations:**

Although Aboriginal resistance to colonization existed for over a hundred years prior (Niezen, 2000), an identifiable movement of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, and the development of national organizations looking at broad issues did not begin to emerge until the 1969 White Paper was presented under Pierre Trudeau (Frideres and Gadacz, 2001; Comeau, 1995). Until this point wider Canadian society was generally unaware of Aboriginal critiques of the state and the concept of Aboriginal self government was not widely discussed (Frideres and Gadacz, 2001). The White paper, which stemmed from a liberal vision of justice and equality that devalues difference or identity group formation, proposed eliminating the special status of Indians in Canada and assimilating them into the dominant white society.

Because of the extensive consultation with Aboriginal peoples, not reflected in the White paper, it was seen by Aboriginal people across Canada to be evidence of the lack of understanding of their position, interests and demands within the government (Comeau, 1995; Frideres and Gadacz, 2001). The threat of this assimilationist policy gave rise to a national coalition of Aboriginal people across Canada, which successfully lobbied against the policy (Comeau, 1995; Frideres and Gadacz, 2001; AFN, 2005). After this success Aboriginal leaders

began working together to influence the discussions leading up to the repatriation of the constitution in 1982 (AFN, 2005) leading to the inclusion of Sections 25, 35 and 37 in the Constitution Act, 1982, which “protected First Nation constitutional rights and the special relationship with the Crown.” It was also during this process that “In December 1980 an Assembly of Chiefs adopted the Declaration of First Nations, establishing the foundation upon which the national organization now known as the Assembly of First Nations stands” (AFN, 2005).

The diversity of the constituency of Aboriginal people in Canada has resulted in a lack of consensus on policy issues and contributed to a feeling of impotency to change the conditions of Aboriginal people (Frideres and Gadacz, 2001; Comeau, 1995; Dupuis, 2002). Nevertheless, Anderson and Denis (2003) have identified a rise in the use of nationalist discourse in Aboriginal resistance, which developed in response to the proposals of the 1969 White Paper, and as a result of various court decision recognizing Aboriginal rights (Dupuis, 2002). The focus on nationalist discourse, tied to land claims in rural areas in Aboriginal organizing, is a major contributing factor to the lack of adequate services and support for Aboriginal people in cities. Aboriginal leaders or members of Band Councils often live on reserves, and tend to focus on the issues faced in their immediate environment (Anderson and Denis, 2003). The focus in Aboriginal resistance has been on negotiations with the Canadian government for restitution for abuse suffered in residential schools, land claims and treaty rights mostly through the judicial system, as well as increased resources and investment on reserves (Anderson and Denis, 2003; Frideres and Gadacz, 2001). Within this nationalist discourse the interests of urban Aboriginal s are generally overlooked (Anderson and Denis, 2003). As a result, urban centered organizations attempting to address the needs of Aboriginal people tend to be under funded, in a constant state of crisis (Frideres and Gadacz, 2001).

The growth of a movement, based in a politicized identity is a key element of social justice that needs further development through Aboriginal run organizations in urban centers.

Silver *et al.* (2006a) argue, "All of this requires the development and promotion of an 'ideology', rooted in an understanding of the historical effects of colonization and the necessity for de-colonization (p2). Wrangling over which level of government—federal, provincial or municipal—is responsible for providing funding to Aboriginal organizations in the city is a major barrier to the inclusion of Aboriginal peoples in urban centers, and has resulted in a lack of support for people transitioning into urban life (Comeau, 1995; Frideres and Gadacz, 2001; Silver *et al.*, 2006a; Walker, 2008). Aboriginal people receive far less government assistance in transitioning from rural to urban life and economy compared to that received by immigrants to Canada (Silver *et al.*, 2006a; Findlay and Wuttunee, 2007). This is compounded by the lack of long term government funding for culturally specific services for Aboriginal people in cities (Comeau, 1995; Frideres and Gadacz, 2001). Frideres and Gadacz (2001) argue more Aboriginal run organizations that are culturally sensitive and empowering are needed to develop the "institutional completeness," essential to Aboriginal community development in Canada.

### **Conclusions: Facilitators and Barriers**

The divided nature of civil society in Canada is not absolute. Although there is a lack of cohesion or shared vision between some of the more prominent movements, social movements do influence each other. Meyer and Whittier (1994) argue,

Social movements are not self contained and narrowly focused unitary actors, but rather are a collection of formal organizations, informal networks, and unaffiliated individuals engaged in a more or less coherent struggle for change... they have effects far beyond their explicitly articulated goals. The ideas, tactics, style, participants, and organizations of one movement spill over its boundaries to affect other social movements (p277).

This study is part of a body of literature on the circumstances that facilitate coalition building between social movements. A particularly interesting piece of research by Carroll and Ratner (1996), done in a Canadian context, of cross movement networking in the Greater Vancouver area found that segregation between movements can be overcome through a "broadly resonant master frame—the political- economy account of injustice." A common vision can exist between

these movements and shared tactics and similarities in their goals indicates that there is a basis on which to build coalitions.

The disability, feminist and Aboriginal movements in Canada all have ambiguous borders as identity groups. Belonging to the group brings both privileges and disadvantages, though research indicates that overall, for all three groups the cons outweigh the pros, and social change that addresses the marginalization of all three is necessary. However, the discourses, systems and institutions that construct them come together in a web that structures and limits the choices, development and capacities of individuals. All three of these groups experience exceptional levels of poverty, which is the product not only of class relations and capitalist exploitation but also physical barriers, patriarchy, racism, illiteracy and inadequate education opportunities. All three of these groups experience cultural devaluation, which solidifies the illusion of their internal coherence and the group's overall deviance from that standard of human behaviour and appearance our society expects. Cultural devaluation of the feminine, the vulnerable and unruly, and the traditional implicate a system of values that undergrids the existing structure of cultural and economic production in Canada. Cultural devaluation and poverty manifest in the lives of those who identify (or are so by others) as women, disabled and Aboriginal in the forms of geographic and social isolation involving segregated schooling, institutionalization, imprisonment, physically inaccessible public spaces, urban ghettoization, and reserves. These forms of social and cultural isolation work to reinforce poverty and make escape from it extremely difficult. As a result, addressing poverty of Aboriginal people, people with disabilities and women in Canada must address the cultural, physical and institutional forms of oppression they face.

Fundamentally, these groups hold in common an experience of oppression and marginalization that contributes to oppositional culture and political movements that oppose this system, and instead emphasise the importance of specificity and diversity, and personal experience as an important source of knowledge. All three groups have sought to develop an

epistemology and corresponding research agenda in order to rewrite history, include their identity group's contributions to history and reveal the processes through which their marginalization has come to be.

**Barriers:**

All three movements experience a lack of resources, and as a result are dependant on government funding to provide services or engage in advocacy. The disability movement often lacks a radical critique in practice and needs to find a balance between disengagement and mainstreaming or else risk continuing to be perceived as a non-political service provision or medical issue, or as being co-opted by the government and complicit in continuing a "charity model" discourse.

Feminism is more institutionalized than the Aboriginal or disability movements in Canada and tends to be dominated by white able bodied women. In contrast to both the disability and feminist movements in Canada, Aboriginal resistance is most often tied to the land, and is seen as a specific culture separate from western culture. In fact feminism can be seen as a product of western culture and therefore a threat to Aboriginal resistance.

Based on the findings of the literature review I have identified 7 Facilitators which are necessary conditions for social justice shared by all three groups, including Cultural empowerment, politicized identity & organizations, income and employment, self determination, inclusion in major institutions, literacy and education and geographic and social isolation.

I have also identified 6 barriers to cooperation between these three movements which represent areas where conflicting interests, tactics or priorities exist between these three groups including application of theory, critique of existing system, racism, community supports, gender and sexuality and lack of resources. Some of these may represent greater barriers than others. The first two represent weaknesses that cross over all three groups while the last three represent the priorities of each of these movements, which the literature indicates, have not been raised by the other two.

**Figure 1: Analytical Framework Step 1**

Source	Facilitators	Barriers
Literature review	1. Cultural empowerment	1. Application of theory
	2. Politicized identity	2. Critique of existing system
	3. Poverty and housing	3. Racism & Colonization
	4. Self determination	4. Community supports
	5. Inclusion in major institutions	5. Gender & Sexuality
	6. Literacy & education	6. Lack of resources
	7. Geographic & social isolation	

**Gaps in the Literature:**

There are some major gaps in the literature on the intersections between the perspectives of other social movements and groups and the practice and theory of the disability movement. The most significant gap in the literature is a lack of research of how various marginalized group's perspectives, such as women or ethnic minorities, have or can be incorporated into the theory and practice of the movement. Conversely, the role of people with disabilities in the activism and theory of the Aboriginal and feminist movements is also major gap in the literature. Ultimately, research that helps to produce a dialogue across identity boundaries and bring into action coalitions on this basis is also required. By bringing the perspectives and interests of the disability, Aboriginal and feminist movements together, this research attempts to address this gap.

The literature discusses feminist perspectives on the disability movement and theory, but neglects how these insights have had an impact on practice. Further research is needed on the possibilities of a synthesized disability and feminist perspective and practice. The literature indicates the perspectives of people of colour, particularly Aboriginal people, have not been incorporated into theory and practice of the disability movement. As a result further research on the overlap between the values of Aboriginal culture and the values and social structures

pursued by the disability movement is needed. Literature on the disability movement also indicates critiques of the underlying values of liberal capitalist society have not been applied in practice. More research on the perspectives of Aboriginal people with disabilities, from a gender sensitive perspective is also needed. Collectively, these gaps indicate a need for further research that synthesizes a disability perspective, feminist theory and Aboriginal philosophy in order to deconstruct the dominant individualist, ableist, and patriarchal values that underpin our society.

The research in this thesis attempts to give voice to organizations, provide clarity of their own missions and open a democratic and supported discussion between them toward a vision of justice that draws connections between their experiences, issues and tactics. According to my research no study of this kind, which implements an inclusive vision of justice while asking participants to develop that vision in accordance with their experience and interests, has ever been performed.

## **Chapter 3: Data Chapter**

To identify individual and cross movement ideas of social justice, as well as facilitators and barriers to cooperation, this project drew upon combination of three sources of information about the West Central Women's Resource Center (WCWRC), Manitoba League of Persons with Disabilities (MLPD) and the Indian and Metis Friendship Center of Winnipeg (IMFCW). The three sources of data included 13 policy documents provided to me by the organizations themselves, 3 interviews of three senior staff members, and 1 group meeting. The interviews and group meeting were both audio recorded, with the participants' consent and transcribed for analysis.

In this section I have identified themes that arose out of the data itself and grouped these themes into three categories: Convergences, Divergences, and other. Convergences include areas where the data from each of the organizations revealed a common theme, Divergences include themes that arose in only one of the three organization's data, while other information I gleaned generally represents areas where two of the three organizations' data revealed a common theme.

### **Policy review data:**

For the policy review section of the research I asked each of the organizations to provide 3 policy documents that reflected their philosophy, their priorities or issues they consider important, and how they go about addressing these. Overall these organizations have not produced a large number of policy documents, and provided me with more information about their programs, such as pamphlets and newsletters, and less about their vision of justice or philosophy. I believe this is due to a combination of the fact that both the MLPD and the IMFCW have been in a process of adjustment over the last year, and that both the WCWRC and the IMFCW primarily focus on providing programs to support their communities over advocacy or policy making.



The documents I received were a combination of each organization's website, newsletters and annual reports, constitutions, and program pamphlets. Specifically, the West Central Woman's Resource Center (WCWRC) asked me to review their website, and also provided me with a newsletter from fall 2008, and a *Letter to the Ombudsman Office Regarding Administrative Policies and Regulations and Procedures of the Manitoba Employment and Income Assistance Program* produced in 2008.

The Manitoba League of Persons with Disabilities (MLPD) also asked me to review their website, which includes their 2006 Annual report, which I used extensively, as well as their May 2008 Newsletter.

The Indian and Métis Friendship Center of Winnipeg (IMFCW) provided me with a copy of their constitution. Because their website is currently under construction, they provided four one page pamphlets that describe some of the programs they offer. I have included the information available on their website, their constitution and all four pamphlets (a total of 5 documents) in my policy review to compensate for the lack of detailed information available from them compared to the other two organizations.

In reviewing the websites of these organizations I looked at what information was provided, including their mission statements, information about their membership, and what other documents they have produced and made public on the site. I looked to their newsletters, the annual report and their program descriptions as examples of how these organizations go about addressing the issues they have identified as priorities.

I looked at each of the organization's mission statement or statement of philosophy to identify common elements between them as well as disparities. Please see Appendix 1 for a description of each of the organizations' mission statements or philosophy and programs.

**What kind of documents qualify as policy documents?**

The literature review found that the philosophy and politics of community organizations are key elements of forging new visions of social justice and politicizing individuals. Carroll and Ratner

(2001) argue the role of community organizations, as the implementers of social movements in the real world, is threefold:

(1) community building, in the sense of elaborating collective identities and ethical-political frameworks that are oppositional to dominant conceptions; (2) meeting needs of constituents in ways that empower them and prefigure alternative ways of life; and (3) mobilising and engaging in collective action to press for tangible changes in cultural discourses and social relations (p67).

These three functions of locally based organizations work to wean individuals from “hegemonic constructions of their interests and identities” (p67).

In the gathering of the policy documents I hoped to find some expression of how the philosophy of the organization influenced the actual work done. The WCWRC empowerment model is the only document that I received that did this. I also expected to receive documents which outline issues the organization have identified and how they are trying to address those issues, or recommendations on how they should be addressed by other agencies. The documents I received from both the MLPD and the WCWRC most closely approximated these kinds of documents. The policy documents I received from the IMFCW expressed very little about the philosophy of the organization, their methods, or their criteria for choosing certain issues to address over others. This left me to rely more on the interview participant’s contribution and to my own conjecture.

I believe the kinds of documents I received from these organizations, which focus on the services they provide more than they did their philosophy and vision of justice or positions on issues relating to their communities, (such as racism, patriarchy or the ableism), reflect the fact that both the WCWRC and the IMFCW are community based organizations that work at the grassroots level and focus their energy on providing services to their clientele. The WCWRC’s literature does reflect a synergy between the development of a philosophy and a method of taking action which could be due to a longer history of activism and theorizing in the feminist movement than either the disability or Aboriginal movements. While the MLPD has a developed philosophy and priorities directly related to that philosophy, there is less of a connection between

that philosophy and *how* they go about their work, in their policy documents. It is also possible that MLPD focuses more on advocacy rather than service provision because in the disability movement there is a need to politicize and challenge the medicalized, or charity model of disability organizations that have dominated the history of services and organizations for people with disabilities.

**Convergences:**

In this section I discuss the common themes in the documents of all three organizations.

**Inclusion and full participation:** All three of these organizations emphasise full participation in society, whether that be in terms of inclusion in social institutions, in their community or in the urban environment. However, none of these organizations define social justice or use the term justice in their policy documents. Instead, MLPD refers to “equal rights, full participation in society and positive change”, the WCWRC refers to social inclusion or “breaking down social isolation”, and the IMFCW promotes integration of their membership into urban society.

**Income, housing and employment:** The three most prominent common themes in their priorities, identified in their mission statements, program information and newsletters/annual reports, included employment, housing, and the provision of community services for their respective community members. All three offer referral services to their clientele to assist them in addressing issues of housing, poverty and employment.

**Advocacy and public education:** All three also emphasised advocacy and public education as means of achieving their goal of inclusion. To this end, all three emphasise partnership building with other community members, organizations, and government.

**Membership:** Membership is an area in which they were all different because of their focus on a particular community, but similar in their openness to people outside of their target population. None of these organizations is completely exclusive in their membership, but they all do focus particularly on the interests and concerns of their affiliated community. Specifically, the MLPD is an organization “representing the concerns of people with all types of disabilities in Manitoba.”

However, their membership can include both people with disabilities and “their supporters.” The WCWRC’s website or other documents do not mention official membership but the center’s work focuses on the concerns of women in the West Central Winnipeg neighbourhood, while also addressing the needs of their families and the broader community. The IMFC’s membership includes Indian, Métis and Inuit adult residents of Winnipeg, while “Associate Members”, who do not have voting rights at the center’s AGM or eligibility for Board membership, can be any adult non-Aboriginal resident of Winnipeg.

**Problem solving:** The final commonality shared by these organizations is that they do not make a radical critique of the status quo, but instead seek to “problem solve” for the members of their community. All three of these organizations fit into the category of mainstreaming identified in the literature review. Despite their grassroots origin, their goals are to change the system to make it more hospitable to the communities they represent, but not to identify and change the underlying structures of society that cause their marginalization.

**Divergences:**

In this section I outline the areas that make these organizations distinct by highlighting the themes only one of the three organizations mentions in their policies.

**Consciousness Raising:** Consciousness raising is a method of activism and community building that has long roots in the feminist movement. The WCWRC is the only organization to emphasise raising the awareness of their participants to help them recognise that they do not struggle alone and to empower them to make positive change themselves.

**Gender and Violence:** The WCWRC is also the only organization out of the three to address violence and gender issues in their policy documents and programming.

**Accessibility:** Access is a major overall theme for the disability movement, and the crux of the social model itself, which demands the removal of barriers to the participation of people with disabilities in society’s major institutions. The MLPD listed three specific areas of interest and advocacy in their website which were not mentioned by the other two organizations including

access and physical barriers in public buildings and services, accessible public transportation, and the quality of Manitoba's Homecare system.

**Culture:** The IMFCW Constitution is the only policy document to emphasise the need to strengthen and develop Aboriginal culture as well as share this culture with the broader community in order to gain respect and empower the community's members. Little evidence of an emphasis on the need to change cultural perceptions of women or of people with disabilities is found in either the policy documents of the WCWRC or of MLPD.

**Other information I gleaned from these documents:**

In this section I identify the themes that were shared by two of the three organizations. Overall, the majority of the themes I identified in these documents were held by only two of the organizations. These include education and literacy; empowerment for individual and community activism; supporting the broader community; service provision; and advocacy.

**Education and literacy:** The provision of education, including improving literacy and access to education for their members is a common theme between MLPD and IMFCW but is not mentioned in the WCWRC policy documents.

**Empowerment for individual and community activism:** Both the MLPD and WCWRC emphasise empowering their participants by providing support in self and/or class advocacy for change in their community, family, or personal lives, which is not mentioned by the IMFCW documents.

**Supporting the broader community:** Both IMFCW and the WCWRC offer support to members of the broader community (non-identity group members) in putting on events and finding supports where none are provided while MLPD did not mention supporting non-disabled persons in the community in any way.

**Service provision:** Both the IMFCW and the WCWRC provide programs, such as sewing circles or sharing circles, aimed at breaking down social isolation. The MLPD does not offer

services to their community in this sense, but instead focus on advocacy and public education campaigns.

**Advocacy vs. programs:** According to their policy documents both the WCWRC and the MLPD engage in advocacy aimed at the government and media, including writing letters to politicians or letters to the editor. MLPD does not provide programs, but instead engages mostly in advocacy, joining networks, writing reports and updates for the disability community on pertinent issues to them while none of the policy documents from the IMFCW mentioned advocacy activities of any kind.

