In the Spirit of Sharing:
Honoring First Nations educational experiences.

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis documents First Nations students' experiences in post-secondary institutions. This work recognizes the important, complex social issues currently encountered by many First Nations peoples. As such, this thesis is grounded in the words of First Nations students who are recognized as experts on the topic of their academic journeys. The issues of respect, collaboration and voice are key parameters utilized throughout the entire research project which was conducted through open-ended audio taped interviews with four self-identified Aboriginal female scholars from the Greater Vancouver, Lower Mainland area in British Columbia.

Within First Nations there is an underlying common vision: to collectively ensure that the painful history of colonialization ceases to continue, to begin to heal from this past, and to actively work toward securing a brighter future for all First Nations peoples. This community focus involves creating institutions in which Native peoples can actively participate. *Education is a part of this vision.* Securing the advancement of current, and future, Aboriginal generations, is viewed as one way to ensure the overall rights of First Nations peoples. Integral to this collective vision, is a common denominator of 'giving back' to ones community, or to the Aboriginal community in general. As such, this work is dedicated to supporting this collective vision that invests in the overall wellness of First Nations communities. It is from *the spirit of sharing* that this research explores a largely undocumented area and contributes to dialogue among all those interested in creating more respectful and meaningful educational environments for First Nations learners.

This work is dedicated to
the collective vision of past, present and future
First Nations peoples.

A vision that invests in the
overall wellness of our First Nations communities.

Acknowledgements

In a conversation with a friend I once stated that, "if it takes a community to raise a child, it has taken an entire Nation to pull me through this masters degree!"

First, I would like to offer a heartfelt thank you to the four First Nations women that took time out of their extremely busy schedules to generously share their stories with me. Each of these women gave me far more than an 'interview', they gave me the courage to go on, renewed spirit in our shared laughter, and strength in realizing there are other First Nations students out there that I could relate to. I was empowered to be in their company. Without their support of my research, this paper would not exist.

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And finally, to all of our ancestors that survived a long history of unthinkable and inhuman assimilation tactics. The proof of your incredible strength and resiliency is found in the smiles of our youth. Thank you for your journeys.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Research Focus

This thesis will examine First Nations[1] graduate student experiences in post-secondary institutions. I will explore what Aboriginal students have to say about their experiences in pursuing their academic goals by means of open-ended audio taped interviews with 4 self-identified Aboriginal graduate students in the Lower Mainland area. The issues of respect and collaboration are key parameters utilized throughout the entire research project in terms of methodological approach and in 'writing up' the thesis utilizing accessible language.

There is a body of related literature that is commonly grounded in a broader examination of government policy and historical analysis, and while I recognize the value of such work, I would like to further recognize the importance of the individual daily lived experience of First Nations peoples. As such, this thesis is grounded in the words of First Nations students that are recognized as vital experts on their academic journeys. By engaging in this research project, it is my hope that this work will contribute to the dialogue that further addresses the diverse challenges that continue to impact Aboriginal scholars.

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[1] From the outset, it is important to recognize that throughout my paper I will use the (intentionally capitalized) words, Native, Aboriginal, First Nations, interchangeably; (and at times I will quote the term "Indian"). When I utilize this terminology I am referring to the first inhabitants to occupy the country in which we live (which includes Métis, Inuit, Innu, and Two-Spirited peoples). I will also use the term Indigenous to broadly refer to global Indigenous peoples. Language is problematic, as many of these terms are accepted by some Aboriginals, and rejected by others for various political and philosophical reasons (Adams 1995:11; Monture-Angus 1995:2; Hedican 1995:5). The core of these arguments involves the fundamental issue of deciphering terminology, which has been imposed by non-Native policy makers and the implications of what such terms mean. The deconstruction of terminology, *or labeling*, is directly linked to a paramount issue of 'what do Native peoples want to use?' It is not the aim of this paper to homogenize/essentialize Aboriginal peoples into one blanket category, like all other non-Aboriginal populations; I respectfully acknowledge that diversity of opinions exists amongst First Nations peoples.