### **Interview Data:**

For the interview portion of the data I held three one hour long, semi structured interviews with one staff member from each of the participating organizations. All three of the interview participants were senior staff members with a role in policy and program decision making at their organization. I based all of the interviews around 19 questions (see Appendix 2) I prepared in advance and gave to the participants prior to their interview. In addition to the prepared questions I probed participants to expand on their answers where necessary and omitted questions that they had already answered. The purpose of the interviews was to find out more about the philosophy and programming of each of the organizations, and to uncover what each of the participants knew about the other two movements or communities I am investigating, including their philosophy and what impact those movements or their members may have on the work of the organization of the interviewee. I also sought information about what previous experience these organizations had with cooperating with other movements or building coalitions, and what barriers they saw to cooperation between these three movements. Overall the interviews revealed more shared interests and common tactics than differences.

**Convergences:**

In this section I discuss the areas of common interest and activity that became apparent from the interviews. Often the participants did not use the same language to name barriers to social justice or methods of addressing those barriers. For example, what one participant may call “racism” another might call “labelling.” This made direct correlations between the work they do somewhat difficult. However, there were seven areas of interest or action on which all of the participants in the interviews spoke including poverty, improving services, social inclusion, stereotypes and racism, the capacity for movements to learn from each other’s tactics, working in community coalitions, and a weak influence of theory.

**Poverty:** All of the interviewees discussed the role of poverty and its destructive influence on the lives of the people in their respective communities. Poverty was identified as a key source of all the other barriers to social justice for people with disabilities, Aboriginal people and women in Winnipeg, which led to activism around housing and social assistance by both MLPD and the WCWRC. The participant from IMFCW stated that poverty and a low literacy levels are major contributors to family instability, unemployment, addiction, and high incarceration rates among Aboriginal people in Winnipeg. Although the participant identified poverty as a major underlying cause of the marginalization of Aboriginal people they did not discuss any form of activism directly related to addressing poverty directly at their center.

**Better services:** All of the participants from the three organizations discussed the need for better services and supports either from the government or from other agencies, for their community members to address issues such as housing and poverty.

**Social inclusion:** All three participants identified the need for social inclusion for their community members, including providing opportunities for members to gather together and tell their stories or participating in the broader community through personal activism.

**Stereotypes and Racism:** The participant from the WCWRC was the only participant to identify “racism” as a major barrier to social justice for the people in their community. However, both the

MLPD and the IMFCW participant discussed the negative impact of stereotypes on their community. The IMFCW participant expressed a desire to resist labelling or segregating all groups according to demographics or other traits, and the MLPD participant saw the negative impact of labels and stereotypes based on appearance as an issue the feminist and disability movements share.

**Learning from each other:** All three of the participants said they felt they could learn about advocacy tactics or how to better serve their own communities from the success and failures of the other movements. They were all also interested in learning more about the other movements in order to better serve their own communities.

**Community coalitions:** Working in coalitions in the broader community, across identity groups, around specific issues was another common theme amongst all three participants. For example, the WCWRC and MLPD and other disability and community groups are currently working together to advocate for better affordable housing and fairer policies for members on social assistance. Likewise the IMFCW is part of a coalition of community organizations who provide services for youth and work together to improve and share resources.

**Theory:** According to the data gathered in the interviews, the influence of the academic literature and theory associated with these movements was fairly limited in all three organizations. For example, the participant from the IMFCW was reluctant to identify any underlying reason why the people in the Aboriginal community in Winnipeg may need their services or face higher rates of poverty and unemployment. This is in contrast to the literature in which the process of colonization and the ongoing impact of systemic racism is identified as a major underlying cause of the widespread poverty, criminalization, low literacy levels and unemployment Aboriginal people face.

Most of the participants discussed a reluctance to be associated with feminism. Both the MLPD and the IMFCW interviewees stated that feminism did not influence the work they did at their organizations, while the participant from the WCWRC stated that though the interviewee



believed it to be a feminist organization, the original founders of the center would not have identified themselves as such:

People around the table, while their politics were feminist, they didn't like the word feminism. They were scared of the word and, as you know the word has a bad reputation with so many people. There was hesitancy to call this a feminist organization. So you won't see us advertised as some big feminist organization even though we totally and completely are (WCWRC interview).

However, the interviewee did note a number of ways in which the work of the center is based in feminist principles along with Aboriginal traditions, including a holistic approach that sees women as connected to their families and communities, resulting in tactics that target all of these. Based on the content of the interview, though the interviewee may identify as a feminist, and see the work done by the center in that light, others at the center may not.

Finally, in regards to the influence of theory, all of the interviewees were unfamiliar with the social model of disability. Although MLPD appears to work under a social model perspective, the person I interviewed initially said they were not sure what the social model was. After I explained what I meant they agreed MLPD members were more likely to support this perspective than the medical perspective. Nevertheless the participant was not familiar with the theory itself. The interviewees from both of the other two organizations stated they were completely unfamiliar with the concept, though all of the participants agreed they would like to know more about the social model of disability.

### **Divergences:**

In this section I identify themes or areas of focus that arose in only one of the interviews out of the three. I also identify areas where the three participants appear to disagree. I identified three areas on which the interviewees differed including housing, violence and gender inequality, and "politics".

**Housing:** The participant from the WCWRC was the only participant to discuss housing as a major barrier to inclusion for the women who use their center.

**Violence and Gender inequality:** The participant from the WCWRC was also the only participant to discuss violence and gender inequality in the lives of the WCWRC's community members. The participant from the IMFCW did discuss the center's effort to build the self esteem and confidence of women in their community by holding special programs for women, but resisted associating this work with feminism. The participant from MLPD stated that they had never worked with feminist organizations and were not influenced by feminist philosophy or theory, despite the fact that they probably do have feminist members.

**"Politics:"** The participant from MLPD was the only one to openly embrace the political aspects of their organization's work. The participant discussed their work to influence mainstream elections and political parties. Though the participant from WCWRC acknowledged that they do advocacy work along with service provision, and would like to do more advocacy work, the participant said they were inhibited by the conditions set out by their government funders which prohibits "political work". From the participant's perspective, "politics" was the difference between working for systemic change as opposed to the important but less political work of empowering individuals. The participant from the IMFCW on the other hand, stated that they do not associate themselves with politics as much as possible. The participant indicated that they understand politics to mean lobbying the government for change and building larger coalitions, which the responsibility of their provincial and national branches.

**Other data:**

In this section I highlight areas on which two of the three participants spoke. Some of these areas may also overlap with the work of the third organisation but were not brought up during the interview itself. There were five themes identified by at least two of the participants including Aboriginal culture, family, health, gangs, and activism. In all of the areas identified in this section MLPD was the organization which differed from the WCWRC and the IMFCW. This could be a result of a greater similarity in the mission and tactics between the WCWRC and the IMFCW, as program oriented organizations which focus on their immediate geographic communities.

Because MLPD focuses on “community” in a more abstract sense, based on a disability identity throughout Winnipeg and Manitoba their focus and methods differ significantly from the other two organizations. This divergence also suggests that cooperation between these three organizations could be facilitated by a stronger focus on the immediate community in which the MLPD is located.

**Aboriginal Culture:** Both the IMFCW and the WCWRC emphasised the role and need for strengthening Aboriginal culture and using traditional practices in their work. The MLPD reported that though they had made efforts to build relationships with Aboriginal organizations, and do have Aboriginal members, they do not incorporate Aboriginal culture or philosophy in their work.

**Family:** Both the IMFCW and the WCWRC emphasised the need to support families and address health issues of their community members.

**Health:** Both the WCWRC and the IMFCW participant discussed health, and their centers’ work in supporting their community members to live healthier lives as a major component of their work. The participant from the IMFCW also mentioned that health and the impact of diabetes in the Aboriginal community was an issue that crossed over between the disability movement and the Aboriginal community in Winnipeg. However neither family nor health issues were raised in the interview with the MLPD participant.

**Gangs:** The MLPD participant did not discuss gang violence, but both the IMFCW and the WCWRC participants mentioned the role of gangs in their communities and the need to provide services that offer youth alternatives to this lifestyle through after school programs.

**Activism:** Although all three of the organizations engage in activism their methods of addressing the issues of their communities differ. Both the WCWRC and the IMFCW interviewees discussed the relationship between the programs they provide and the expressed need of their clients. They attempt to identify issues and barriers experienced by their community members and provide services specifically to address them. Although both the WCWRC and MLPD participant discussed the advocacy they engage in, the MLPD participant did not discuss

programs they provide to address social needs. Instead they focus on advocacy and public education to get the needs of their community met.

### **Focus Group Data**

The focus group was the culmination of the data collection, application of the theoretical framework and PAR methodology in this research project. The goal of this research project is to open up the discursive space between these three movements to identify commonalities, possibilities for and barriers to cooperation between them. The focus group was the intended intervention that is one of the hallmarks of PAR. The purpose of the focus group was to bring together participants from organizations associated with the Aboriginal , feminist and disability movements to have a conversation about their visions of justice, their priorities and their methods of organizing and pursuing social change. This conversation was intended to spark a dialogue between these groups that would help bridge identity based communities to help reveal what these groups have in common, what issues they could work together on, and what barriers might exist to cooperation between them. A key function of this dialogue was to create an opportunity for each of the participants, and hopefully their organization, to learn about the interests and activities of the other two groups. At the very least the conversation would raise the profile of the issues and priorities of each of these groups in the minds of the other participants. This in turn might lead to greater emphasis on and understanding of the needs of the possible members of each of these communities that cross over between them.

To this end I held a three hour focus group in an accessible central location in downtown Winnipeg and invited one participant from each of the three organizations. Although a participant from both the MLPD and the WCWRC were able to attend, at the last moment an emergency arose that meant the participant from the IMFCW was unable to participate. As a result the conversation that arose out of the focus group, though fruitful and rich, was not as dynamic as intended. The perspective of Aboriginal people's organizations was under-represented in the conversation we had, despite the fact that the participant from the WCWRC revealed that their

work at the center involved mostly Aboriginal women and culture and focused on addressing the barriers they face to social inclusion. As a result the issues and perspectives of Aboriginal women was theme that recurred in the discussion.

**Convergences:**

In this section I describe the areas the participants agreed they had in common both personally and through their work.

**Feminism:** Both of the participants in the focus group were women who consider themselves part of the feminist movement. Both of the participants in the focus group also discussed some reluctance to identify as feminists themselves. They both agreed that, when they defined feminism in their own terms they considered themselves feminists, but were uncomfortable with the mainstream perception of feminism, which was characterised by one participant as “aggressive.”

The participant from MLPD discussed how they have recently taken a greater interest in the issues women with disabilities face. Some of the issues the participant discussed that are particularly important to women with disabilities and have not been adequately addressed in the mainstream disability movement include: employment and income levels, abuse, reproduction and sexual education, and access to healthcare.

The participant from the WCWRC also discussed the work they do at the center where the participant estimated between 80 and 90 percent of the women are Aboriginal. Some of the issues the participant discussed that were unique to Aboriginal women included widespread dependence on prescription medication, violence and a lack of control over their lives, motherhood and the loss of power in their communities despite the strong traditional influence held by grandmothers in the Aboriginal community.

**Class:** Both of the participants identified themselves as coming from a middle or upper middle class background, and attended the same private catholic all-girls school. They agreed that they both found the experience of attending an all-girls high school to be empowering. The participant

from MLPD stated that the goal in enrolling in the school was to help the participant escape the bullying the participant experienced from boys in grade school because of disability. After moving to an all-girls school environment the level of bullying the participant experienced decreased significantly.

**Activism:** Both of the participants in the focus group stated that they had not become associated with either the disability or feminist movement until later in life, though both consider themselves part of more than one social movement today. The participant from MLPD considers herself a part of both the disability and feminist movements while the participant from the WCWRC considers herself to be part of both the feminist and Aboriginal movements through her work.

**The social model:** Neither of the participants in the focus group was very familiar with the social model of disability, though the participant from MLPD agreed that, once it was explained, it was compatible with the philosophy of MLPD. The participant from the WCWRC was not familiar with the social model of disability at all, and admitted that in general the participant lacked information about the disability movement or how to meet the needs of people with disabilities.

**Discrimination:** When asked what common issues they felt all three groups experienced the participant from the WCWRC said they believed that widespread discrimination was a basic barrier to inclusion all three communities face.

I think one of the things we all have in common is discrimination... Just fairness for the three different groups. Fairness in their lives, fairness in the big picture whether it's social justice, whether it's laws, whether it's support, whether it's financial support from governments, I think we all have challenges around that.

**Access to health care:** The focus groups participant from MLPD identified access to healthcare as a barrier to social justice which all three of the groups share.

A challenge for all three groupings would be healthcare, access to healthcare. I think that's a huge, huge issue for Aboriginal people, women and people with disabilities. Documented or not it's obvious that people with disabilities and Aboriginal s do not get the same quality care.

The participant also explained that the feminist disability organization they are a part of has been working with a women's health clinic in Winnipeg researching areas where the health needs of women with disabilities are not being met within the current system.

**Mental health:** The participants also agreed that poverty and mental health issues for all three communities go hand in hand. The participants discussed issues of hygiene and safety which create substandard living conditions in public housing. A lack of support in dealing with the problems arising out of poverty can lead to or compound mental health issues among members of these three communities.

**Poverty:** Both of the participants agreed that for Aboriginal people, people with disabilities, and women poverty is a fundamental barrier to social justice that needs to be addressed before any of the other issues these three communities face can be dealt with.

**Learning from each other:** At the end of the discussion both of the participants agreed they had learned a lot from each other regarding the needs and perspectives of their respective communities. Both of the participants stated they appreciated the opportunity to share information and learn from one another.

**Divergences:**

In this section I discuss the barriers or disagreements that became apparent in the focus group. Overall, there were far fewer barriers than facilitators in the discussion. However, because of the absence of the IMFCW participant some of the barriers or conflicts that were discussed were left unresolved. Further opportunities for contact and conversation between these groups would benefit all three communities' level of mutual understanding.

**Frustration:** The participant from MLPD discussed past efforts MLPD and the feminist disability organization the participant belongs to have made to connect with the Aboriginal community through both individuals and organizations from which the participant reported they have received little response. The participant expressed frustration around failed attempts to connect

with Aboriginal organizations in the past and explained that MLPD has stopped trying to make connections with Aboriginal organizations because of their apparent lack of interest.

**Aboriginal culture:** The participant from the WCWRC identified herself as a part of the Aboriginal movement, despite the fact that the participant is not Aboriginal, because of the high percentage of Aboriginal women who come into their center and the emphasis they place there on incorporating Aboriginal cultural elements and philosophy into their work. On the other hand the participant from the MLPD was less familiar with Aboriginal culture and the issues faced by Aboriginal peoples. The participant indicated that members of MLPD and other organizations they are a part of are interested in developing their relationships with and knowledge of Aboriginal organizations and culture.

**Cultural perceptions of time:** We discussed the difficulties organizations with a mainly white membership can have working with Aboriginal organizations because of a different emphasis placed on time between white and Aboriginal cultures. The participant from MLPD identified this difference as a major barrier to working together. The participant from the WCWRC agreed that there probably is a difference in perception of time and the emphasis we place on being punctual or showing up for meetings, but added that there are often reasons beyond people's control that need to be taken into account. We all agreed it would have been extremely helpful to have the participant from the IMFCW present to shed some light on our thinking on this subject.

**Lack of information or contact:** The participant from the WCWRC stated that her organization had not done more work with disability organizations because they were not aware of a need among the women who use their center. The participant believed they may not have identified this need because of a lack of information of what resources were available or about the disability movement generally. The participant suggested their organization would benefit from a workshop or presentation from a disability organization like MLPD on these issues.



Based on the themes arising out of the data collected in the focus group and interviews five new facilitators were identified and added to the initial analytical framework developed in the literature review, including: Working in community coalitions, Family, Justice and discrimination, Health and mental health, and Violence and safety. These facilitators include issues or areas of interest that were identified as important elements of the marginalization their communities face, by at least two of the participants in the interviews or focus group. In addition, two new barriers were identified out of the data gathered including Culture and Lack of education, information and contact.

**Figure 2: Analytical Framework Step 2**

<b>Source</b>	<b>Facilitators</b>	<b>Barriers</b>
Literature review	1. Cultural empowerment	1. Application of theory
	2. Politicized identity Organizations (of and for)	2. Critique of existing system
	3. Poverty and housing	3. Racism
	4. Self determination	4. Community supports
	5. Inclusion in major institutions	5. Gender & Sexuality
	6. Literacy & education	6. Lack of resources
	7. Geographic & social isolation	
Policy review, Interviews & Focus group	8. Working in Community coalitions	7. Culture
	9. Family	8. Lack of education information & contact
	10. Justice & Discrimination	
	11. Health & Mental Health	
	12. Violence & safety	

## **Chapter 4: Analysis and Findings**

The facilitators and barriers to social justice arising from the theoretical framework and literature review (listed in figure 3) were used to compare the work of the three organizations by coding the data collected from the policy documents, interviews and focus group to determine whether the areas of conflict identified in the literature were reflected in the policies and experiences of the participants. There are 20 identified facilitators and barriers necessary for the existence of social justice according to the theoretical framework developed here, including 12 facilitators and 8 barriers. The three data sources were coded using the list of facilitators and barriers arising from the literature and data collected to determine if each was a strong or weak facilitator or barrier to cooperation based on the number of sources the themes arose in for each of the participating organizations.

Figure 3: Analytical Framework Findings and Analysis

Source	Facilitators	Analysis & Findings	Barriers	Analysis & Findings
Literature review	1. Cultural empowerment	Strong	1. Application of theory	Significant
	2. Politicized identity Organizations (of and for)	Strong	2. Critique of existing system	Significant
	3. Poverty and housing	Strong	3. Racism	Significant
	4. Self determination	Weak	4. Community supports	Significant
	5. Inclusion in major institutions	Weak	5. Gender & Sexuality	Weak
	6. Literacy & education	Weak		
	7. Geographic & social isolation	Strong		
Policy review, Interviews & Focus group	8. Working in Community coalitions	Strong	6. Culture	Weak
	9. Family	Weak	7. Lack of education information & contact	Significant
	10. Justice & Discrimination	Strong	8. Lack of resources	Weak
	11. Health & Mental Health	Strong		
	12. Violence & safety	Strong		

**Facilitators:**

In this section I discuss the areas of overlap between the three groups identified in the literature review and arising from the data collected. These areas of overlap are understood to facilitate cooperation between them because of the need for common interests and tactics on which to build in order for cooperation to be successful. A facilitator was determined to be strong if the

three organizations' data all raised the issue, and if the theme arose in more than one data source from each. If it was omitted from one of the organization's data entirely, or arose in only one source it was determined to be a weak facilitator.