Points of disjuncture: the limitations of academic discourse

From the outset, it is important to note that my holistic philosophy neither fits into, nor is fully encompassed by 'standard' university guidelines. For me, writing about issues that are extremely important, in a linear, one-dimensional format is both uncomfortable and a "work-in progress". Currently in academic genres there seems to be little room or recognition for emotions such as laughter, pain, joy and anger. Try as I have in the numerous drafts of this paper, I have finally resolved that I cannot write effectively and produce work I am pleased with if I try to write and emulate the 'standardized' academic works that surround me. This is important, as it has been a difficult barrier for me to overcome in the completion of this thesis: in essence, for me to stay true to the foundations of my holistic philosophy as a Native person, while working in the confines of an academic institution that subscribes to doctrines that at times, and in a multitude of ways, just does not feel right for my spirit. This issue surfaced in the interviews I conducted, as Phoebe discusses the struggles she faced in finding a balance between school and family responsibilities. She states,

> with the degree, you don't have the time, the patience, the energy, the respect even - and I hate to say that - the respect to be there for your family. And that is not a good feeling. {...} But the way things were going I was being pulled in every direction, parenting, working, trying to finish up the degree, having a relationship. {...} Not only was I not taking care of myself. I was not looking after my own well being in the best way, and unfortunately, it works out then, that you are not looking out for the other things that are important to you. You are not being there for your family the way you want to be. You are not treating people the way you know you can, and the way you want to.
>
> Interview with Phoebe: Sept/00

Another area that deserves attention from the outset and shapes how this paper unfolds is the fact that contemporary Native social issues are complex and not strictly linear, for critical historical factors continue to hold significant meaning. As such, this thesis moves back and forth in time. Woven into each chapter are the multi-layered

factors that continue to impact Aboriginal scholars, and in keeping with how I view 'traditional' Native learning, this work leaves 'partial' onus on the reader to conceptualize the significant factors that continue to shape Native social/educational issues[2].

Honoring the work already done in this area

While it is imperative to highlight areas in need of immediate improvement in increasing the retention rates of First Nations learners, it is equally important to recognize the developments already made. By doing so, we recognize and celebrate the painstaking work established by previous, and current advocates, from both First Nations communities and also non-Native individuals who work collaboratively with Native communities. Focusing on positive areas is important because it moves the mindset from disempowerment to empowerment. To clarify, while this paper depicts some very complex and at times 'difficult' issues, my aim is to do so in a manner that reflects the overall strength and resiliency of First Nations peoples. The determination found within the lifelong career choices of many Native peoples needs to be continually recognized and applauded as I wholeheartedly recognize how arduous this work can be at a multitude of levels.

The road to this research topic

Throughout the years I have been privileged to participate in numerous First Nations gatherings in both Canada and the U.S, that include feasts/potlatches, educational conferences, Pow-Wows, youth conferences, and community health forums. In all my

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[2] See discussion on 'reader response-ability' in Kim Anderson's (2000). Recognition of Being; reconstructing Native womanhood. (pp 48-49.)

experiences, and common to all First Nations, there is an underlying common vision: *to collectively ensure that our painful history of colonialization ceases to continue, to begin to heal from this past, and to actively work toward securing a brighter future for all First Nations peoples.* This point is expressed by many of our leaders, as stated by Grand Chief Alphonse Bird, "Our future as a people depends upon our ability to prepare our children to deal with a rapidly changing world that is not always sensitive to our need and determination to retain and build our culture and communities." (cited in Dyck 1997:7)

> My whole sense of being in school and working hard, was because I was going to go back and help my community and work for my community
>
> Interview with Candice: Jan/01

There is a community and generational aspect to the collective lifelong career choices made by many First Nations peoples. Integral to this collective vision is a common denominator of 'giving back' to ones community, or the Aboriginal community in general. Scholar, Eber Hampton, from the Chickasaw Nation states, "education is to serve the people. Its purpose is not individual advancement or status." (Hampton 1995:21). This like-minded community focus involves creating institutions in which Native peoples can actively participate; *education is a part of this vision.* There is an overall community focus on actively creating educational environments that are culturally meaningful to First Nations communities. Securing the educational advancement of current, and future Aboriginal generations, is viewed as one way to ensure the overall rights of First Nations peoples. These factors have largely contributed to my interest in First Nations educational issues.

The decision to narrow my topic to documenting First Nations Graduate student experiences stemmed from years of various discussions I had with Native students. In

the years of 'hanging out' with Native students I came to realize through our discussions that there were many issues that we could talk about amongst ourselves, that mean so much to us. There is a common underlying thread of understanding of our experiences that are not typically discussed with others who are not from the same background. These powerful discussions have been filled with anger, fear, joy, tears and laughter; but most importantly these discussions have been about creating support for each other in our individual and academic endeavors. This is a key reason for selecting my thesis topic: to document the reflections from the experts that continue to navigate their way through academia. So then, *in the spirit of sharing*, and in 'giving back' to my community, I write this paper primarily for other Native students, to support First Nations students in the recognition that they are not alone in their experience, and *that their experiences and voices are important*. And although there is an emerging body of literature that addresses Native educational issues, there remains a minimal amount of research that exists that specifically documents the contemporary experiences of First Nations students. We need research that is written by, and amongst, Aboriginal peoples utilizing the key parameters of respect and collaboration and that is written in accessible language that does not exclude those who are frequently marginalized from such discourse. All of these components are integral to my research focus.

Yet another reason for selecting my topic involves some common and frequently asked questions that have been posed to me, largely by non-Native university professors, administrators and students alike. I have been invited to sit on panels consisting primarily of SFU university administrators, and I have also given presentations and interviews that focus on Native education issues. It is from these experiences that the

questions emerge that I have been *repeatedly* asked: "What is it that Native students go through?" "Why is it so hard for Native students to get through post-secondary education?" And, "What can we do to ensure Aboriginal student succeed?" It is from these questions that I recognize there is a 'gap': communication is missing that addresses these very important questions. *I know that this paper will not hold all the answers*, but it will begin to explore a largely undocumented area and will contribute to the dialogue for all interested in creating a more respectful and meaningful educational environment for students of Aboriginal ancestry.

There is a strong collective vision within Native communities that values using education as a tool to ensure the overall betterment of our communities. My life's work is dedicated to supporting this collective vision that invests in the overall wellness of our people. This paper is very much about taking a brief glimpse at the process of what we, as Aboriginal people, continue to endure in our educational journeys. Sometimes, I cannot help but laugh at how engaging in this widely viewed 'esteemed' academic process has brought me to the brink of lunacy; perhaps writing about this process will help to demystify this overall experience for fellow First Nations students. As well, this work may be useful for those who wish to support Native students by better understanding what Native students continue to endure. Yet another reason I continue to engage in this academic journey is that, as a Native woman, having the 'M.A.' behind my name will help my voice be heard more clearly by those people who think that educational credentials are of paramount importance. The final key reason for me engaging in my thesis topic, is because *I truly believe* that my thesis topic contains within it an important message that *needs* to be documented.

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCHING THE 'RESEARCHER'

> There is a longing in the heart of my people to reach out and grasp that which is needed for our survival. There is a longing among the young of my nation to secure for themselves and their people the skills that will provide them with a sense of worth and purpose. They will be our new warriors. Their training will be much longer and more demanding than it was in olden days. The long years of study will demand more determination, separation from home and family will demand endurance. But they will emerge with their hand held forward, not to receive welfare, but to grasp the place in society that is rightly ours.
>
> Chief Dan George
> From My Heart Soars (1974:91)

My life's journey recently brought this message back into my path while I was at a friend's place browsing through her library. I first came across these words as a young child. I remember that I liked how this book was written, I liked how I could read and understand the words, I liked the pictures of Native faces, I especially liked the fact that this book was written by a Native Grandfather. Unlike all the other books around me, I felt a connection to this book. At such a young age I had no idea how significant all of these factors would be in my life's journey, and how important Native educational issues would be in my life. All of the factors: including using accessible language, feeling connected to Native writers, and placing Aboriginal experiences and voices at the center of my work, all are issues that continue to shape how I navigate my way through academia. This chapter will attempt to unfold some of the factors that shape how my life's journey brought me to the path of writing this thesis.