**Cultural empowerment: rewriting history, new cultural production and cultural revival, public education**

The literature shows that all three of these movements are rooted in a desire to change the way broader society perceives them. This can occur either by asserting individuality and diversity within the group, by redefining and developing the culture of the group, or by asserting a more positive connotation and interpretation of what it means to be a woman, a person with a disability or an Aboriginal person among both insiders and outsiders of each of these groups. Reclaiming the way that broader society perceives each of these groups can translate into activism in the form of public education, developing research and epistemology in the academic arena to give voice to the marginalized in research, and promoting cultural activities in the arts, crafts, languages and traditions. Evidence of this kind of work is what I looked for in the first stage of this analysis.

The Manitoba League of Persons with Disabilities (MLPD) addresses the need for cultural empowerment through public education campaigns. MLPD's Annual Report states they participated in "networking activities and information sharing with an information display" at two universities and a school division in the community, as well as at the West Broadway Neighbourhood Centre Symposium on healthy communities, and a workshop on self advocacy at the Independent Living Resource Centre's Self Advocacy Support Group (Polson, 2006.)

In the document "Two Hundred and Forty Four Voices" MLPD has also engaged in research using qualitative methods that gave voice to people with disabilities regarding their experience of barriers to employment and income and emphasises the need to change broader perceptions of people with disabilities in order to overcome barriers to employment (Annable, 2000. ii, p10). In the MLPD interview the participant emphasised the role "stereotypes and myths" play in perpetuating the social isolation of people with disabilities and described some of

the most harmful stereotypes around disability: “that we don’t want to work, that we really want a hand out. There’s quite a few in the mental health, people feel the dangerousness myth.” The participant stated that one of the main goals of MLPD is to change these misperceptions through education and advocacy.

I think as we get our message out—tell more of our stories, positive stories, success stories—that will help break down some of the myths and stereotypes and generate more of an acceptance I think, as people have more contact with us (MLPD Interview).

The Indian and Métis Friendship Center of Winnipeg’s (IMFCW) constitution also emphasises the role of culture, though in a different sense from MLPD. It states that one of the organization’s major goals is “to promote an understanding of Aboriginal culture by encouraging participation in Centre functions within the non-Aboriginal population” (IMFCW Constitution, 2). The IMFCW’s constitution recognizes the need to strengthen and develop Aboriginal culture as well as share this culture with the broader community in order to gain respect and empower the community’s members. In the interview the IMCW participant identified the stripping away of Aboriginal culture in his community as a major barrier to social justice:

A lack of culture, a lack of cultural identity or a stripping of that identity over the years is what led to a lot of the issues. If you look at residential school systems and the issues that arose from them like the stolen baby generation, it’s all added up to a lot of the issues that we have (IMFCW Interview).

As a result, the participant said, the programming at the IMFCW has a strong cultural component. For example, one of the programs held by the IMFCW is a Sharing Circle, based in Aboriginal cultural traditions:

Designed to help youth, families and community members come together to share their thoughts and feelings in a safe and non threatening environment. It is a place to learn, teach and grow. It is an excellent way to connect with other for friendship and understanding (IMFCW Sharing Circle Pamphlet).

He also stated that in an effort to become more proactive, and help avoid the development of some of the common issues of gang membership or addiction among the youth in his community, they are developing

Programs before the issue is even there. (Including) a lot more arts programs, we're also working on music programs... So instead of 12 years olds who, for whatever reason, are in trouble with gangs and the law, school, alcohol, addictions, we're giving them tools before it gets to that point. Now they may not even fall into that trap, so it's culture but really it's addressing the social ills that are out there (IMCFW interview)

None of the data collected from the WCWRC emphasised the need to change cultural perceptions of women. During both the interview and the focus group the participants from the WCWRC alluded to the common negative perception of feminism, which has led them to somewhat distance themselves from it. For example one of the participants from the WCWRC said "But you know growing up I always felt there was a negative connotation with the word feminist but as I matured I learned how important feminism is to the world and how it affects my life"(Focus group participant). This commonly held negative perception of feminism however, does not appear to be an issue the center is actively working to change.

However the WCWRC does incorporate traditional Aboriginal cultural elements into their programming because of the number of Aboriginal women who use their center. In the interview and focus group the participants from WCWRC discussed the important role that traditional Aboriginal cultural practices play in their programming. The interview participant said:

For example we smudge during some of our programming; we start the respect circles with a smudge and the youth circles with a smudge. I think we recognize not only the racism that people face but the healing that people are calling for and the need to have traditional knowledge fostered. So we try to do that in different ways (WCWRC interview).

During the focus group the participant described the parenting program they run at the center:

"We run it very traditionally. It's Aboriginally based. We smudge before the group starts and we drum at the end. It's a traditional sharing circle" (Focus group participant). The participant also

emphasised the positive personal impacts the traditional cultural aspects of their work have had:

In regards to my experience (with the Aboriginal community) it has been absolutely wonderful. I've embraced it and love it to the point I can't imagine absolutely doing anything different...I know that there's just a really really healthy respect in our center for the two communities to be healthy together (Focus group participant).

The emphasis in the WCWRC is on strengthening Aboriginal culture and integrating it into their work in order to facilitate healing and community development among the Aboriginal women who use their center. The widespread negative perception of feminism is an issue both of the WCWRC participants are aware of and even personally impacted by, but which the center is not working toward changing in a direct way. It appears that the center does not promote “feminism” but rather works on feminist principles and takes the less political path of providing support for and empowering women in their community, without labelling it “feminist”.

The theoretical framework for social justice that forms the foundation of this thesis is based partially on the critical feminist perspective of Nancy Fraser who (2000, p113) suggests a model of social justice aimed “at overcoming subordination by establishing the misrecognized party as a full member of society, capable of participating on a par with the rest.” The findings of this research show that cultural empowerment is overall, one of the strongest areas of convergence between these three groups. Although the IMFCW and the WCWRC focus on Aboriginal culture as a facilitator of social change and MLPD focuses on changing broader cultural perceptions of people with disabilities, both tactics are elements of Fraser’s program for social justice which calls for creating more positive cultural representations of oppressed groups (Fraser, 2000; Butler, 1999). Although it is clear all three organizations see culture as an important element of social change, neither the WCWRC nor MLPD’s work reflects the tendency identified in the literature (Galvin, 2003) to base their work on the development of distinct culture in their communities based on identity. The IMFCW also emphasises the goal of the Aboriginal movement identified in the literature of strengthening and renewing Aboriginal cultural traditions (Silver *et al.*, 2006a; Frideres & Gadacz, 2001; Newhouse, D. & Peters, 2003). For the IMFCW their interest lies in both creating a better understanding of Aboriginal culture in the wider population, and restoring Aboriginal traditions within their community.

The WCWRC’s interest lies in nurturing Aboriginal culture in their center to promote healing in their community. However, in regard to feminism, the WCWRC participants discussed

an awareness of a general negative perception of feminism in our culture, but their activities are not focused on changing this. It seems that the work of the WCWRC is directed more by the demographics of the community than by the overarching goals of the feminist movement. Both the IMFCW and the WCWRC tend to be more internally focused, developing culture within their communities, than MLPD which focuses externally, influencing broader cultural perceptions of people with disabilities.

**Self determination:**

According to the literature, all three movements emphasise the need and right to self determination of either their community as a whole or their individual members. For the Aboriginal movement this has meant self-government and de-colonization. For the feminist movement this has meant establishing rights to control one's body, to vote, to own property, to work in any field of industry we choose and be free to leave a relationship when we choose. For all three movements, and particularly the disability movement, self determination has also meant the power to determine one's own needs and design services and supports to address those needs within their communities. Self determination is a key element of the theoretical framework of this project, understood in the context of a society that supports all individuals to realise their potential and be self determining to whatever degree they are able.

MLPD and WCWRC emphasise a more individualist approach to self determination that is reflective of western liberal values than the IMFCW which focuses on the collective, and the intersubjective value of friendship in the community. Despite the fact that all three of these movements, and the literature associated with them, emphasise the importance of interdependence, caring for each other and a relational understanding of identity formation, the practices of these three organizations reveal a major difference in how these communities articulate and understand social justice (Stienstra and Ashcroft, forthcoming). For both the feminist and disability organization the emphasis is placed on the individual while for the



Aboriginal organization the emphasis is placed on the collective and the relationship of friendship.

MLPD emphasises the self determination of people with disabilities in their philosophy which puts self determination in terms of rights: "Manitobans with disabilities have the same rights and responsibilities as any other person. All persons, regardless of abilities, must have access to opportunities in order to exercise these rights" (MLPD Website). The MLPD interview participant reinforced this emphasis on self determination and drew a connection between the tactics of their movement as a whole and the ability to define issues on their own terms. The participant stated that one of the things they, as a movement of people with disabilities, had learned from the women's movement was "how to better organize our movement; we've learned from their successes slash failures. Everything from framing an issue to defining our own terms. Rather than letting someone else define the issue for us" (MLPD Interview).

The emphasis on the rights of people with disabilities to self determination translates into advocacy activities around euthanasia, which is seen as the ultimate denial of the right to self determination. According to MLPD's Annual Report they have engaged in a campaign to erect a monument to Tracy Latimer "honouring her life and other persons with disabilities murdered by caregivers" for the last ten years (Simpson, 2006).

The IMFCW's policy documents and interview did not mention the topic of self determination, and instead focus on the value of friendship. The IMFCW Constitution states:

The mission statement of the Indian and Métis Friendship Centre of Winnipeg will be to serve in friendship, the Aboriginal (First Nations, Inuit, and Métis) population of Winnipeg. The role and functions of the Centre will recognize the underlying beliefs that are inherent in the term "friendship". These beliefs will form the basis of all work carried out within the Centre. Its programs and services will accommodate the needs of the community when its members need a friend, including: When it is the first time for an individual locating to the city; When help is needed to support or organize an event or similar undertaking; When assistance is needed with matters where no existing form of support is present (IMFCW Constitution, p1).

The emphasis on the term "friendship" reflects the greater significance placed on collective and relational values over asserting the rights of the individuals which was identified in the literature

on Aboriginal cultural values (Martin, 2003; Frideres and Gadacz, 2001). The IMFCW interview participant elaborated on the philosophy of the center when the participant said they offer support “to anybody that needs help. We are here to help the betterment of the community, the way we see it everybody’s a single part or a single micro organism in a macro organism. So any time you can help another...”(IMFCW interview). Overall, the emphasis at the IMFCW, as expressed by their mission statement, is to facilitate integration into urban society for Aboriginal people newly arrived in Winnipeg, rather than the individual rights model articulated by the MLPD.

The ability to help oneself and community is a central characteristic of self determination. The WCWRC’s goal, as stated in their mission statement, is to “Assist in empowering women to help themselves, their families and their communities to safer, healthier lifestyles” (WCWRC Website). The WCWRC focus group participant described the need to foster self determination among the Aboriginal women in their community:

The women I see in the sharing circles have had such a life of trauma and huge barriers and oppression that they’ve lost that sense of being in control, of being strong, being self sufficient, having a voice and being able to fulfill their needs. So we’re trying to give them those tools (Focus group, p44).

In empowering women to help themselves, the center emphasises capacity building through a “framework based on four stages of empowerment ranging from building connections with others to taking action to better one’s life or the situation of one’s family or community” (WCWRC Website). The focus group participant emphasised the role that participating in the sharing circle and other programs at the WCWRC plays in empowering women to become self-determining.

Many of the women that I work with have come from such trauma and such crisis, that the amount of shame that they carry I think completely encompasses totally who they are. Completely immobilizes them...They have a disability on many, many levels, emotional disability, of moving forward and making change and embracing change is a real challenge. So I honour and absolutely support them. Those women come into that circle every week they are absolutely making forward movement beyond belief. Because for every twelve women that are sitting in my circle there’s a hundred and twenty four that are will never get to that circle (Focus group, p44).

The emphasis on capacity building at the WCWRC reflects the feminist movement's overall goal to see women be self determining, in control of their fates and less subject to the power of violence, poverty and isolation.

Stienstra and Ashcroft argue that our understanding of disability, and human life in general can be enriched by the ontologies of non-Western cultures, including Aboriginal and Native American, along with feminist ethics of care, which understand individuals to exist in relation to community and non-human life. The relational nature of Indigenous epistemology is summarized below:

Within Aboriginal or Native American cultures, life is viewed as a series of concentric circles like ripples on a lake. Circles of Life Energy are believed to exist within people, surround them, and make up relationships. Harmony and balance in all relationships, between all the circles is necessary for survival of all life (Stienstra and Ashcroft (forthcoming)).

An individualist approach, which focuses on the self determination of individuals as articulated by MLPD, translates into practices that are less critical of systemic causes of marginalization and instead focus on adjusting the system to address the symptoms. This view also fails to value the lessons offered by experiences of disability described by Stienstra and Ashcroft, such as the ability to experience human flourishing under adversity because of human interconnectedness. A relational approach leads us to focus on relations and systems that cause marginalization, and have the potential to make a radical critique of the status quo. All three of these movements offer this kind of radical critique in their literature, but none of these three organizations here articulates this perspective. Overall, IMFCW uses a relational perspective the most while WCWRC is located in the middle of the spectrum with a focus on women as both individuals and members of communities and families. MLPD, on the other hand, uses a more individualistic or rights based understanding of social justice and self determination.

Overall, self determination is one of the weaker facilitators between these three groups because of a lack of emphasis in the IMFCW policy and interview data and a greater emphasis on the individual in the MLPD philosophy. The focus in both the MLPD and the WCWRC is on

empowering individuals to be self advocates, and is more individualistic than at the IMFCW where the focus is on “friendship.” This difference in focus is probably a result of the influence of Aboriginal cultural values in the IMFCW structure, which focus on the collectivity or a relational sense of identity, while in the WCWRC and particularly in the MLPD there is a greater influence of Western individualism. These organizations and their communities could all benefit from deepening their analysis and broadening their understanding of self determination from individual rights to reshaping the pie to support the capacities of all members of society to realise their potential (Parsons, 1999). Recognizing on the relational and systemic nature of the lives of these three groups (and all humans) inevitably reveals the interconnectedness between their communities and exposes paths toward social change which incorporate all three while emphasising no particular identity as paramount.

**Politicized identity: Organizations (of and for)**

A central element of any social movement has been the politicization of an identity and the revelation that marginalization is not a result of individual failings but rather the result of systemic discrimination (Fusco, 1995; Kauffman, 1990). This has translated, in the feminist, disability and Aboriginal movements, into a strong emphasis on reclaiming and taking pride in either the disabled identity, Aboriginal culture, identity and traditions or in the category of “Woman”. The understanding that these categories have been socially constructed and may be re-constructed through cultural empowerment is a major hallmark of new social movements. For all three movements, the desire to empower individuals to take pride in their identity has gone hand in hand with the development of organizations run *by* the members of their community *for* members of their community. For the three participating organizations in this study, all three clearly have an emphasis on including and representing the needs and voices of their respective communities, though none are exclusive in their membership which makes this a strong facilitator of cooperation between them.

The MLPD's Mission statement identifies it as an organization of and for people with disabilities along with their non-disabled supporters: "The MLPD is a united voice of people with disabilities, and their supporters, that promotes equal rights, full participation in society, and facilitates positive change through advocacy and public education" (MLPD Annual Report, 2006). Membership in MLPD is not confined to people with disabilities and includes any citizen who supports their philosophy and mandate (MLPD Website).

The IMFCW is an organization of and for Aboriginal people because, as its constitution states, its primary goal is to serve and support First Nations, Inuit and Métis persons, particularly those who have recently moved to the city (IMFCW Constitution, p1). The constitution also distinguishes between *Regular members*, including any Aboriginal person over 18 years of age living in Winnipeg for at least 6 months, and *Associate members* who may be any adult over the age of 18 living in Winnipeg for at least the last 6 months. Associate members may use the services and programs of the center but may not vote in the Annual General meeting and are therefore welcome to be there but not equal in power and decision making at the center (IMFCW Constitution, p3). However the interview participant pointed out that though Aboriginal people are their primary focus.

We're not exclusive or exclusionary, anybody that needs a hand or assistance can come to the doors and they get looked after. But primarily the location that we're in, most of the people who use our services are Aboriginal (IMFCW interview).

However, the participant noted that "labelling" was a barrier Aboriginal people need to overcome and hinted that most people at their center were not empowered to claim their identity in the same way a feminist might be:

We talk about labels, there's always a danger with labels, that's what has led to some of the problems of Aboriginal people in the first place, because we're labelled. But if someone considers themselves a feminist, odds are they are stronger internally to be able to go out there and identify as a feminist (IMFCW interview).

This statement indicates that the people in the community the IMFCW attempts to support have a less developed politicized identity than how this participant perceives feminists feel about their identity.

Though the WCWRC's policy documents do not make any statement about membership, the center maintains a policy that excludes men from the space of the center until 1pm everyday. The interview participant stated that this policy is a result of requests from the women who use the center, who have stated,

'This has to be a women's centre, this is a place for women, to support women'... I think (these) women have dealt with a lot of shit and they just want a space that is at least free of that one aspect of something they may be challenged by, just even for a little while. That doesn't mean there aren't other challenges and other dynamics between people, but at least there's that one *something* they can be free of, for a little while (WCWRC interview).

However, the goal of the center states that the focus is on empowering women, their families and their communities, which clearly indicates a desire to reach out and include men, women and children in their work. To this end, men are welcome to participate in a number of programs such as the Childcare program, their Safety program and their Drop-in. This approach recognizes that the "feminist movement" is no longer only for women, and recognises that women are a vital part of strong communities that incorporate multiple identities and roles.

Overall, the MLPD differs from the WCWRC and IMFCW in the degree of politicization of their work. MLPD is not a service provision organization but an advocacy organization, while the WCWRC and the IMFCW both focus on providing services to their surrounding communities. The interview participant from the WCWRC stated that though they do engage in advocacy around such issues as social assistance and low quality housing, they are hampered in their ability to be truly political or critical in their stance by the requirements of government funding:

Some funders are focused on the individual and individual change. They want to work with individuals, and make differences in peoples' lives, but don't support work at the systemic level. One example is the Status of Women Canada adjusting its criteria in 2007 to focus on individual women and no longer have their project criteria include 'political change' that would benefit women. While there is a great need for individual support, and while we're so honoured to be able to provide that individual support, there also needs to be systemic changes. As long as the system is the way it is individual support will always be needed, so changing the systems and structures we live with is equally as important. We need more space and support to address systemic changes (WCWRC interview).

The IMFCW interview participant shied away from associating their work with politics and stated that their center does not engage in advocacy or broad coalition building. The participant said,

Sometimes you end up talking politics and we like to keep politics out of it as much as we can. I don't know if we've partnered or anything like joining forces in a sense. We're focused on a ground level movement, you know the grass roots; working with the people. If you want to talk about a grander scale movement then we'd be talking about MAC Manitoba Association of Friendship Centers who lobby for all the friendship centers in the province. And then they're accountable to National Association of Friendship centers who lobby the government for the friendship center movement (IMFCW interview).