Honoring Nisga'a Protocol

In keeping with Nisga'a protocol, I will begin with an introduction[3]. My Nisga'a name is K'amyuuwa'a, a name selected by my late grandmother, Sigidimnak'

[3] In her work, Cree/Mètis scholar Kim Anderson, also discussed the importance of identifying oneself and views it as "[practicing] an Aboriginal method of contextualizing knowledges" (Anderson 2000:21)

(matriarch), Jiits' (grandmother) Pauline Robinson. She explained to me that this name translates to "the one who carries the light to a dark community"[4]. I am very proud to carry this name, a name that I continue to 'grow into'. My parents are Ray and Sylvia Guno (nee Adams) and both are from Gitlakdamiks (New Aiyansh, B.C.). I am Laxsgiik (eagle clan) from the house of Minee'eskw. The Chief of my house is Simoogit (Hereditary Chief) Minee'eskw Rod Robinson Sr.. I have three younger brothers, they are Preston, Foster and Che. I recognize that the meaning of this introduction will be lost on many, but, I am compelled to include this introduction as it is important to me. That said, I will continue in this chapter to describe issues that have impacted my educational experience.

A Predetermined Relationship with Education

My journey, or relationship, with education started long before I was born. I am a third-generation survivor of the residential schools. Although I did not personally attend the residential schools, the residential school system has *directly* impacted my life as numerous members of my Nass Valley community were forced to attend the residential schools. My grandparents went to residential schools, as did both of my parents, and this overall experience directly impacts my life. My family means the world to me, and I

[4] I am compelled to highlight a discussion I had with a 'potential' research candidate. In learning my Nisga'a name she responded with a comment that 'she found it interesting that our people would refer to ourselves as a dark community'. In thinking back to this comment, I believe it is important to recognize that meanings can be misinterpreted in the translation. Further, my Jiits' that selected this name for me, was an extremely complex woman and a powerful matriarch. I was honored to have lived with her during the last two summers of her life, when I traveled home during my graduate studies to work in my community. I sat and talked long hours with my grandmother, she taught me a lot, I was continually awestruck by her wisdom. She explained to me that her selection of my Nisga'a name comes from a multitude of meanings, in the 'knowledge' I carry with me, in both worlds that I walk in, in the First Nations community and in the white community. She also felt my name described the light, or humour, that I bring home in our shared laughter. So in many regards, she explained the multi-layered and multi-directional meaning she placed in selecting my Nisga'a name. Often these meanings do not clearly translate onto paper and in between languages.

maintain the *utmost* respect for all of their life-long journeys. I have grown to learn how the residential school experience is directly related to their survival after being forcefully removed to residential schools that were long distances from families, community and culture, for the majority of their childhoods. The residential school experience has *directly* impacted how three generations of my family have come to learn 'family'. The fact that I have a 'family' and the fact that I am here today writing this paper, speaks volumes for the profound strength and resiliency of my parents, my family and of the overall power of First Nations culture.

I have been privileged to be able to work within my community organizing a conference that created a space where Nisga'a community members had the chance to reflect upon their residential school experience as a way of healing and moving forward. This experience taught me that not all people view their experience at the residential schools as a bad experience. I respect that viewpoint. However, as an overall comment, I believe that the trauma that the entire residential school experience brought to Native communities is currently apparent in *every* dire social consequence that continues to pervade many realms of Native communities. Residential schools were one of numerous tactics that were used in efforts to undermine, or to attempt to eliminate, Aboriginal culture. Candice recognizes this country's history of denying First Nations access to adequate education, and also, the importance placed in contemporary educational advancements. Candice states,

> I personally believe that because our people have been denied, and given such subservient education in our recent past, now that we have the [vision to] capacity build and educate ourselves, if we have members within our community that are willing to make that commitment; they should pursue the highest levels of education possible. {..} We have a right to educate ourselves. I have so many opportunities that I should grasp, because my mother definitely did not have any of these opportunities. I look at my family, and I want a role model for my daughter.
>
> Interview with Candice: Jan/01

Canada's long history and diverse strategies of colonialization continue to impact how I navigate my way through *every aspect* of life around me, which includes my academic journey. I continue to 'undo' the imprint that the residential school era has directly brought to my life. Living the life of a colonized people, while I am surrounded by institutions that are still grounded in oppressive mentalities, is for me at times, extremely difficult, utterly exhausting and consumes most of my energy.