Politicized identity is an area of strong convergence between the three organizations. For both the WCWRC and the IMFCW social change primarily involves identifying needs and providing services that attempt to address those needs in their communities. For MLPD social change involves advocating that the state provide better services and supports for the disability community along with attempting to change broader social attitudes toward people with disabilities. All three of these organizations are working toward social change, which I would define as political work, despite the fact that the language used by their staff or in their policy may disassociate them from being "political."

Social groups are salient in the lives of all human beings, but for some who belong to "misrecognized groups," politicizing their identity or culture becomes a source of empowerment and resistance to marginalization once the cultural values that privilege certain groups over theirs are identified (Fraser, 2003). Although these organizations are not equivalent in their use of political language, the focused yet open membership of these groups is compatible with my theoretical framework of social justice. This framework is rooted in the recognition of the importance of identity and differences, while working with other groups to move toward greater inclusion for all marginalized groups. Although their membership is relatively specific to the communities they are serving, they are all open to including members of the broader community in their work. This is a promising characteristic for facilitating cooperation across social movements as all three organizations recognize the need to include non identity group members in their work. The relatively open membership shows that though these organizations are related

to identity based social movements they are still open to working with other groups across identity.

**Poverty and housing:**

Poverty is a major structural cause of marginalization and oppression, which goes hand in hand with cultural forms of oppression such as discrimination and devaluation. Having the material resources to participate on par with the rest of society is a fundamental, first step toward a socially just, open and inclusive discourse. It is therefore essential that we address poverty and the physical realities of social exclusion as central elements of social justice and the process of inclusive and democratic discourse (Young, 1990, 2000; Fraser, 2000; Benhabib, 2002). As discussed in the literature review, the feminist, disability and Aboriginal movements all focus on issues of poverty, housing and unemployment among the members of their communities. Social exclusion and discrimination for all three groups manifests in the form of unemployment and low incomes often resulting in higher rates of social assistance use and low quality living conditions. In the focus group both participants agreed that poverty was a fundamental barrier to social justice that all three groups face. The WCWRC participant stated that income “is absolutely the bottom line basic need in the women’s lives of the women we are talking about and it is not being met” (Focus group participant). The MLPD participant agreed and tied the issue of poverty with low quality housing: “yup *poverty* because, I’ll tell you, social housing it is, it’s a *nightmare* it’s an unbelievable nightmare” (Focus group participant, emphasis in original). The WCWRC interviewee noted that in working on coalitions around social assistance it is clear that these groups share many characteristics:

Sometimes those are the same people. Poverty is just one issue, but low income folks could be Aboriginal, they could be women, and they could be people with disabilities. They’re dealing with the challenges poverty brings. Marginalized people face different types of discrimination, and it might stem from different things, although patriarchy plays a role in much of it, but they also share experiences. With the example of social assistance, it’s currently way too low and those who are collecting it face numerous challenges. So people marginalized for different reasons are all sharing an experience (WCWRC interview)

Barriers to employment for people with disabilities are a major focus of the work done by MLPD.



Their document *Two Hundred and Forty-Four Voices* produced by MLPD in 2000 and made available on their website, focuses on the experiences of people with disabilities with the income assistance program in Manitoba. It points out that a large number of people with disabilities are on income assistance and yet are able and willing to work. In his interview the MLPD participant identified poverty and a lack of supports or services, including adequate affordable housing and accessible public transportation as key areas where better supports are necessary for the inclusion of people with disabilities (MLPD interview). MLPD's focus on the issues of unemployment and inadequate income assistance or affordable accessible housing translate into advocacy activities in the community including being a member of the Social Planning Council's Poverty Symposium Planning committee, and a presenter at the Disability Poverty Workshop in 2006 (Polson, 2006).

Neither the IMFCW's constitution, nor program pamphlets bring up the issues of poverty, unemployment or low quality housing. However, in the interview the IMFCW participant repeatedly identified poverty as a key source of the other issues Aboriginal people transitioning to an urban environment face.

A lot of them come from the same demographic where, if they're accessing our programs, they have a lower education, or lower literacy levels. They come from a more impoverished background and, I guess weaker might be too strong of a word, but they have more family issues than the average person who is adjusting and has more opportunities (IMFCW Interview).

The participant stated that the center was initially founded 50 years ago when these issues were first identified, and today the center works to address a list of issues that stem from poverty:

You have health issues, you have gambling, you have addictions you have, I'll say a weaker family unit in some cases where maybe the parental supervision isn't as strong as maybe it would be in a more affluent community. A lot of it does stem from that education and literacy levels which statistically have also been lower in the Aboriginal community (IMFCW interview).

The interview participant at the WCWRC also identified poverty as the stem from which many of the other issues the women in their community spring: "within income issues there's so many

issues with that are particularly linked to things like housing, which is a major issue, and then also things as basic as transportation and food” (WCWRC interview). This participant also discussed the unique way that poverty can manifest in the lives of women:

Women specifically within that have their own barriers. So for example when we talk about homelessness, if you look on the street you mostly see homeless men on the street but when you actually look at the numbers, women are homeless too, they're just living on people people's couches, so they're more invisible. Women are often invisible within stats or figures – they face similar challenges to men, but can be invisible to those who are counting. So something we try and do is just highlight where women are, help make them visible (WCWRC interview).

Many community members at the WCWRC rely on provincial income assistance for their income and housing and as a result live in poverty. Problems with the administration and policies of the Manitoba Employment and Income Assistance Program (MEIAP) prompted the WCWRC to join forces with a number of other community organizations to draft a letter to the ombudsman office regarding unjust regulations. The letter argues that the policies of the MEIAP, and “combination of case loads being high and little follow up traps people living on EIA and in poverty”(Cerilli and Keirstead, 2008, p4). The letter drafted by the coalition demonstrates that the policies of the Manitoba Employment and Income Assistance Program trap people in unsuitable housing, and force people to use their food budget for rent on damage deposits or even forces them to become homeless (Cerilli and Keirstead, 2008, p5). The work of the WCWRC to address these issues focuses on assisting women and their families to find suitable and affordable housing through its *HOMES Program* which provides one on one support for housing and EIA concerns.

Overall, poverty and housing is also one of the areas of strongest convergence between the three groups, with only the IMFCW policy documents failing to address this issue.

Economics is an underlying structural cause *and* effect of the marginalization of women, people with disabilities and Aboriginal people, which all the participants agreed leads to most of the other issues these groups face. However, the IMFCW and the WCWRC do less to address poverty directly in their programming and instead focus on addressing its affects like drug addiction, bad nutrition, and violence, which is likely related to the lack of radical critique in these

organizations. All three of these organizations focus on addressing immediate issues, and fit securely in the category of mainstreaming or problem solving organizations. As discussed in the literature review, (Parsons, 1999; Wine, 1991; Briskin, 1991; Anderson *et al.*, 1988) this is an important role in any social movement, but does result in a lack of action on underlying structural causes of marginalization. More research involving a broader sampling of organizations in the feminist, disability and Aboriginal movements in Winnipeg would clarify whether or not this is an overall tendency within these three movements.

### **Inclusion in major institutions:**

Inclusion in major societal institutions means the participation and inclusion of individuals and their particular perspectives and interests in such institutions as government, mainstream politics, the media, the legal system, the education system and other important institutions that form the basis of a democratic society. Inclusion in major institutions is a fundamental aspect of social justice based on the work of Young (1990) and Fraser (2000). Iris Marion Young (1990) defines the purpose of social justice as social equality, not only in the distribution of social goods, but “the full participation and inclusion of everyone in a society's major institutions, and the socially-supported substantive opportunity for all to develop and exercise their capacities and realize their choices” (p6).

Overall, none of the participants or their organizations' policy documents emphasized the need to include their community members in large institutions such as these. However, MLPD, as an advocacy organization, appears to focus more on these large institutions than the other two. For example, MLPD is widely active in an array of committees and organizations in which they work to bring the exclusion of people with disabilities to the forefront and ensure access for people with disabilities in those organizations (Polson, 2006). The MLPD interview participant also discussed the methods of advocacy they engage in which focus on mainstream political parties at provincial and federal levels as well as attempting to give a voice to the disability community through the mainstream media: “We use the press, the media. During the election

campaign I wrote several letters to the editor, dealing with the whole poverty issue. I was part of the vote to make poverty history campaign...I did some video interviewing" (MLPD interview).

The IMFCW is also committed to working with organizations and government to improve services for the Aboriginal community. The IMFCW's constitution states, through working with government, private and community organizations, they work to achieve their goal to improve the services and facilities available to the Aboriginal community in Winnipeg (IMFCW Constitution, p2). However neither IMFCW interview data nor program pamphlets discussed inclusion in society's major institutions. This indicates that the IMFCW sees the state as a site for social change and inclusion for Aboriginal people in Winnipeg, however, the greater emphasis in their work is on the surrounding community at the grass roots level.

The WCWRC programs focus on their immediate community and supporting the social inclusion of women in the West End through limited government lobbying but more significant activism within the community with an emphasis on developing relationships with other women through the center. The WCWRC's harm reduction model based on four stages of empowerment eventually leads participants toward contributing to social change in their communities and becoming more integrated into it. None of the data collected from the WCWRC interview or focus group touched on the topics of media representation, mainstream politics, the education system, or the legal system. As a result I assume that these areas of social participation are not a priority in their pursuit of social change.

Inclusion in major institutions is the area of least convergence between the three groups, with only the MLPD focusing on this issue in both policy and in their interview, while the WCWRC did not address this issue in any of the data. Inclusion in major institutions involves larger systems and institutions such as government bureaucracies and mainstream politics, healthcare, or media, which are a focus of the MLPD's advocacy activities. MLPD appears to define "community" in a different sense than the WCWRC and the IMFCW. The latter two focus

on their geographic communities and the demographics of the persons who use their centers, while MLPD attempts to advocate for the rights of a more abstract “disability community” which is not focused on their geographic location. Because both the IMFCW and the WCWRC are more directly focused on their geographic and demographic communities they direct less energy toward these broader kinds of institutions and more on developing the community they are a part of. The participant from the IMFCW pointed out that the broader issues encompassed in “major institutions” are more likely to be addressed by their provincial and federal branches. For the WCWRC their directly local focus is also likely the result of a lack of emphasis on these broader institutions. There was no evidence that they are a part of a larger provincial or federal network, aside from being funded by Status of Women Canada.

The WCWRC has an interesting, somewhat anomalous placement, between the mainstream/liberal and grassroots/radical feminism dichotomy discussed in the literature (Adamson *et al.*, 1988; Wine and Ristock, 1991). They are focused on the grassroots community level but at the same time use mainstreaming or problem solving tactics. This could be the result of the fact that the women who initially founded the center did not aspire to being members of the feminist movement and did not identify as feminists themselves. Because of this, they did not adopt the radical critique of grassroots feminism, but instead attempted to carry out the mainstream feminist agenda at a grass roots level. At the very least the position of the WCWRC somewhere between radical and mainstream indicates that the dichotomy developed in the literature has its exceptions.

**Geographic and social isolation:**

The Aboriginal, disability and feminist movements have all raised and attempted to address the issue of social isolation among their members. Combating social isolation means bringing people together to help them realize that they do not struggle alone, and raise their consciousness of the widespread nature of the issues they face. One of the most important functions of community based organizations identified in the literature is realised by bringing

people together to talk about their experiences enabling individuals to recognize the collective nature of their struggle and therefore the importance of working together to create change (Carroll and Ratner, 2001; Parsons, 1999).

For people with disabilities isolation is often the result of geographic or physical barriers in combination with negative stereotypes and attitudes. MLPD has focused heavily on issues of accessible transportation for people with disabilities including working to establish the Handi-Transit system in Winnipeg and in other communities across Manitoba. MLPD has an ongoing committee focused on transportation issues (Polson, 2006). The issue of accessible transportation was also raised by the MLPD focus group participant who discussed both the work they have done to make the Handi-Transit system in Winnipeg a reality and the ongoing issues they have with assuring its quality, along with gaining access to the mainstream public transportation system.

MLPD also works on the issue of accessible and affordable housing for people with disabilities through its Housing Committee which advocates for universal design principles in new housing developments in Winnipeg (Ament and Saunders, 2006). In addition, MLPD works to ensure that new institutions, such as the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, are built to both include the experiences of people with disabilities in their version of history but are also fully accessible to people with disabilities in their physical construction (Simpson, 2006).

In terms of individual social isolation, in his interview, the MLPD participant discussed the need to reduce negative attitudes toward people with disabilities by increasing opportunities for social interaction:

I work in the community living field and quite often those closest to the individual are the caregivers, the paid staff. If you're paid staff you're not really a friend. You can't pay someone to be your friend. We would like to see less of that and more of them having more friends in the community (MLPD interview).

He suggested that by giving people with disabilities opportunities to tell their stories in a public forum they hope to reduce stigmatization and isolation. "I think as we get our message out, tell

more of our stories, positive stories, success stories, that will help break down some of the myths and stereotypes and generate more of an acceptance I think, as people have more contact with us” (MLPD interview).

Overall, the focus at MLPD is on reducing social isolation by ensuring access for people with disabilities in major institutions and public space. In contrast, the work of both the WCWRC and the IMFCW focuses on reducing isolation by bringing members of their community together to talk, share their experiences and provide support.

For women, the belief that their struggle, their experience of violence, discrimination and poverty was an individual one has been radically altered by the feminist movement which works to assert the connection between the experiences of women by bringing them together in organizations and Consciousness Raising groups (Vickers, 1991; Ristock, 1991). This kind of work is still evident in the work of both the WCWRC and the IMFCW. For example, the capacity building framework that is the basis of the WCWRC’s philosophy begins with bringing women together to recognise their struggle is not alone and making connections with others through their center. The WCWRC interview participant stated that social inclusion is a fundamental value that drives their work.

We recognize social inclusion to be a massive barrier or something that works on many different levels. So just bringing people together, that inclusion piece, is something we work hard at. Our drop-in does that; you know you can come any time and just be here. And then going through different stages of involvement, from simply speaking to others and becoming involved in the community, to taking action on an issue that is affecting you, or affecting your community (WCWRC interview).

To this end they run a program for teen girls in the community called “Liking Me” which provides an opportunity where “these girls can have time to just be with other girls in their daily lives”

(WCWRC Newsletter, Fall 2008, issue 6, p1).

The IMFCW interview participant also discussed social isolation as a barrier they attempt to address at their center.

It can be a culture shock. And when they're back in their rural community or reservation they have a family, family support. They have a stable there of people that they know. And people, they'll move into the city and there's not as good job prospects as maybe they thought there were, there's a lot more temptation. There's a lot more other issues that suddenly they get faced with that they may not have been ready to handle or haven't been kind of told this is what it is (IMFCW interview).

To combat the social isolation of Aboriginal people moving to the city the IMFCW runs a similar program called "The Sharing Circle" which "is designed to help youth, families and community members come together to share their thoughts and feelings in a safe and non threatening environment. It is a place to learn, teach and grow. It is an excellent way to connect with others for friendship and understanding" (IMFCW Sharing Circle Pamphlet).

Geographic and social isolation is amongst the areas of greatest convergence between the three groups, with an emphasis in all three data sets among all three organizations, and is therefore a strong facilitator of cooperation. However, their understanding of and methods for addressing this issue differ. The WCWRC and IMFCW go about addressing social isolation by bringing people together to talk about their situations and barriers, while MLPD focuses more on public forums and reducing physical barriers to public space. However people with disabilities also experience social isolation on a personal level, as the MLPD interviewee pointed out.

Therefore people in the disability community would benefit from the same kinds of "consciousness raising" programs as run by the WCWRC that help break down social isolation and develop community. In addition, physical barriers to public space also impact both Aboriginal people and women at higher rates than men or the non-Aboriginal population, which makes ensuring access for their communities to structures and systems like public transportation an important part of reducing social isolation. These three movements could learn from each other on this issue and work to address both forms of social isolation in their communities.

#### **Literacy and education:**

Literacy and education are important factors for realising the goals of employment and raising community members out of poverty in all three of the movements discussed here.

However, out of the three organizations, the IMFCW appears to place the most emphasis on this



issue. Two of their policy documents and their interview participant discussed education and literacy. The interview participant cited education and literacy as major barriers to inclusion, and reasons for other issues including unemployment, high incarceration rates, and addiction and gambling problems in the community multiple times. To address these issues they provide programs to improve education or literacy such as their Drop In program for youth called "The Indian and Métis Friendship Centre Drop In and Lighthouses program" which "Was designed to provide a safe alternative outlet for youth to spend their 'After School' hours, one (sic) in a positive, cultural and educational manner" (IMFCW 'Beeper Spence; Drop In and Lighthouses Program pamphlet).

Although the literature review found that gender studies at the university level has been a major accomplishment of the feminist movement in Canada (Wine and Ristock, 1991; Adamson, et al. 1988; Rebick, 2005) basic literacy levels were not listed as a major focus of the Canadian feminist movement. This is reflected in the policy and programming of the WCWRC. None of the policy documents, the interviewee or focus group participant from the WCWRC discussed literacy and education as a barrier to social justice for the women in their community. I conclude that literacy and education is not a priority or need they have identified in their community.

The MLPD website does mention access to education, and inclusive education as an issue area on which MLPD has worked in the past. The interview participant however focused more on educating the wider community about the stories and perspectives of people with disabilities as well as educating their members about how to advocate for themselves. They focus on "getting our message out, our point of view out there. In the media, workshops, conferences, letters to the editor; equipping our members so that they're able to better advocate for themselves, providing them with the necessary advocacy skills" (MLPD interview).

Literacy and education is overall a weak facilitator between these groups because it is one of the lowest priorities for the WCWRC, though one of the highest priorities for the IMFCW,

and of some importance to the MLPD. Based on the literature review, access to education has been a major issue for the Aboriginal, feminist and the disability movements both historically and to this day. Nevertheless, the only organization to focus on access to education and supporting literacy was the IMFCW, which is likely a result of their focus on youth programming. It is unclear why education has become less of a focus for MLPD than it has been in the past though the focus group participant mentioned that the activity level of MLPD's various committees is reflective of the interests of the members at any point in time, which indicates that access to education has simply declined in importance as gains have been made toward inclusive education in Manitoba. For the WCWRC, education and literacy were not mentioned at all by the participants or the policy documents. This may be the result of the fact that education and literacy is seen as an issue for youth more than adults and is not a major focus of the feminist movement in Canada.

**Working in community coalitions:**

Cooperation and coalition building between and across identity based movements is the ultimate goal and major focus of this research. Meyer and Whittier (1994) argue,

Social movements are not self contained and narrowly focused unitary actors, but rather are a collection of formal organizations, informal networks, and unaffiliated individuals engaged in a more or less coherent struggle for change... they have effects far beyond their explicitly articulated goals. The ideas, tactics, style, participants, and organizations of one movement spill over its boundaries to affect other social movements (p277).

Evidence of coalition building and cooperation was therefore an important dynamic that I looked for in the data gathered from all three participating organizations. What was found is that when it comes to specific issues or events all three of the participating organizations work with outside organizations in the broader community to realize their vision of social justice. What they do not do is build coalitions or identify priorities based on who is missing from their organizations.