The 'colonizing arm' that has been used by past governments and institutions continues to 'reach in' and impact the daily lives of many Native peoples and their communities. This point is highlighted by Maori scholar, Linda Smith (1999),

> The reach of imperialism into 'our heads' challenges those who belong to colonized communities to understand how this occurred, partially because we perceive a need to decolonize our minds, to recover ourselves, to claim a space in which to develop a sense of authentic humanity (23).

The silent and individual struggles (that are the direct results of Canada's historical oppression) that many of our Aboriginal community members continue to work through, are of paramount consideration. Throughout my schooling, I have continuously read about the social statistics that claim to describe Native communities in terms of 'high alcoholism rates, shorter life expectancies, highest suicide rates nationally'. However, it took me *years* to link these impersonal, one-dimensional statistics from the flat pages they are written on, to my daily struggle of overcoming, and *living through*, what these social realities mean to my life, and to the First Nations people and communities around me. Smith (1999) states that "research has not been neutral in its objectification of the Other. Objectification is a process of dehumanization" (39). The 'statistics' are people that I know and these facts continue to directly, and indirectly, impact my life.

The overall de-colonialization attempts of First Nations peoples have *directly* resulted in my personal healing journey. My commitment to my healing journey is in itself a full-time job but at the same time I have commitments to many other important issues that I continue to work through simultaneously. There are times when I try to imagine how life would be for all Native community members without having to deal with a history of assimilation and colonialization, as well as the current facets of oppression - how much *easier* life would be. But at the same time, I recognize that even with the past/current pervasive forms of institutionalized oppression, how amazing it is that our people continue to make great strides in the collective vision of ensuring that Canada's colonial history does not repeat itself, and that future Aboriginal generations will have stronger life chances. Lil'wat scholar and educator, Lorna Williams, states,

> Education is the most powerful institution in any society, and teachers are its most powerful agents. As Aboriginal people we know this very intimately. Education has been a force for destruction. It is also a powerful force for construction, and it can produce citizens who are capable of determining their own future. (Williams 2000:145)

I recognize that personal issues are not typically discussed in academic discourse, but I question whom that silence benefits? I grappled with including this information, because of my concerns about how this information can be misinterpreted. My first concern was for my family and community. I in *no way* want to represent my family/community in a negative light. I am proud to be apart of my family/community. My second concern (and one shared in general conversations with Native students) is that by highlighting our daily realities we do not seek 'pity', nor to be viewed as 'victims', nor are we attempting to make up 'excuses' for course deadline extensions/requirements.

All of these interpretations would be fundamentally incorrect. Further, the inclusion of this information does not invalidate my research as too 'subjective'[5].

I have selected to share this information from the outset because I believe it sets the context of my personal journey and the challenges that I continue to face as a Native person, a Native woman, and as a Native 'academic'. It is imperative to acknowledge that my journey is exactly that, *one* journey. I support the fact that First Nations people are from diverse communities with richly diverse viewpoints. I will now briefly highlight my personal journey through education and some of the struggles I have faced.

My Educational Journey

As a child I attended kindergarten to grade twelve schooling in off-reserve provincial public schools in Terrace, B.C. I rarely spoke out in class; and did not really grow into my 'voice' until much later in my life when I was in my mid twenties. Looking back, there is a vivid memory of my grade one class that depicts a significant issue that I continue to grapple with, particularly within academia. I wrote about this issue for the first time, over twenty years after it occurred, as a part of my final theory paper in my first year of graduate school.

> The class was reciting aloud, as a group, a nursery rhyme - after which the teacher asked a question about the nursery rhyme. The class did not know the answer, I knew the answer - but did not answer aloud. As a class, we went back to repeat the rhyme, at the end the teacher posed the question again; to no avail. On the third try, I stated the answer aloud, just as the class began the rhyme again - the teacher heard the answer and asked 'who said that?' I did not let her know it was me, so we started the rhyme again, I said the answer again. She stopped the rhyme and asked again - after a few minutes she realized it was me who said the correct answer. Upon this realization the teacher's response in amazement was "I am surprised....I just didn't think that *you* would have the answer" (Guno 1997: 4-5).

[5] The issues of 'objectivity' and 'subjectivity' will be further addressed in my chapter on methodology.