Overall, the work of MLPD is directed more toward coalition building than either of the other two organizations. The MLPD's 2006 annual report has a section dedicated to community partnerships and coalitions in which they state "Community partnerships and coalitions allow us

to play an active role on issue resolution, increasing communications, and idea and knowledge exchange across sectors and within the disability community.” They list an array of community partnerships focused on disability specific issues including, to name a few “Participation on the Chronic Conditions Coalition of Manitoba, Joint Community and Government Members Committee on Disability Related Employment and Income Assistance Issues and membership in the Children’s Coalition of Manitoba dealing with child and family disability concerns” (Polson, 2006). The MLPD interviewee also noted that they have recently been part of the euthanasia prevention coalition in Winnipeg and in the past have “worked with the Manitoba federation of labour, the labour unions, on employment issues. We’ve worked with the labour movement. A lot of that was educational in nature” (MLPD interview). The interview and the focus group participant both confirmed that MLPD has never actively sought out any partnership with feminist organizations in their communities. Both participants also noted that they have attempted to build relationships with Aboriginal organizations but have received little or no response from any Aboriginal organization in Winnipeg.

Although the MLPD participants reported that they have never worked with feminist organizations, MLPD and the WCWRC were both part of the coalition that produced a letter to the ombudsman office regarding administrative policies, regulations and procedures of the Manitoba employment and income assistance program. The coalition included MLPD, WCWRC, Canadian Mental Health Association, Community Financial Counselling Services, North End Women’s Resource Centre Inc, Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, The Elizabeth Fry Society, and the Women’s Health Clinic. The issues of social assistance and housing brought these organizations in the West Central community in Winnipeg together to voice their concerns about the system because they “discovered that many of us have experienced the same difficulties. The result of this common experience is that many EIA recipients we assist have been negatively impacted and we feel a review of how this program functions is necessary” (Cerilli and Keirstead, 2008. p1).

In their policy documents, the WCWRC's stages of empowerment model emphasises supporting the women in their community who use their center to develop connections in the community and begin to work for social change with other organizations. The model states: "Building skills and capacities are components that are inherent in each of these levels. In an effort to create positive change in the community through empowering women and their families, we also hold community involvement and partnership building as high priorities" (WCWRC, private communication, Jan 2009). However, the interview and focus group participants both stated that they had never actively sought out partnerships with a disability organisation though they have been members of the same coalitions in the past. They both agreed they had greater connection with the Aboriginal community in Winnipeg by virtue of the demographics of their neighbourhood and the women who use their center. However, the WCWRC is very active in building networks with other organizations in their community around the issues of housing and income.

The IMFCW's constitution also affirms the need to reach out and work in partnerships with organizations outside their community for two main reasons: "To inform the community about the needs of the Aboriginal population within Winnipeg to facilitate action toward resolving those needs whenever necessary" (IMFCW Constitution, p2) and "To plan and organize with governmental, private and community organizations to improve the number and quality of services and facilities for the Aboriginal community" (IMFCW Constitution, p2). The interview participant from the IMFCW stated that though they generally partner more often with other Aboriginal organizations than non Aboriginal ones, they are part of a "Community coalition of youth based service agencies" which crosses many cultural and identity group boundaries.

Overall, coalitions appear to arise around specific issues these organizations discover they have in common or are evident based on the characteristics of their clientele. However, the WCWRC makes special efforts to include Aboriginal culture in their programming and works with Aboriginal and other organizations in their community regularly, and the IMFCW is open to

coalition building across identity based movements on specific issues relevant to their community such as youth gang involvement or income and housing, while the MLPD works with other organizations on specific issues related to disability including access to physical spaces, housing and services. Attempts at coalition building between the Aboriginal movement and the disability movement have not been successful in the past however.

Working in cooperation with other organizations across identity groups is important to all three of the organizations though it was slightly less important to the IMFCW than to the MLPD or WCWRC, and is therefore identified as a strong facilitator of cooperation. Although all three organizations work in coalitions with other organizations it is often very issue specific, related directly to the identity group they represent. From a strategic perspective it makes sense to identify issues according to their community's needs and then seek partnerships with other groups also attempting to address those needs. However, the result for both the WCWRC and the IMFCW was that a lack of understanding of the disability movement or awareness of convergence of their interests has meant they haven't worked together in the past, and were unaware of what support the disability movement might provide to members of their communities. The IMFCW participant also pointed out that their provincial and federal branches are more likely to engage in widespread coalition building than their local chapter, which focuses more directly on its surrounding community. The WCWRC is also very locally focused, with no higher provincial branches, which is why their coalition building activities focus more on the geographic location of their community members. In contrast, MLPD is a provincial advocacy organization, which explains why it is more externally focused in its activities and engages in more coalition building activities than either the WCWRC or the IMFCW.

**Family:**

Family is a facilitator category that arose out of the emphasis in the data of both the IMFCW and the WCWRC. Family is an issue that these groups share, although higher priority for both the WCWRC and the IMFCW than for MLPD and therefore overall not a very strong

area of convergence and is a weak facilitator of cooperation between these three groups. Although both the feminist and disability movements seek to make political what is generally perceived as private, according to the literature in the disability movement the tendency has been to distance the issues faced by people with disabilities from the private, family realm (Fine and Asch, 1988). The fact the MLPD does not address family in any of their data is a reflection of this tendency. On the other hand, the feminist movement has focused on bringing family and other private issues to the forefront (Ryan, 2001), which is reflected in the WCWRC's programs that support mothers and families. The literature on the Aboriginal movement did not address the issue of family and focused more on the history of colonization, and resistance. Though the emphasis on family at the IMFCW is a reflection of traditional Aboriginal values this category of convergence came more directly out of the data collected here than it did the literature. Family support is an important value in the Aboriginal movement today because the geographic isolation of Indian reserves in Canada has led to greater social isolation because of the dissolution of families and communities when Aboriginal people are forced to move to urban areas for school or work, or disability supports.

Family is an important part of Aboriginal culture. Strengthening the support network that family provides which may be weakened when people move into cities, as well as honouring and respecting previous generations (elders) for their wisdom and knowledge are values the Aboriginal movement seeks to strengthen. Both the WCWRC and the IMFCW demonstrated these were important values in their policy documents and interviews, while for the MLPD supporting families was not a significant theme in either their policy documents or interview.

The IMFCW interviewee emphasised the role of family support networks, or the absence of these, and their center's desire to help strengthen families in their community:

It's because of the importance of the family unit, now whether that's a woman or a father that's involved with their children, that importance of having that relationship of parents and children is, I think it's shown through studies, put into practice. When you have a parent that's more active and involved in their child's life that child has a hell of a lot better chance in life than an absent parent. It's so clichéd, but children are the future and we want to make sure that those children have every opportunity to advance further on.

And that means not leaving the young mothers out in the lurch and only focusing on the youth, or the young men. In our parenting programs we have men that are just as involved as well. We just know that the strength that comes from having parents fully and wholeheartedly involved in their children's life (IMFCW interview).

To address this need the IMFCW holds a program to support parents with children under five to enhance their skills, self-esteem and coping skills through a six week program called "Nobody's Perfect." The program "promotes positive parenting and increases parents understanding of children's health, safety and behaviour (IMFCW Parenting and Skills Enhancement Program pamphlet).

The WCWRC also affirms their commitment to supporting women and families in their mission statement (WCWRC Website). The interview and focus group participants both discussed family issues particularly supporting women in their community to regain custody of their children through their parenting program. Their Peace Begins at Home Parenting Program, involves "Weekly circles where grandmothers, mothers and aunties can come together in a non-judgmental environment to share struggles and strengths when dealing with gang, crime, and/or drug involved family members" (WCWRC Website). The interview participant linked this emphasis on supporting women and families to a holistic feminist approach to social change which mirrors Aboriginal ontology (Stienstra and Ashcroft, forthcoming) and sees women as members of a whole community: "As our mission states, our goal is to assist women and we know that assisting women helps families, because it's often women who are caring for families or are the primary kind of caregiver in families whether it be children or elderly or whatever" (WCWRC interview). The center therefore provides supports for childcare provision because "There are a lot of women, be they mothers or grandmothers or even aunties who are caring for children who don't have a lot of other support like family support and they get really burnt out. So child care or respite care for those people is really big" (WCWRC interview).

The role of family and the private sphere are important elements of the feminist and disability movements and an important traditional value in the Aboriginal community.

Recognizing the personal is political is a fundamental element of the feminist movement and has

also been an important point of the disability movement in asserting that personal supports need to be publicly provided, not just by family members, to enhance the independence of people with disabilities.

**Justice and discrimination:**

The theoretical framework for social justice that forms the foundation of this thesis is based partially on the critical feminist perspective of Nancy Fraser who (2000, p113) suggests a model of social justice aimed “at overcoming subordination by establishing the misrecognized party as a full member of society, capable of participating on a par with the rest.” Discrimination and a lack of justice for these three communities was a theme that came up in the interviews, the focus group and the policy documents. As stated before, the WCWRC interviewee drew the connection between Aboriginal people, women and people with disabilities based on poverty and the discrimination that poor people face. In the focus group the WCWRC participant also identified discrimination as a major barrier to social justice which all three communities experience:

I think one of the things we all have in common is discrimination. In a social sense; fairness for the three different groups fairness in their lives fairness in the big picture, whether it's social justice, whether its laws, whether it's financial support from governments. I think we all have challenges around that (focus group, 45).

The participant from the IMFCW also discussed the danger of “labelling” for both the Aboriginal community and for other groups in society: “we talk about labels there's always a danger with labels, that's one of the problems with Aboriginal people in the first place, because we're labelled.” However we went no further into the issue of discrimination and focused more on how they support Aboriginal people in the community by direct services, informal counselling and recreational opportunities.

The MLPD interviewee also identified discrimination based on physical appearance and superficial assumptions about individual's abilities as a shared issue between the disability and feminist movements. The interview participant emphasised the role “stereotypes and myths” play in perpetuating the social isolation of people with disabilities and described some of the most



harmful stereotypes around disability: “that we don’t want to work, that we really want a hand out. There’s quite a few in the mental health people feel; the dangerousness myth.” The participant stated that one of the main goals of MLPD is to change these misperceptions through education and advocacy.

I think as we get our message out—tell more of our stories, positive stories, success stories—that will help break down some of the myths and stereotypes and generate more of an acceptance I think, as people have more contact with us (MLPD Interview).

Justice and discrimination, which relates to both the cultural elements of social justice, was overall a strong area of convergence and facilitator of cooperation between the three groups. All of the participants agreed that these three groups share a history of widespread discrimination in our society which has led to an overall unjust, marginalized status for these three communities which manifests in both economic and cultural forms.

#### **Health & mental health:**

Health and mental health was a theme that arose out of the data itself. The literature on the Aboriginal and feminist movements did not emphasise health as a major issue for either of those movements, while the disability movement’s history springs from a desire to distance the marginalization of people with disability from the medical perspective and tends to downplay the role of health as a cause of the marginalization people with disabilities experience (Danermark and Gellerstedt, 2004; Tregaskis, 2002). Nevertheless access to healthcare came up in the data collected as a cross cutting issue for all three communities.

In the focus group the participants from the MLPD and WCWRC agreed that access to healthcare was an important issue for both people with disabilities, for the Aboriginal women who use the WCWRC, and for people living in poverty in general. The MLPD participant stated

I think overall a challenge for all three groups would be healthcare, access to healthcare I think that’s a huge, huge issue for Aboriginal people and women with disabilities and people with disabilities in general, women and people with disabilities. Documented or not it’s obvious that people with disabilities and Aboriginal s do not get the same quality care as those without disabilities (Focus group participant).

The IMFCW interview participant also drew the connection between disability issues and the problem of widespread diabetes in the Aboriginal community which they are trying to address through programs that teach proper nutrition: “diabetes is a huge problem in the Aboriginal community. So our nutritional component, trying to you know, teach parents teach elders, teach kids that Pepsi for breakfast isn’t gonna help you when it comes down to it. We’re trying to be preventative in that sense” (IMFCW interview).

The focus group participants and the WCWRC interview discussed the connections between poverty and mental health issues for all three communities. The WCWRC interview stated:

A significant portion of the people who use our services also have mental health challenges, be they regular illnesses or a deterioration of their health from time to time. As an agency we realized we need to learn more about how to support people with mental health challenges. We also heard the same desire from other neighbourhood agencies. So we sought out advice from the overarching mental health department who gave the community a series of workshops on how to work in supportive ways with people experiencing mental health set backs or illness (WCWRC interview).

The focus group participants agreed that there is a relationship between poverty and substandard living conditions, which combined with a lack of support in dealing with the problems that arise out of poverty, can lead to or compound mental health issues for members of these three communities.

Health and mental health was a strong area of convergence and facilitator of cooperation between these three organizations, surprisingly however, because of a greater emphasis on health between the IMFCW and the WCWRC than at MLPD. The issue of health and mental health came out of the data gathered in this study and was not a major issue identified in the literature of these three movements. However, participants from all the organizations identified health and mental health as major issues for all three communities. It was agreed that poverty and inadequate healthcare go hand in hand and that poverty and discrimination have detrimental impacts on the mental health of members of all three communities. However, because disability is generally understood as a health issue due to the influence of the medical

model, when asked what issues these communities shared the participants from the WCWRC and IMFCW may have automatically thought of health issues experienced by their community members, such as diabetes, foetal alcohol syndrome or depression. The participants from both the WCWRC and the IMFCW discussed individuals with disabilities who come to their center and efforts they make to welcome them, but did not connect those isolated experiences with the poverty and overall marginalization of their communities. Because participants from the WCWRC and IMFCW have not extended their systemic analysis of the issues their communities face to experiences of disability they continue to view individuals with disabilities who come to their centers through the individualistic medical model. They were less likely to immediately think of issues of social and geographic isolation, cultural devaluation or discrimination as common to all three groups. However, as the MLPD focus group participant pointed out, these conditions and their lack of access to healthcare along with adequate supports in their communities are major barriers to social justice experienced by all three groups. In order for these three communities to work together effectively it is necessary that a systemic analysis of a lack of access to healthcare be extended to the individuals with disability who come to the WCWRC and the IMFCW.

**Violence and safety:**

Although violence is a major theme in the literature around women's issues (Lowman, 2000; Razack 1998; Jiwani 2006), the theme of violence and safety was not initially recognized as a cross cutting issues for all three groups because of a lack of discussion in the disability and Aboriginal movement's literature. However, violence and safety were issues that came up for all three groups out of the interviews and focus groups. The IMFCW interviewee discussed the issue of gang violence among their youth which they attempt to address through their after school programs and other youth programs. The participant discussed how gang violence can limit the ability of youth from his community to visit other neighbourhoods:

If we're talking youth, if there's programming over across the bridge our youth won't go and access it because, one, it's tough for them to get there. Even if there's a way for them to get there they won't because you start looking at the gang and territorial which is a huge issue amongst our youth. A lot of our kids would be scared to go over there, a lot of their kids they won't come over here even if we have floor hockey or whatever, we can't get their kids over in there over here. Sometimes, for our girls group, we're able to take our kids safely there and do programming and then we bring their kids over here and we'll do programming over here. It's almost like going on a field trip because this is an area of town where there are people they would never ever meet. And if they did meet them on the street there might be animosity, so we're able to help bridge that a little bit (IMFCW interview).

The WCWRC focus group participant also discussed the influence of violence in their community in the Winnipeg's West End: "Gang issues are a big one. That's where some of my funding comes from. It's from National Crime Prevention. Violence is hugely present in the West End—well it's everywhere in the city—but specifically for our center the gang issues are just huge" (focus group participant). The WCWRC participants also discussed violence against women and programs that they provide to promote their safety. The interview participant from the WCWRC stated:

Violence is a really big issue too. It hasn't gone away, it still really exists and it's kinda crazy to acknowledge that women especially are targeted in violence and it's just almost the norm. It just exists everywhere in our society and it destroys people. People can be saved and you know build themselves up from that but it's really pervasive. People who have been in violent relationships have come here and started volunteering, and slowly kind of built up their self worth and we've assisted them in leaving their relationships when they wanted to do that. We also help people to develop safety plans and support them with court visits (WCWRC interview).

The WCWRC attempts to address the violence women in their community face through their RESPECT program which provides support and referrals for women who experience violence or abuse at home or in their relationships (WCWRC website).

In the focus group, the participant from the MLPD discussed some of the issues that women with disabilities in particular face and noted that women with disabilities experience higher rates of abuse than do non-disabled women or men with disabilities.

The other issues that women with disabilities deal with probably more often is abuse; sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse. Because not only are they vulnerable because of their disability but women are seen as more vulnerable period, than men in society. So we are wanting to do more research on that and look at that and we have recently just met with (a feminist health organization) to do some work to train women

with disabilities to become crisis counsellors. So that when a woman with a disability is in crisis, a crisis worker with a disability can go to the hospital and be with that person. You're talking with a peer, a person who knows what it's like to be vulnerable (Focus group).

However, the participant noted that many of these issues are not addressed by MLPD and that the work being done on violence against women with disabilities is through a feminist disability organization rather than the mainstream disability movement. The issue of gang violence, which was held in common between the IMFCW and the WCWRC who both serve a predominantly Aboriginal population was not an issue raised by the MLPD participants or their policy documents.

The area of violence was a strong facilitator, or common issue, which arose out of the data gathered in the research. According to the policy documents and interviews violence is a high priority issue for both the IMFCW and the WCWRC not only because of the common issue of gang violence but also domestic violence in both communities. However, neither the interview nor policy documents of the MLPD identified the issue of violence against people with disabilities despite the fact the MLPD focus group participant identified abuse and violence against people with disabilities and particularly women with disabilities as a shared issue between the disability and feminist movements. Overall, violence is a significant effect of oppression and marginalization which all three of these communities share. Many of the tactics used by organizations like the WCWRC to help deal with violence in their community members lives could benefit both the IMFCW's and the MLPD's community members.

### **Barriers:**

Based on the literature review and the data collected, there are a number of apparent reasons why these movements may have difficulty working together or building a common vision of social justice despite all the areas of interest and action they share. A small number of tensions or barriers may make the difference between these groups working together toward social change or continuing to compete against each other for limited resources because of the failure to

recognise the ways their constituencies overlap. This section reviews the specific issues important to each of these movements which are most likely to be neglected by the other two to see whether this is the case or if these issues present less of a barrier to cooperation than anticipated. Ultimately the goal is to identify what barriers exist and what it might take to overcome them. In the analysis of barriers to determine the strength or weakness of a barrier, themes that arose in only one organization's data were determined to be strong. Themes that arose in all three of the organization's data sources were determined to be weak barriers to cooperation because they had all agreed it was an issue they are attempting to address.

**Figure 4: Analytical Framework Barriers**

Source	Barriers
Literature review	1. Application of theory
	2. Critique of existing system
	3. Racism
	4. Community supports
	5. Gender & Sexuality
Policy Review, Interviews & Focus group	6. Culture
	7. Lack of education information & contact
	8. Lack of resources

**Application of theory in their work:**

Not all movements are alike in their application of theory in their organizing. In this section I looked for examples of the application of theory developed out of disability studies, gender studies or Aboriginal studies in the policies and activities of these three organizations. I also looked for cross over between the organizations. For example, the theory or mandate of one movement may be expressed in the policy or programming of the other organizations. A lack of mutual understanding of the underlying sources of marginalization and the interconnectedness of the issues faced by their own and other communities may create a barrier to working together.