This early experience features how my teacher's assumptions and expectations of me shaped her view of my ability in her classroom. Further, at such an early age, I was made aware of my 'defined' role in the classroom. Issues of marginality, self-esteem and using one's voice are integral factors compounded into this example. Two decades later, I can now see that this early experience sent a clear message to me about my life-long academic journey.

Not until my teenage years did I come to realize that I was 'different' than the majority of my schoolmates. In retrospect, I now realize that I was usually the only Native person in the majority of my classes. Throughout my childhood, I formed friendships with non-Native children. However, many of the other kids teased and ridiculed me for being Native and as a result I got into a few physical fights with boys, but I did not 'face time in the principals office' for such incidents, and unlike many other Native children, I managed to get through school with an unscathed 'permanent' record. As a child, I faced a number of years of name-calling such as 'dumb, stupid, and ugly'. These taunts have continued to resonate within me as I write this thesis. Producing this thesis is when I have become most aware of the damaging impact that this racism has had on my self-esteem and has been a difficult obstacle that I faced throughout all of my academic endeavours, particularly in regard to completing this thesis.

I was not by any means a 'gifted' student. I had 'average' grades throughout my entire early schooling years. Further, I struggled through my first two years of college and once faced academic probation. It took me three consecutive applications to get accepted into SFU to complete my undergraduate degree. On my third application, I had resolved that if I faced another rejection letter, I would have to drop out of post-

secondary education, as my college did not offer a four-year degree program. Getting accepted into SFU to complete my undergraduate degree was a major accomplishment for me and I vividly remember the day. I highlight these points to clarify the fact that my educational journey has been continuously one of 'almost slipping through the cracks'.

I recognize that many students face struggles throughout their academic endeavors. However, unlike other students, Native peoples face a history of widespread and institutionalized oppression that is directly linked to the current challenges for Native learners. There have been numerous times in my life when others have silenced my voice. I have to pick my battles of when and where it is safe to use my voice. Sometimes I choose to be silent because either I am too tired to try and 'educate' others, or because I know that my voice will fall upon ignorant ears that cannot hear me; and sometimes, my silence is simply a form of resistance[6]. Silence used as a form of resistance surfaced in the interviews I conducted. Joan states,

> it is funny, because when I had confidence – before I went to university – I had a really good confidence – and all through my life people were trying to take it away {..} I stood up for myself – when I was going through elementary and high school and I got shot down so badly. And when you are that young, - you know they are wrong - but you just don't know what to say. Well, here I was [facing similar issues in post-secondary and], I knew what to say -- *but I didn't want to do it anymore.*
>
> Interview with Joan: Jan/00

I am reminded of a specific example of how the issue of silencing surfaced for me in my graduate studies. I tried to initiate a class discussion by highlighting Aboriginal women's critiques of elitist feminist practices. This comment resulted in a silent, but clearly evident tension for me in this classroom setting. I felt completely disengaged from this class. I tried to rectify the situation by approaching the professor after class - to no avail. Further, almost every student in this classroom individually approached me to

[6] The issue of resistance is integral to all aspects of First Nations discourse and will continually resurface throughout the paper; and I will offer a deeper analysis of resistance in my chapter on social theory.

express their regrets about the struggle they could see me encountering in this class. But like me, they could not break this silence and bring the issue to discussion. In addition, the professor continually called me by the wrong name. It was only after I jokingly called this professor by an incorrect name, (from the opposite gender!) that my name was remembered for the last few weeks of the semester. The dynamics of this situation were further compounded by the fact that there was a student in this class who continually took an authoritative position, to victimize, and speak *for* Canadian Native peoples. Further, this student was trying to appropriate my ideas and research. These combined factors resulted in my remaining extremely 'guarded' in this class. At the time, I had a dream that I was sitting in this classroom, *literally* unable to speak.[7]

Whether it be an experience in my first year of elementary school, or my first year in graduate school, the same powerful message was transferred to me, a message that silences and devalues my opinion. However, it is imperative to note every time I overcome this silencing - my voice grows stronger as a result. This thesis can be viewed as an example of overcoming this form of silencing. I hesitated over the inclusion of the last example, but I truly believe that this critical experience profoundly impacted my ability to find my voice, trust my opinion, and write this thesis.