The policy documents analyzed for the policy review made no mention of theories developed in the literature on the disability, feminist or Aboriginal movements. In the interview data it was apparent that the influence of the academic literature and theory associated with these movements was fairly weak in all of these organizations. None of the participants from the WCWRC or the IMFCW were familiar with the social model of disability. However, they both expressed a desire to know more about it and sympathy with the concept of resisting discrimination against people with disabilities. However, neither of the participants from the MLPD was familiar with term “the social model of disability” though they both agreed that this theory, once it was explained, was compatible with the philosophy of their organization. The only occasion on which there was a cross over of theory expressed in a policy document was found in the letter to the ombudsman office regarding administrative policies and regulations and procedures of the Manitoba Employment and Income Assistance Program which was the product of a coalition including both the WCWRC and MLPD and other community organizations in Winnipeg’s West End. The document discusses disability from a social model perspective when it objects to the policy that will “no longer (allow) a person requesting eligibility for the Income Assistance Program for Disabled Persons, who has an obvious disability, to be automatically determined eligible. They will be required to have medical documentation provided by their medical professionals” (Cerilli and Keirstead, 2008, p6). The letter also uses a social model understanding of disability when it objects to the medical view of disability in the Income Assistance Policy in Manitoba which often sees disability as a complete inability to work and disregards the social aspects of disability (Cerilli and Keirstead, 2008, p9).

The interview participant from the WCWRC also discussed the influence that feminist theory has on the work they do at the center, including a holistic approach which sees women as members of families and communities, as well as a focus on revealing the special ways that marginalization impacts women. However, the participant also noted that the original founders of the organization would not have identified as feminist, and as a result “you won’t see us

advertised as some big feminist organization even though we totally and completely are” (WCWRC interview). Because of the weak application of theory in all three of these organizations this is a significant barrier to the three organizations working together.

**Critique of existing system:**

The literature review found that social movements work best when there is a balance between radical grass roots activism and mainstreaming or “problem solving” tactics. Overall, none of the policy documents in this review made a fundamental critique of the existing system and therefore this remains a significant barrier to their collective action. All three organisations appear to work on a problem solving level in which they identify a social problem based on the needs of their community, and specifically the people who come into their centers, and develop programs to address those issues or make recommendations to government to alter existing programs to make them more equitable. Neither the MLPD nor the IMFCW interview participants made a radical critique of the existing system in their interviews. The participant from the WCWRC did discuss the need for social change and the impact that the restrictions placed on their funding by the federal government placed on their ability to do so.

Some funders are focused on the individual and individual change. They want to work with individuals, and make differences in peoples live, but don't support work at the system level. One example is the Status of Women Canada adjusting its criteria in 2007 to focus on individual women and no longer have their project criteria include 'political change' that would benefit women. While there is a great need for individual support, and while we're so honoured to be able to provide that individual support, there also needs to be systemic changes. As long as the system is the way it is individual support will always be needed, so changing the systems and structures we live with is equally as important. We need more space and support to address systemic changes (WCWRC interview).

This quote shows that though staff at the WCWC are aware of the need for systemic change, they are restricted in their ability to pursue it because of restrictions on funding. As a result the majority of the work at the WCWRC focuses on “problem solving” while advocacy or political critique of the system must remain secondary.

MLPD also focuses mainly on making existing systems more accessible and inclusive of people with disabilities rather than arguing for structural change. Although their interest in changing attitudes toward people with disabilities has the potential to be radical, their



suggestions for addressing this issue involved merely increasing contact between people with disabilities and the broader community. Similarly, although the IMFCW participant alluded to colonization as a fundamental cause underlying the marginalization of Aboriginal people, they shy away from being “political” in their responses to these issues. Instead they develop programs to help individuals in their communities either avoid or escape the traps that structural racism lays out for them in urban society.

Effective measures to pursue social change involve working in coalitions with organizations from other movements across identity divisions, finding a balance between disengagement, or critique of the status quo, and mainstreaming, or problem solving, and cultivating diversity within movements (Parsons, 1999; Wine, 1991; Briskin, 1991; Anderson *et al.*, 1988). Of these three organizations IMFCW applies theory relevant to their own or the other two movements the least, though none of the organizations do so consistently. Applying the theory associated with the social movement an organization is associated with, is key to ensuring their work and the overall vision of justice work together effectively. Having an overall understanding of the sources of the issues a social group face helps clarify how an organization should go about addressing those issues. At the same time, all three of the organizations lack a critique of the existing system, though both MLPD and the IMFCW are more consistent in this area than the WCWRC. The WCWRC interviewee was the only participant to mention the systemic nature of the oppression their community members face. A lack of synthesis between the overall vision or theory and the work of an organization, along with a critical analysis of existing structures that cause oppression and marginalization is a significant barrier because it can lead to situations where the means become overshadowed by the end, or the process can ultimately reinforce the same factors that contribute to the problem in the first place. For example, an organization without a clear theoretical base and defined vision of justice, such as the IMFCW, might end up failing to address the connection between the racism members of their own community face with racism they may express against other cultural or ethnic groups.

Similarly, the WCWRC is a feminist organization for all intents and purposes, and yet the reluctance of some members to identify as feminist themselves does little to resist the general negative perception of feminism in society and allows the perception that women who advocate for equality and justice are “aggressive” to go unquestioned.

**Racism and colonization:**

The literature review showed that women of colour have critiqued the feminist movement for being exclusionary of non-white women, and has failed to take up the issues women of colour face (Lorde, 1984, reprinted in Ryan, 2001). The literature also found little focus on issues of racism in the Canadian disability movement. As a result, it was expected that less emphasis on the issue of racism would be found in the disability and feminist organizations’ policy documents than in the Aboriginal organizations, despite the fact that this is an issue that could be addressed by all three. However, the policy review found no mention of the impact of racism on any of the communities represented by these three organizations. The interview participant from the WCWRC was the only participant to mention racism as fundamental barrier to social justice faced by the women who access their center:

I think a huge thing is systemic racism in our country, and our city and province in particular. So just the regular and ongoing discrimination, women and also men, but the women that we work with face, that’s massive. Particularly Aboriginal women, but I’m sure new comer women have similar experiences but I think that they might be different experiences (WCWRC interview).

The WCWRC focus group participant also discussed the presence of racism both against the Aboriginal women who use their center, and amongst these women towards other ethnic groups.

There’s still a lot of racism in our center and it’s not necessarily against the white folks, it’s also against East Indian or possibly newcomers. We’ll talk about it when it happens: Isn’t it common that there’s racism everywhere? So you know. I’ll speak for myself me as a white woman, I would have thought that the Aboriginal population of women would be very aware of racism and oppression coming from a culture that has been oppressed; a culture has had lots of challenges with racism and yet there’s another culture that their culture will discriminate against. It’s really interesting. That was an eye opener for me actually (Focus group participant).

The fact that Aboriginal people have experienced colonization and racism in our society does not necessarily mean that they, as individuals or collectively, see the connections between their

own oppression and the experiences of other marginalized groups. This is a good example of a significant barrier to cooperation between movements, or social groups, which may appear to have shared issues and concerns. This is also an important example of the prevalence of racism in our society, such that even those who are targets of a racist society may have internalized the “othering” impulse on which this system is based, and in turn impose it on other marginalized groups. In order for successful cooperation to occur between marginalized groups it is essential that we work to reveal how we may oppress others, even as we are oppressed. Racism is an obvious cross cutting issue between Aboriginal people and newcomers to Canada. However, if members of the Aboriginal community do not see this connection, or do not see systemic racism as a source of their own oppression how can they effectively address it or work with groups with similar issues?

The impacts of colonization were also not mentioned by any of the three organizations’ policy documents. The IMFCW interview participant was reluctant to identify an underlying reason for the issues Aboriginal people face in urban society in Canada, though the participant alluded to the impact of colonization:

It’s really hard to you can’t mothball it all into one type of reason. But over time, you know we’re talking ranging over a hundred, hundred and fifty years ago, the Aboriginal population has been secluded and looked at secondly. Kinda let them deal on their own. And it’s only been in the last thirty or forty years, since the seventies there’s been more of a social consciousness towards Aboriginal s and the issues that they face. And governments, city participation, community agency participation, they started to address those needs. But really they all stem a lot of the same things: lower family, lower education and job prospects (IMFCW interview).

It’s unclear why they did not identify racism or colonization as underlying reasons for the marginalization of Aboriginal people in Winnipeg. However, there are a couple of possible reasons; first, because I am white they might have felt uncomfortable talking about this issue and assumed that naming structural racism would offend me. The participant might also genuinely not see colonization and racism as key causal factors in the marginalization of Aboriginal people. The participant does appear to believe the reasons for many of the issues Aboriginal people face are a result of lower literacy rates, unemployment, and a lack of cultural

identity. Either way, the perspective the staff member expressed on behalf of the IMFCW did not reflect a radical critique of mainstream Canadian society. It was clear the focus was on supporting members of the Aboriginal community to adapt to and assimilate into urban society rather than alter society in a fundamental way to be more compatible with traditional Aboriginal cultural values.

Neither MLPD nor the IMFCW address issues of racism or colonization, while the WCWRC does so more consistently. A failure to address racism and colonization as underlying systems that perpetuate the marginalization of Aboriginal people and white hegemony in Canadian society is fundamental to social change; a truly inclusive society requires that we all recognize privilege, where it exists, while at the same time working to deconstruct all such hierarchies. Why the IMFCW does not name racism and colonization as sources of oppression for Aboriginal people is unclear, it is possibly related to a reluctance to identify their work as “political.” This could be due to similar funding limitations as those described by the WCWRC which prohibit “political” work, or a genuine belief that these factors are not relevant to the exclusion of Aboriginal people in urban society. Nevertheless, failure to recognize racism and colonization as underlying systemic causes of the exclusion of Aboriginal people (and other non-white populations) allows individuals to continue to be blamed for their own oppression, to express racism toward other similarly oppressed groups, and efforts to redress exclusion to be seen as undeserved “privileges.” Failure to address racism and colonization also inhibits the development of a broad movement based on the recognition that individuals’ problems are collective issues, which society has a responsibility to *all* citizens to redress and ensure inclusion in both economic and cultural spheres.

**Community supports:**

Community supports are a central element of ensuring independence and social inclusion for people with disabilities. However, it also encompasses a wide array of services and programs ranging from homecare, transportation, to income support and inclusive education (Barnes and

Mercer, 2005). According to the literature, the disability movement has focused heavily on developing services by and for people with disabilities in order to facilitate independent living and social inclusion (D'Aubin, History of the Independent Living Movement; Barnes and Mercer, 2005). The MLPD's emphasis on ensuring accessible transportation is a good example of the importance of supports for people with disabilities in their communities. Overall it was not expected that these issues would be of importance to the feminist or Aboriginal organizations participating in this study. Income support, affordable housing, and mental health are issues the interviewees and the focus group participants all identified as significant. In addition, they agreed these are areas where greater supports were needed for both the WCWRC and MLPD's community members. Neither the IMFCW nor the WCWRC mention disability related supports, such as homecare or transportation in their policy documents. Both of the participants from the WCWRC admitted that their building was often inaccessible for persons in wheelchairs due to an unreliable elevator and lacked clear signage to let people know where they were located, reducing their accessibility. As a result community supports is a significant barrier to collective action.

However, according to their website, the WCWRC was originally founded as a support to women in West End area, because of the particularly high rates of poverty women experienced in the west central part of Winnipeg ("Our History" WCWRC Website). The WCWRC interviewee also noted that they have put efforts into providing better supports for women in their center with mental health issues, but noted that for the Deaf woman who often visits they had not looked into means of providing supports to her beyond using notes to communicate and interpreting her gestures. The interviewee did state that it would be helpful to have someone who uses sign language on their staff.

The interview participant from the IMFCW reported that though their center is physically accessible to wheelchair users, disability issues were not high on their priority list. The participant felt the needs of people with disabilities were relevant due to high rates of diabetes in

the Aboriginal community, but the IMFCW nevertheless does not actively pursue disability related supports for their community members.

MLPD places the most emphasis on community supports such as homecare or accessible transportation, while the IMFCW places none, and the WCWRC addressed community supports only in their interview. Community supports are a central element of ensuring the inclusion of people with disabilities in society. Because both the Aboriginal population and women experience significant rates of disability, particularly impairments resulting from diabetes (among the Aboriginal people) and mental health issues, the need for community supports for both communities is real. Both the IMFCW and the WCWRC participants tended to approach the issue of disability on an individual basis, and to identify physical disabilities more readily than invisible disabilities. Overall both the IMFCW and WCWRC do not connect disability issues to the other forms of systemic marginalization members of their community face. In order for the IMFCW and WCWRC to better recognize, serve and understand the needs of persons with disabilities who come to their centers they would benefit from more contact with and information about the disability movement.

### **Gender and Sexuality:**

Power relations related to gender and sexuality are a major component of the feminist movement's analysis of the causes of oppression for Aboriginal women, women with disabilities, transgendered persons, gays, bisexuals and lesbians (Ryan, 2001). Power relations between the sexes in Aboriginal communities have changed dramatically through colonization, and the imposition of European values which undermined the status of women (Anderson, 2000). The impact of ableism and patriarchy on sexuality, body image, reproduction, and exposure to abuse are all gendered experiences of disablement that affect the psyche, emotional wellbeing and self-esteem of women with disabilities (Odette, 1994; Nosek, *et al.*, 2001; Ticoll, 1994.)

Overall the WCWRC policy documents, interviewee and focus groups participant all covered the topic of gendered violence, particularly domestic violence, in addition to issues of

parenting, and family. However, none of these sources discussed issues of sexuality, or issues of transgendered, gay or bisexual women. Reproductive technologies and body image were also not mentioned in any of these sources from the WCWRC. The WCWRC focuses more on empowering the women in their community, particularly women in poverty to gain access to resources and supports to gain and maintain independence, with less focus on sexuality.

According to the literature, issues related to gender and sexuality have traditionally been neglected by the disability movement (Fine and Asch, 1988), which is a finding borne out in the policy documents, interview and focus group participation from MLPD. No mention of issues of violence or abuse experienced by women with disabilities or other feminist issues such as reproduction and motherhood, or body image were raised in any of the policy documents provided by MLPD. The MLPD interviewee did state that though they felt there were feminist members at MLPD the organization's work was not influenced by the feminist movement and they had never worked in a partnership with a feminist organization. The focus group participant from MLPD affirmed that feminist issues were neglected in the mainstream disability movement, including the MLPD, which the participant also noted was male dominated. The focus group participant identified herself as a feminist, but noted that they had been reluctant to do so in the past because of the negative perception of feminism in society. However, the participant indicated that through the activities of women with disabilities in Winnipeg, the feminist movement has a growing voice in the disability community, if not through the MLPD.

The IMFCW's policy documents are silent on issues of sexuality, gender based violence or other feminist issues. However, the interviewee from the IMFCW discussed the programs they have developed to help strengthen the self esteem of young Aboriginal women in the community as well as programs to support young parents. The participant argued however that these programs were not a reflection of the influence of feminism but were related to the importance they place on families in their community. The participant also contrasted Aboriginal women in general with "feminists":

Maybe it's my skewed take on it but feminism, perhaps. I find it, I don't want to say aggressive, but there's a... you have a person that has labelled themselves— We talk about labels, there's always a danger with labels, that's what has led to some of the problems of Aboriginal people in the first place, because we're labelled—But if someone considers themselves a feminist, odds are they are stronger internally to be able to go out there and identify as a feminist (IMFCW interview).

Though the influence of feminism can be inferred from the recognition of the need to empower women in the Aboriginal community, the participant from the IMFCW did not see the feminist movement as an influence in their work. This may be reflective of an overall aversion to having their work interpreted as “political” and a weak connection between the theoretical developments in academia in gender, Native studies, post-colonial theory and the work of the IMFCW. There is a disconnect between these actions or programs, which reflect feminist values, and an apparent resistance to being identified with feminism. This disconnect may be the result of a widespread negative perception of “feminism” as represented in the media which was mentioned by almost all the participants in this study. This resistance to being associated with feminism may also be the result of either the success of feminism or traditional Aboriginal values that merely happen to coincide with feminist values.

The literature review identified a number of significant objections to feminism from an Aboriginal perspective. According to Green (2006), some argue “feminism is un-traditional, inauthentic, non-liberatory for Aboriginal women and illegitimate as an ideological position, political analysis and organization process” (p20). On the other hand, the fact that programs directed as supporting women as mothers and developing self-esteem are not seen as feminist in nature by the participant may also be the result of the success of the feminist movement's mainstreaming of certain values, including the understanding that women as mothers, caregivers, and citizens are central to social justice and strong healthy communities. These may be seen as basic or ‘natural’ parts of social change, and as fundamental values of traditional Aboriginal culture, which in this participant's mind are not associated with the mainstream understanding of “feminism.” Based on the data collected here, the divide between the two groups seems less significant than portrayed in the literature; whether or not it is called feminist



activism, supporting women in the community as mothers while developing self esteem among women in the community are important goals of both of these groups.

Overall, though MLPD addresses gender issues less than the other two organizations, gender issues are one of the least significant barriers to cooperation between the three because of the influence of feminist staff at MLPD and feminist disability organizations in the community. It seems that the issue of family and feminist values are less of a barrier between the Aboriginal and feminist movements than they are between the disability and Aboriginal movements, because of the desire in the mainstream disability movement to distance themselves from being seen as a private family issue (Fine and Asch, 1988).

The literature review showed a tension between the feminist and Aboriginal movements because of the perception that feminism devalues women's traditional roles as mothers and caregivers which are highly valued in most Aboriginal cultures (Green, 2006). However, the findings of this research indicate that both the Aboriginal and feminist organization focus on supporting women and their families. Nevertheless, the IMFCW participant did not believe that feminism influences their work at the IMFCW but saw these programs instead as a result of the emphasis on family in their community. Because of the compatibility between their goals and methods around empowering and supporting women I believe the true barrier between the Aboriginal and feminist movements is a widespread misperception of the nature of feminism and not a fundamental difference in values. Perhaps if the feminist movement was not viewed so negatively the participant from the IMFCW and other Aboriginal (and non-Aboriginal) women would be more willing to identify with the movement.

**Culture:**

The cultural divide between the three communities was an issue raised in the literature around Aboriginal feminism (Ryan, 2001), which suggested a major divide existed between the feminist and Aboriginal communities. According to Shackel's (2008) review of the literature, Aboriginal culture has an impact on the experience of disability in First Nations communities. Shackel

argues the words used in indigenous languages in Canada are less negatively value laden than English terminology, and reflect an attitude toward disability that emphasises the ability of people with disabilities to teach their community, or a more spiritual understanding of disability, or conversely, disability as a manifestation of sin (Shackel, 2008, p36). However, the literature did not address the impact the different cultural values may have on the ability of the disability and Aboriginal communities to work together on common issues.

According to the data gathered in this project, there appears to be a greater degree of connection between the feminist movement and Aboriginal communities particularly because of the emphasis both the WCWRC and the IMFCW place on incorporating Aboriginal culture into their work. The largest disconnect amongst the three communities that became apparent out of the data was between the Aboriginal and disability communities. Both of the participants from the MLPD discussed past unsuccessful efforts made by MLPD to reach out to Aboriginal organizations. The MLPD interviewee speculated as to why this was the case: "Could be partly cultural or jurisdictional; federal provincial issues" (MLPD interview). The MLPD focus group participant believed that failure of their efforts to work with the Aboriginal community sprang from two sources: Aboriginal organizations do not believe their issues regarding disability are similar enough to make working together fruitful and/or because their cultures are too different in terms of their understanding of time, and the responsibility to show up for meetings you've agreed to attend, that they were unable to connect. The participant stated that, after a number of attempts to make connections with Aboriginal organizations, MLPD has stopped trying. However, both MLPD participants stated that they do not include Aboriginal philosophy or culture in the work of MLPD and that the organization was dominated mainly by white members. On the other hand the IMFCW participant agreed that though disability was an issue in his community it was not something they focused on, and they had never worked with a disability organization in the past.

Overall, however, culture is one of the weakest barriers to cooperation between these three groups because of the strong emphasis at the WCWRC on incorporating Aboriginal culture and

traditions. According to the data gathered, the barrier presented by different cultural values exists mainly between MLPD and the IMFCW.

The WCWRC has embraced Aboriginal culture as a central element of their work in supporting the women in their community to become self-determining and promote healing. The data collected in this project has revealed that the greatest rift in this triad is between the Aboriginal and disability movements in Winnipeg. Both of these movements are relatively strong in Winnipeg, and yet they have rarely, if ever, worked together. This is not because they do not share common issues, or because the disability movement is not aware that Aboriginal people with disabilities face even greater barriers to inclusion than the non-Aboriginal disabled population. The rift appears to exist because of a lack of contact and mutual understanding. The participants from the MLPD conjectured that this was a result of cultural difference, but because the participant from the IMFCW was unable to participate in the focus group, we were not able to hear or include his perspective on why this rift exists. However, more efforts on the part of the disability movement to incorporate Aboriginal values and traditions into their work, along with more emphasis on communicating with the Aboriginal community about their interests instead of incorporating Aboriginal people into their disability agenda may lead to a more fruitful relationship between the two communities.

**Lack of Education, Information and Contact:**

Working together across identity groups was found to be a significant facilitator of achieving mutual understanding and achieving social change in the literature and the data collected in this project (Meyer and Whittier, 1994). Conversely a lack of contact and information about other social groups creates a barrier to mutual recognition and influence. For these three communities in Winnipeg a lack of contact and information was a significant barrier identified by all three groups in all of the interviews and the focus group.

The focus group participant from the WCWRC said their organization had not done more work with disability organizations because they were not aware of a need for disability supports among the women who use their center, or because there have not been very many women who

use wheelchairs or walkers who regularly come to the center. They also said they may not have identified this need because of their lack of information of what resources were available or what the disability movement was about. The participant suggested the WCWRC would benefit from a workshop or presentation from a disability organization on these issues.

Similarly, the participant from the IMFCW stated that though they believed disability issues were relevant to the Aboriginal community based on the high incidence of diabetes in the Aboriginal community, they were simply unlikely to work with organizations that were not Aboriginal. Both the IMFCW and the WCWRC participants were open to finding out more about the disability community. In my opinion, bridging this gap would likely require an Aboriginal Disability organization with established connection within the Aboriginal community to work between the two communities. Currently, although organizations in the disability community like MLPD are interested in building connections with the Aboriginal community, but are unaware of how to make their efforts more fruitful. An organization with connections in the Aboriginal community may be able to bridge the cultural gap, reveal to the disability community how to make their agenda more relevant of Aboriginal people, and help raise the profile of disability issues within the Aboriginal community.

The literature review found that divisions within the Left, including unions and political parties, and within identity groups, tend to undermine the ability to discuss what they may have in common. Instead there is a tendency to "other" each other or to compare levels of oppression with other groups rather than discuss how to build a better society together and take concrete actions (Severson and Stanhope, 1998; Galvin, 2003). The lack of contact and information about each other found in the data is a clear example of the impact of the disconnected nature of identity based social movements and shows that a lack of contact and information between the communities is one of the strongest barriers to cooperation and mutual understanding between them. The assumed able-bodiedness of the their constituencies or the influence of the medical model, which leads people to assume disability is merely a medical and not a social issue may

be the underlying cause of their lack of knowledge about the disability movement and what its organizations have to offer.

Overall, this study found that the contact between the Aboriginal and feminist communities was greatest, while the contact between the Aboriginal and disability communities was the weakest. The level of contact between the Aboriginal and feminist community is a result of the high percentage of Aboriginal people living in the West End and the identified need to provide supports to women living in poverty in the community through the WCWRC. The participants from the WCWRC and the IMFCW stated they lacked knowledge about the disability movement and were unaware of the social model of disability. All of the participants agreed that a lack of contact or information about the disability movement was the most likely reason for their lack of cooperation with disability organizations. However, this does not appear to be entirely the result of a lack of effort on the part of MLPD; they have sought relationships with Aboriginal organizations in the past and found these efforts unsuccessful perhaps because their tactics were not inclusive enough of the agenda of Aboriginal organizations themselves to make cooperation between them fruitful.

Similarly, the MLPD interviewee stated they had never tried to work with a feminist organization in the past, despite the fact that they have feminist staff and members. Nevertheless, the MLPD focus group participant (and staff member) identified as a member of a feminist disability organization (and the feminist movement) as well, which we can assume would have some influence on their work at MLPD. Overall, it would benefit both the Aboriginal and feminist communities to work on developing a stronger relationship and knowledge of the resources and perspectives of the disability community in Winnipeg.

**Lack of resources:**

Finally, because the literature review found that organizations in all three communities are dependant on government funding or other unstable sources of funding, a lack of resources is expected to be a significant barrier to cooperation between these organizations (Loxley, *et al.* 2007; Wine, & Ristock, 1991; Hutchinson, *et al.* 2004). A combination of federal and provincial

financial support make up the majority of funding for most community based non-profit organizations. Funding is often project specific and comes with requirements that limit the ways money can be spent. However, the policy review only uncovered one statement regarding the impact of a lack of financial resources on the capacities of an organization. MLPD's 2006 annual report states,

2006 was a challenging year for MLPD. Acquiring funds continues to be one of our major challenges. But throughout the year, we received many donations through our own direct mail campaign... We also appreciate the funding support and encouragement from our government and foundation funders (McIntosh, 2006).

Nevertheless a lack of funding did not stop MLPD from working in coalitions with other organizations in their community or across the country. The other two organizations' policy documents did not mention funding sources though both of the interview participants from the WCWRC and the IMFCW discussed the impact funding had on their ability to work in coalitions.

The interview participant from the IMFCW noted that segregating these groups based on identity has the effect of undermining their ability to pool their resources to make them more effective, and work together for social change.

I guess, they're all looked at as targeted demographics where agencies or government or money is set aside for each one, and again once you start labelling—the Aboriginal issue, or the disability issue, or the feminist—once you start labelling I think they become targeted and that's really tough to bridge those gaps. So if money is set aside for Aboriginal issues and, although it maybe crosses over into a disability or a feminist realm, that money has to be put towards Aboriginal s. It's very difficult to cross because the government needs their stats and they need them done right (IMFCW interview).

As stated above, the WCWRC interview participant also discussed how funding limited their capacity to be "political" in an overt way. However, for all three organizations they do seem to be able to work with other identity based and community organizations when it is on a specific issue they share. It is unlikely however, that funding could be procured for the purpose of building a cross identity coalition between organizations such as these without it being focused on a specific issue, such as housing or youth.

According to the data collected in this project a lack of resources has an equal impact on all three groups, and though it is a barrier for all three it is not necessarily a determining factor in

their ability to work together. As a result a lack of funding is identified as a moderate, not significant, barrier to their collective action. All of the groups discussed the limiting impact a lack of funding or restrictions on funding have on their ability to work with other organizations across identity groups, however when it comes to a specific issue, such as youth programming or income support, all of these organizations have worked in such coalitions. In fact most of the participants reported that working in such coalitions can help either stretch their funding further or make it more effective by pooling resources and reaching larger populations.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

The conclusion of this project includes three general categories: lessons about doing community based participatory action research, major findings of the research, and suggestions for future action that come out of these findings. Feminist research methods require researchers to breakdown the distinction between objective observer or researcher and the research subjects found in traditional research. One major step in doing this is to position oneself as a researcher and learner in the process. I therefore begin the conclusion with a reflection on my experience as researcher and learner, and what I might change in the future.

Although this research project aspires to a participatory action research model there are major differences between what actually occurred and ideal participatory action research. There are three main reasons for this: As a student I did not have the resources or time available to invest in ensuring participants had full input into the research design process. Secondly, the participating organizations were limited in their ability to participate and commit to the project due to time and resource constraints of their own. Finally, ideally I would have chosen to do this research in a community in which I had stronger connections to begin with so as to make the commitment required to this project feel less onerous to the organizations. However, I believe this research this will still provide some foundation on which further alliances between social movements could be built and contribute to a larger process of social change. The open dialogue I tried to create in the research process may facilitate the development of connections between these organizations and provided me, as a learner and researcher, an opportunity to better understand these cultures and communities

Participatory research requires time and resources to be invested in developing relationships with the participating organizations. Ultimately, if the questions and goals were designed by members of the communities I had become a part of in the year prior to the data gathering process, finding participants would probably have been far more straightforward. This



would likely have also made the intervention I designed more relevant to their work and ultimately more fruitful.

I do believe the research maintains a resemblance to participatory action research for a number of reasons. Most importantly, the forum of the group meeting, in which members of at least two organizations who were unfamiliar with each other's work came together to consider and discuss each other's issues and what they might have in common was an important intervention. These communities are quite separate, and the disability community is by far the most detached from the Aboriginal and feminist. Bringing these groups together will at the very least raise the consciousness of the issues they have in common among three activists and hopefully influence their work within their respective organizations.

Participatory research also requires communication and equality between the researcher and the participants, as well as possibilities for feedback and input into both the initial design and the final outcome. Informal feedback has been gathered from all the interview participants, and a more formal response from the focus group participants on their experience of participating in the research project, and the overall reaction was positive. However, due to the very small number of participants in the project, the opportunity to give anonymous feedback where they participants might feel free to be more critical was impossible. In the future, to determine the participant's experience of the power dynamic between the researcher and themselves as "subjects" more information and feedback on the participant's perceptions of this dynamic could be gathered.

Fundamentally, however, all of the organizations willingly decided to participate, and offered what information they could very generously. It was their generosity, goodwill, and concern for social justice that motivated them to participate in my thesis research. Despite my critiques of aspects of each of their approaches it is important to point out that each of these organizations does important, political, work by supporting members of their communities and

seeking social change. I truly hope that none of the observations made here are taken as a lack of respect for the difficult and important work they do.

The purpose of this research project was to investigate three questions: What are the connections between the issues faced and visions of social justice held by three organizations involved in the Aboriginal, feminist and disability movements in Winnipeg, Manitoba? What common interests, language, values and activities held by their organizations can be built upon to develop a common vision and facilitate cooperation between them? What barriers to creating this common vision exist? What would it take to overcome these?

Ultimately the goal has been to open the discursive space between these three communities, with a focus on three community based organizations from each, by first identifying facilitators and barriers between the three based on academic literature, followed by their organizational policies, and the perspectives of their staff through three interviews. The interviews were followed with a focus group intended to bring the groups together to discuss their experiences and work, to identify what interests they hold in common, and what barriers divide them.

The literature review found 12 areas of overlap between the three movements including: Cultural empowerment; Politicized identity; Income and Employment; Self determination; Inclusion in major institutions; Literacy and education; Geographic isolation. The categories of Working in community coalitions; Family; Justice & discrimination; Health & Mental Health; Violence & Safety were added to the analytical framework based on the themes that arose out of the data.

After reviewing all of the data, this research project found that these three organizations and their respective communities have more in common in terms of the barriers to social justice they face and their visions of a just society than they have barriers dividing them. The literature review found 8 areas of tension or barriers between the movements to be used in the analytical framework including the application of theory; critique of existing systems; racism and

colonization; community supports; lack of resources; and gender and sexuality to which was added Culture and Lack of Education and Information & Contact based on the data collected.

However, these three communities have many common issues upon which they could build a joint vision and action. The most significant common issues I found were poverty and housing issues, which all of the participants agreed is the underlying cause of almost all the other barriers these communities face. The other most significant barriers all three participating organizations identified were discrimination and social isolation on a widespread level. In terms of tactics there are strong commonalities regarding politicized identity, with memberships that are focused and yet open to the broader community, along with cultural empowerment. These commonalities correspond directly to the vision of justice developed in the theoretical framework of this project, based on the belief that inclusion and self determination for all persons and groups requires a dual track approach that employs both economic and cultural forms of empowerment for marginalized groups.

The theoretical framework of this research project is based on the understanding that the pursuit of social justice must include both cultural and economic understandings of the causes of oppression. Therefore effective tactics to realise social justice must include both cultural methods and economic ones. Overall, this project found a greater emphasis on cultural approaches to social justice than economic issues. They all agreed poverty was an underlying cause of almost all the other barriers these communities face, but their actual work focuses more on cultural forms of resistance by fostering Aboriginal cultural traditions or sharing their stories in public forums. For example the WCWRC focuses on building relationships in the center and the community, the IMFCW's programs provide recreational and educational opportunities for communities members to develop and foster Aboriginal culture and address issues as they arise, and MLPD focuses on "getting their message out there" through media, research and other public forums. An economic approach might involve advocating for restructured work days, developing an alternative economic model and choices to live by in the community, or even

supporting the rights of workers in their communities along with seeking out employment opportunities for the unemployed. Carroll and Ratner (1996; 2001) argue that the broad economic frame for understanding social injustice enables diverse groups to work together, and in this case it is apparent that poverty is an issue all three organizations have identified. The barrier lies in the fact that their work does not directly address economic injustice. Further cooperation on the issue of poverty and income would require all three to focus more directly on either a structural critique of the economic system that produces widespread poverty, or a more problem solving approach that focused on working together to provide for the needs that are not being met within the existing economic system.

It is a major finding of this research that these organizations view both “community” and disability in very different ways. There is a significant gap between these three organizations in their conceptualisation of community. Both the WCWRC and the IMFCW focus on their geographic location as their community and determine what issues they will address and programs they will provide based on who lives around their center and uses their services. On the other hand MLPD holds a more abstract understanding of community which encompasses “the disability community” throughout Winnipeg and Manitoba. The consequence of these different understandings of community is a lack of contact between these organizations and their respective communities. For both the IMFCW and the WCWRC, because people with disabilities do not make up the majority of the people in their centers or do not use their services as much as other groups, people with disabilities in their communities are low on their priority lists. They have both failed to question why people with disabilities may not be in their centers, despite the fact that Aboriginal people, women and people living in poverty in general, experience higher rates of disability. On the other hand, for MLPD their abstract understanding of community has left them disconnected from community organizations in their vicinity and less connected to the people who live in their geographic community. I would recommend that MLPD attempt a project in their geographic community and make connections with groups working near by in order to

raise the profile of issues people with disabilities in the downtown core face amongst other organizations.

The largest gap I found in this triad of communities is between the disability and Aboriginal movements in Winnipeg. However, both the IMFCW and the WCWRC showed a lack of knowledge or contact with the disability movement. The lack of contact with and information about the disability movement and its relevance to their communities is a significant barrier to cooperation between these three groups. The lack of information the IMFCW and the WCWRC and their participants seemed to have about the disability movement and more systemic understandings of disability, and their apparent willingness to learn more, indicates that the disability community as a whole would benefit from more lateral activism; where disability organizations reach out and educate other community based organizations about their interests, their perspective and what they have to offer members of their communities. On the other hand, the participants from the WCWRC and the IMFCW need to widen their understanding of the nature of the marginalization their community members face to include experiences of disability. These organizations continue to approach disability as an individual problem rather than identifying the connection between stigma, disability, poverty and other forms of discrimination. Conversely, the disability community may also find their efforts to build connections with the Aboriginal community more fruitful if they incorporate Aboriginal culture and philosophy, as well as their agenda, into their own work. The disability community, and particularly MLPD, continues to use an individualist, problem solving approach to pursuing social justice for people with disabilities which also masks the interconnectedness between the issues faced by Aboriginal people, women and people with disabilities. A more holistic approach, reflective of Aboriginal philosophy and feminist practice, would help to elucidate the connections between these groups making working together more likely and is compatible with MLPD's goals of advancing the importance of disability supports.

However, it is important to note that MLPD is a different kind of organization with different

methods of activism than the WCWRC and the IMFCW. An organization like the Independent Living Resource Center (ILRC), an organization that also provides services and supports from a social model perspective, might have been a more straightforward comparison organization for this study and in the future would likely be a more appropriate organization to build relationships between the Aboriginal, feminist and disability movements in Winnipeg.

Overall, these organizations are problem solving organizations that apply the theory associated with their own movement, or that of the other two rather weakly. This leads to some contradictions in their methods and philosophy. This study also found that two competing discourses around feminism that reflect the mainstreaming vs. radical streams of the feminist movement in Canada. On the one hand the participants in this research agree with and act on the principles of feminism, whether they understand them in this light or not; these organizations all seem to agree that gender issues need to be addressed and that women in their communities face unique barriers to inclusion and self determination which must be addressed to realise the goal of strong healthy communities. However, most of the participants reported a reluctance to identify as feminist, or associate their work with the feminist movement because of the perception of feminism as “aggressive.” Failing to address or reclaim the title “feminist” and thereby developing an understanding that feminism is fundamentally about seeking inclusion and self determination for women of all ethnicities, classes, abilities and sexual orientations, while valuing women’s roles as mothers and caregivers, perpetuates the belief that women who assert their rights and seek justice are “unfeminine” and undesirable, and undermines social change.

The lack of analysis or focus on issues of racism and colonization in the IMFCW or MLPD is also a matter of concern because, as the WCWRC participant pointed out, Aboriginal people may also express racism toward other ethnic groups. Failing to address the systemic nature of racism in our society means that even those who are subject to discrimination because of race fail to recognise their own discriminatory behaviour toward others. A more integrated

analysis not only between the feminist, disability and Aboriginal movements, but also in connection to racism experienced by other ethnic and racial groups in our society would help create a more coherent vision of justice and methodology in the IMFCW and MLPD. Simply avoiding “labelling” as the IMFCW participant seemed to advocate will not address the realities of the barriers to social justice that exist for many social groups including Aboriginal women, people with disabilities, or other ethnic and racial groups.

All three of these organizations fit neatly into the category of mainstreaming or “problem solving” organizations, which shy away from radical structural critique, and instead focus on working within the current system to promote inclusion and self determination on an individual level. The problem solving tendency of these three organisations may or may not be a reflection of a broader trend in these communities, and may be the result of restrictive funding structures emanating from the government which reinforce the divisions between these identity groups and prohibit “political” work in organizations it funds. It behoves all of these communities to attempt to resist these restrictions, though it remains unclear how the issue of a lack of resources or alternative funding sources could be overcome entirely. One possibility for resisting these restrictions that has revealed itself through this research is pooling the resources of these communities, working together on common issues thereby making all of their efforts more effective, and stretching their resources while at the same time working to build a cross identity anti oppressive movement toward social justice.

Finally, the problem solving tendency of these organizations may also be a result of a weak application of theory in their work. The WCWRC, as the representative of feminist organizations in Winnipeg was the strongest in its application of theory of both the feminist and the Aboriginal movement in practice, which reflects the findings of the literature and is likely the result of a longer history of academic study and activism in the feminist movement compared to the Aboriginal and disability communities. The only solution to this issue that I can see is the continued work of Aboriginal and disability scholars, in their academic fields, that focuses on

supporting and developing their respective movements. Participatory action research methods are the most appropriate for bringing together theory as developed in the academe and activism as it occurs in the real world. Research in this tradition can also harness some of the resources dedicated to research and direct them toward facilitating social change that incorporates the lessons of both activists in the community and scholars in the academy.

**Recommendations for future action:**

More research on the breach between the Aboriginal and disability movements needs to be conducted, including a larger sample of organizations, before any generalization or conclusion about this rift could be made. The perspective of more Aboriginal activists on the issues of disability in their community and the rift between these two communities would help focus efforts to bring the two groups together. Because the participants from the disability community in this research who identified this rift between these two communities felt that further contact between the two would benefit them, the next step is to work on this relationship through increased contact and information.

More lateral activism on the part of the disability community, involving developing contacts and providing information about the disability movement and the systemic nature of disability to other community organizations and agencies, would benefit not only the disability community but also improve the ability of the feminist and Aboriginal organizations to identify and advocate for the needs of people with disabilities in their communities.

Further research on all three movements involving larger numbers of organizations would be required to determine if the “problem solving” trend identified in this project is an overall tendency in these three movements. If this is the case, developing a more radical critique, based on a materialist and cultural analysis, would likely benefit all three movements. The effort to develop a radical critique within these communities can also be supported through more participatory action research that focuses on drawing connections between these communities.



This project has engaged with the intersections between three separate identity groups and their respective social movements, Aboriginal disability and feminist movements to investigate the barriers that divide them and the issues and interests that have the potential to draw them together and forward. By asking activists who work in these three communities this research has gone beyond the academic literature on social movements to understand how individuals who are active in creating and changing the relationship between these three groups understand each other. Ultimately, this research has identified some initial paths these groups can take toward working together, developing a common vision of social justice and of how to effectively address the needs of their own communities.

**Figure 5: Analytical Framework Analysis, Findings and Actions**

<b>Facilitators</b>	<b>Analysis &amp; Findings</b>	<b>Barriers</b>	<b>Analysis &amp; Findings</b>	<b>Actions</b>
Cultural empowerment	Strong	Application of theory	Significant	PAR research
Politicized identity Organizations (of and for)	Strong	Critique of existing system	Significant	PAR research
Poverty and housing	Strong	Racism	Significant	PAR research
Geographic & social isolation	Strong	Community supports	Significant	Lateral Activism
Justice & Discrimination	Strong	Culture	Significant	Build relationship between Disability and Aboriginal community
Health & Mental Health	Strong	Lack of education information & contact	Significant	Lateral activism
Justice & Discrimination	Strong			
Violence & safety	Strong	Lack of resources	Weak	Pool resources
Self determination	Weak	Gender & Sexuality	Weak	none
Inclusion in major institutions	Weak			
Literacy & education	Weak			
Family	Weak			

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## Appendix 1: Organization descriptions

### **Indian and Métis Friendship Center of Winnipeg (IMFCW) Mission Statement and objectives:**

In June, 1958 the Indian and Métis Friendship Centre was created, the idea springing from an Indian and Métis Conference sponsored by the Community Welfare Planning Council of greater Winnipeg. Their purpose was to establish referral service for Indian and Métis people for the purpose of guidance and counselling on matters of employment, housing, education, health and other community services. Those attending the conference felt this was a practical way of helping the Indian and Métis bridge the gap between the Native community and the city.

#### **The Aims and objectives of the first Centre were:**

- To assist Indian and part Indian newcomers in the adjustment to urban life.
- To inform the community about the problems of Indians in the city and to take action in resolving the problems.
- To plan with government and voluntary health and welfare services, churches and other community groups to improve services to new comers of Indian origin.

The mission statement of the Indian and Métis Friendship Centre of Winnipeg will be to serve in friendship, the Aboriginal (First Nations, Inuit, and Métis) population of Winnipeg. The role and functions of the Centre will recognize the underlying beliefs that are inherent in the term "friendship". These beliefs will form the basis of all work carried out within the Centre. Its programs and services will accommodate the needs of the community when its members need a friend, including...

When it is the first time for an individual locating to the city...

When help is needed to support or organize an event or similar undertaking...

When assistance is needed with matters where no existing form of support is present.

#### **IMFCW Programs:**

The Centre has worked hard to maintain partnerships created with the Elders, Youth and women's groups in Winnipeg to ensure that the Friendship Centre's programs are focused on the needs of the community we serve.

- Joseph "Beeper" Spence Youth Resource Centre (Drop In): Open Monday to Friday 3:30 to 8:30. Saturdays - 11:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. (Lighthouse Program). Ages 7 - 18, Supper provided at 5:00 p.m.
- Elders/Kookums Corner: Held every second Monday - 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Presentations, Guest speakers, Games, Crafts, Support Programs. Light lunch provided

- Healthy Baby Parenting Program - Pre Natal & Post Natal: Held Tuesdays - 1:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. Presentations, Guest speakers, Public Health Nurse, Nutritional Cooking & Much More. Light lunch and child care provided
- Outreach & Family Support Worker: Held Monday to Friday - 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Presentations and workshops (a variety of topics provided to the community). Advocacy, Referrals, Housing and Family Support.
- Open Arms Community Soup Kitchen: Held Thursdays 12:00 to 1:00. A free nutritious meal. Open to everyone.
- Nobody's Perfect: Every Tuesday 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. & 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. Parenting classes, 7 week program. Child care and light lunch provided.

### **West Central Women's Resource Centre (WCWRC) Mission Statement and Philosophy**

**Mission Statement:** The West Central Women's Resource Centre (WCWRC) exists to assist in empowering women to help themselves, their families and their communities to safer, healthier lifestyles.

**Philosophy:** Our priorities are to provide support to women and work to break down social isolation. We do this through a capacity building framework, using a harm reduction model, based on four stages of empowerment:

- i. Entry level – Barriers begin to be broken for women who are isolated and marginalized. They begin to make connections with others.
- ii. Support/networking level – They start sharing information about community resources and develop supportive friendships. They become more active in the community.
- iii. Awareness level – Through interaction comes the realization that their situation is not uniquely theirs alone. They realize that they have similar problems as others and begin to question and learn how to cope and/or change them.
- iv. Action level – Women become involved in the broader community and voice their needs and assist in change that affects their lives, their family's lives and the community and city as a whole.

Building skills and capacities are components that are inherent in each of these levels. In an effort to create positive change in the community through empowering women and their families, we also hold community involvement and partnership building as high priorities.

#### **WCWRC Programs:**

- Respect: The RESPECT Program offers support for people struggling with issues of safety, gang involvement, or drugs and crime in their lives, families or neighbourhood.

- Childminding: The program offers an opportunity for people in the West Central community to receive free training and learn job skills in childminding.
- Drop-In and Services: Drop-in area, Clothing Depot and Community Cupboard
- Homes: The HOMES Project (Housing Options, Mentorship and Economic Security) has been created to give women support when dealing with problems or concerns around housing or income security (welfare or employment assistance).
- Volunteer: If you're looking for somewhere fun and meaningful to volunteer the WCWRC could be the perfect place for you!

**Manitoba League of Persons with Disabilities (MLPD) Mission Statement and Philosophy:**

The MLPD is a united voice of people with disabilities, and their supporters, that promotes equal rights, full participation in society, and facilitates positive change through advocacy and public education. The MLPD is a membership-based organization representing the concerns of people with all types of disabilities in Manitoba. The MLPD supports Manitobans with disabilities with social policy research and consultation, public education programs, information and referral services, and class advocacy.

**MLPD Philosophy:**

- Manitobans with disabilities have the same rights and responsibilities as any other person.
- All persons, regardless of abilities, must have access to opportunities in order to exercise these rights.

**MLPD Priorities:**

- Accessibility: MLPD members work to remove barriers which prevent people with disabilities from entering and using public buildings and services.
- Education: MLPD members work to ensure that students with disabilities have access to education opportunities in regular public schools.
- Employment: MLPD members work to provide effective employment policies and programs for people with disabilities.
- Support Services: MLPD members work to improve Manitoba's Home Care System so that people with disabilities can live in the community.
- Transportation: MLPD members work to guarantee that people with disabilities have access to transportation services.

## **Appendix 2: Letter of Introduction and research description**

I am writing to request the participation of your organization in my Master's thesis research project as a student in the Interdisciplinary Disability Studies program at the University of Manitoba. One disability, one feminist, and one Aboriginal run organization are participating in this research. If you participate we will be investigating the role of identity politics in the work of community based organizations in these three movements in Winnipeg. Your organization's participation will contribute to an understanding of the connections between your and other communities in Winnipeg, possibilities for a common vision of justice, and for cooperation between them.

*The purpose of the project is to:*

- Work to develop a vision of social justice with your, and two other (Aboriginal , feminist or disability), community based organizations by building on the importance of group membership, politicized identity as well as cultural and economic oppression.
- Discuss the connections between the issues faced by these three groups (Aboriginal , feminist and disability community members).
- Develop ideas about how to encourage cooperation between these groups.

*The questions I am trying to answer are:*

- What are the connections between the issues faced and visions of social justice held by these three organizations in Winnipeg, Manitoba?
- What common interests, language, values and activities held by these organizations can be built upon to develop a common vision and facilitate cooperation between them?
- What barriers to creating this common vision exist? What would it take to overcome these?

### **You will be asked to do three things:**

Identify three policy or research documents produced by your organization that reflect your vision of social justice (or philosophy), for me to review for the purpose of understanding the work and philosophy of your organization.

Choose 2 people appropriate for the role they will be asked to play: 1 interview and 1 group meeting.

For the interview, one administrator, board member, principal organizer or staff member will be interviewed about the work of your organization and its role in the disability, feminist or Aboriginal movements, and your organization's history of cooperation with other organizations in other social movements. The interview will last about 1 hour depending on how much the participant has to say.

The other participant will be asked to take part in one 3 hour group meeting. Preferably this person will be a member of the board of directors or staff member of your organization or a heavily involved volunteer who has a strong understanding of the vision of social justice (philosophy and goals) of your organization, and of the community you are a part of. The first half of the meeting will focus on getting to know each other, and discussing what social justice means in these three movements. The second half will focus on common issues faced by the

participating organizations, possibilities for, and barriers to cooperation between you. We will also be discussing methods of cooperation and brainstorming about a political intervention or strategy the groups could take together around a common issue.

Interviews will happen at a location and time of the participant's choosing. Though the locations of the group meeting is not yet decided, it will happen in a central, accessible location in downtown Winnipeg.

Participating in the research will benefit your organization by deepening your understanding of how we all can better serve a diverse population, provide an opportunity to reach out to other organizations and show how these other organizations could potentially better serve your community. This will also give you an opportunity to connect with people working in similar ways in other social movements, as well as help you understand the connection between your organization and the movement it is a part of.

If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to ask. If you are willing to participate or not, please let me know as soon as possible.

Thanks so much for your time,

Claire Atherton, MA student, Disability Studies, University of Manitoba

Cell: 204 218 0499

Email: [athertonclaire@hotmail.com](mailto:athertonclaire@hotmail.com)



## Appendix 3: Consent form

### Consent Form for Research Participants

**Accessible Movements: the Application of an Inclusive Model of Social Justice with Disabled People's, Aboriginal and Feminist organizations in Winnipeg**

**Researcher:** Claire Atherton, MA student, Disability Studies, University of Manitoba

**Research supervisor:** Dr. Deborah Stienstra, Professor, Disability Studies, University of Manitoba

**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 not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.**

You have been asked to take part in a participatory research project.

*The purpose of the project is to:*

- Work to develop a vision of social justice with your, and two other, community based organizations by building on the importance of group membership and politicized identity as well as cultural and economic oppression.
- Identifying the connections between the issues faced by the identity based groups participating in the project.
- Develop ideas about how to encourage cooperation between these groups.

*The questions I am trying to answer are:*

- What are the connections between the issues faced and visions of social justice held by the Inner City Aboriginal Neighbours (I-CAN), the West Central Women's Resource Centre, and the Manitoba League of Persons with Disabilities (MLPD) in Winnipeg, Manitoba?
- What common interests, language, values and activities held by these organizations can be built upon to develop a common vision and facilitate cooperation between them?
- What barriers to creating this common vision exist? What would it take to overcome these?

*What will I have to do?*

You will be asked to participate in either one interview (phase one), and/or two group meetings (phase two).

### **What will you be asked to do if you are participating in phase one (Interviews)?**

You will be asked to participate in one interview lasting between one or two hours. The interview will cover your organization's role in the disability, feminist or Aboriginal movement and the inclusion of Aboriginal, feminist or disability issues in its work, as well as any history of cooperation between your organization and organizations in other movements. It will also cover what problems your organization is trying to address and how, as well as the organization's overall visions of social justice.

The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. I will send all participants a summary of the main points of the interviews in preparation for the first group meeting. You will be asked to

review the summary and approve it before it is sent to the other participants in the group meeting(s).

**What will you be asked to do if you participate in phase two (Group meetings)?**

You will be asked to take part in either 1 full day group meeting or 2 three hour long meetings depending on what is easiest to accommodate for the participants. The group meeting(s) will include 6-9 people from each of the participating organizations. The purpose will be to discuss the common issues faced by the three organizations, their respective movements, and barriers to cooperation between organizations.

The first half will focus on getting to know each other and each other's organizations, and our respective ideas about social justice. If we choose the two meeting format I will compile a summary of the main points brought up in this meeting. You will be asked to approve any direct quotes of you in this document. The summary will be sent back to all participants, along with the questions for the second meeting. The second half will focus on common issues and barriers to cooperation, identifying a common issue and a possible intervention or political action we could take together on the issue.

Before the thesis is defended you will be asked to approve any quotations of your contributions to the discussion that will be included in the thesis.

*What are the risks and benefits to me?*

There are minimal risks involved in participating in this study. You may be asked to discuss personal issues in your life, which may be uncomfortable, but is not required. The focus will be on your thinking about organizations like yours involved in social movements, and will not require you to make any personal statements unless you want to. You may become aware of feelings of frustration as you discuss personal experiences with others. However, you may choose to stop participating at any time or refuse to answer any questions. Your decision will always be respected.

One part of your participation in the project is helping me to decide what an appropriate offering in return for your organization's participation would be. I would like to offer to produce a painting incorporating concepts, images, and colours important to your organization and movement. However, if you think there is a more appropriate offering, I could do that instead. If you have an idea for this please write it here:

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The project is designed to benefit participants as much as possible. You may make new friends, develop your understanding of your role in social change, or express yourself in a new way. Overall the benefits should greatly outweigh the risks to you. If you anticipate any risks to you please let me know and I will do my best to address and eliminate these.

*Will my identity be confidential?*

Whether or not you choose to include any personal information in the interview or focus group, my advisor and I will be the only people with access to information of a personal or identifying nature once the focus group is complete. However, anonymity during the focus group is not possible, and all participants including you, are asked to keep any information shared during the focus group confidential. To respect the privacy of the other participants, please do not discuss the events of the focus group with anyone outside the project.

The thesis and any subsequent papers will not use your name or any identifying characteristics. Your name will not be associated with your responses. The audiotapes and notes will be kept at the researchers' home in a locked drawer and destroyed six months after the thesis has been successfully defended. The number of participants in the research is small and the names of the organizations are included, so absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

**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.**

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**This research has been approved by the 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](mailto:margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca). A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.**

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Participant's name	Signature	Date
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Researcher and/or Delegate's Signature	Date
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## Appendix 4: Interview Questions

1. What is your role here, at this organization?
2. Can you explain the philosophy of this organization?
3. What is the group of people you hope to reach, influence, support through the work of this organization?
4. Please discuss what you think are the main barriers to inclusion/social justice this group(s) face?
5. Does this organization have a vision of social justice toward which the people here are working?
6. What do you think this organization does to contribute to realizing social justice?
7. What actions, programs, activities does this organization do and why? What would you say is its main focus and role?
8. Is there a connection between what you think are the main barriers to inclusion or social justice and the work done here?
9. What influence does the disability/Aboriginal /feminist movement have on how you do your work, or what issues you decide to address? Is there a connection? If not why?
10. Please describe any past efforts your organization has made to work with organizations in other social movements, either on a particular issue or program.
11. What do you know about the social model of disability? What is it?
12. Do you include people with disabilities or the social model of disability in your work here? How? If not why?
13. Do you include Aboriginal people, Aboriginal culture or philosophy into your work here? How? If not why?
14. Do you include feminist philosophy or feminist issues into your work here? How? If not why?
15. Do you think there are ways to do this better?
16. What are the main obstacles to this?
17. Do you find identity politics influences who benefits from or who participates in this organization?
18. Do you feel there is a connection between Aboriginal /disability/feminist movements? Why or why not?
19. Do you feel the work done here reflects that connection? How?

## Appendix 5: Focus Group Format

**Morning: 10 am 11:15 Coffee and food will be provided**

### **First Discussion: (will be recorded and transcribed for data collection)**

1. Please explain who you are, what you identify as, are you a feminist, are you Aboriginal ? Do you have a disability? Anything else you'd like to add?
2. I'd like to go around the group, have everyone introduce themselves and explain what organization you are a part of and what that organization does. Try to explain the issues you are trying to address as an organization and the vision your organization is working toward.
3. I'd like to discuss your feelings/thoughts about the Aboriginal , disability and feminist movements. Do you feel that you are part of a social movement? What does this mean to you?
4. I'd like to discuss what social justice means to each of you. How is this related to the respective movement your organization (and presumably you) are a part of? What does your organization do to address these issues?
5. Do you think cooperation between these groups would be fruitful? Why or why not?
6. What do you think stops movements, and organizations that are a part of them, from working together?

### **Break 11:30-1:00**

1. Can we identify an issue of interest to all three groups?
2. Describe why this issue is important to your community.
3. Can we think of a solution to the problem that would satisfy all three perspectives? If we were to design a political intervention in our community around this issue what would it be?
4. How likely would you be to do this intervention? Why or why not?
5. What did you think of this process?