There have been numerous days I have considered leaving the masters program as a measure of self-preservation and resistance. There are many reasons I have wanted to quit, that include: the stress of living in financial poverty, the guilt of not fulfilling my

[7] I believe these dynamics contributed to the fact that I received the lowest grade of my graduate studies in this class. According to my calculations I was 0.04% below the grade I received. Another student in this class indicated that her overall grade was 2% lower than my final overall grade. This student was 'bumped up' to the higher grade, I was not. Grade point average (GPA) scores are very important particularly in regard to admission to graduate studies programs. This is an important factor to consider in the event I pursue doctoral studies. I did not seek to officially contest my final grade; at the time I felt dis-empowered by the overall experience.

community role, I have missed many feasts because I couldn't travel home due to lack of travel funds and the demands of academic coursework. The university bureaucratic process has drained my energy in problems encountered in getting my research completed, and also in my prolonged support of First Nations students and the social/political struggles encountered on campus. Historically, education has been equated to the complete assimilation of a Native person and I struggle to not let this degree pull me away from my identity. And finally, overcoming my 'internalized colonialization'. All of these combined factors have worn me down, but at the same time, I continually struggle with how ***to not*** "participate in my own oppression" (Hampton 1995:35). This thesis is one of the most pronounced, most permanent, and most public forms of using my voice. To further compound this, I am not only using my voice, but have been given the trust of four Native women who I highly respect. It is of the utmost importance to me that I honor this trust by producing a thesis that closely reflects the important experiences shared by these four women.

This chapter has highlighted the complex factors that have shaped my educational experience. The next chapter will highlight how historical factors continue to impact contemporary Native educational issues. A fuller understanding of Canada's history since the time of non-Aboriginal encroachment on Indian land sets the context for *all* current social issues faced by Native Canadians particularly in regard to contemporary First Nations educational issues.

CHAPTER 3: HISTORY

Since the time of early "contact"[8] strong Western viewpoints existed on First Nations communities and have greatly impacted how Aboriginal peoples have been viewed, and treated, by non-Aboriginal governments and peoples. Assimilation is an integral factor to all Canadian government 'Indian policy'; which includes Native educational policy. Historically, education was used as a tool to enforce deeply entrenched Western assimilationist ideologies; further, this history continues to profoundly impact the relationship between Native communities and educational institutions. The deconstruction of oppression is difficult as the task involves a critical examination of numerous inextricably connected factors. The pervasive nature of oppression further perpetuates the elusive nature of racism; in order to understand the complex social issues currently faced by First Nations peoples, one must understand how longstanding, how all-encompassing, and how deeply embedded oppressive ideologies are.

It is not my aim to exhaustively document the inextricable links between numerous historical factors involved in Aboriginal/European relations[9]. Moreover, I realize that it is important to recognize that knowledge is relevant to the context of the time it is produced. That said, the aim of this chapter is to critically analyze how the

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[8] I utilize this popular term "contact" to depict the time of European arrival in the Americas. It is imperative to recognize that Aboriginal peoples were in "contact" with surrounding Indigenous communities long before the first European explorers arrived in the Americas. Aboriginal communities were actively involved in "contacting" surrounding communities since time immemorial for various complex social, economic, trade, and political activities. Smith (1999) addresses the imbedded connotations involved in the Western construction of 'prehistoric' and 'historic' time frames (55).

[9] For further Indigenous discourse in this area, Maori academic Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) offers an in-depth critical analysis of relevant factors such as: Imperialism/economic expansion, religious and/or "moral authority", Eurocentric or Western world-views, scientific "reason or validity" and/or patriarchal ideologies; these are all important underlying factors of the history of Western colonialist and oppressive systems (19-41).

current challenges encountered by First Nations educators, academics and community members alike should not be viewed as deficiencies within First Nations communities, but rather, should be viewed as the residual effects of hundreds of years of profoundly misguided administration, and hegemonic ideologies that have been continually and vigorously enforced upon Native peoples by non-Native governments and populations. This premise is postulated in Dyck's (1991) work where he argues that we must recognize that "the current social, political and economic difficulties confronting Indian communities emanate from a longstanding and complex pattern of beliefs, relationships and institutional activities that have been given far less attention than they deserve"(2).

In an attempt to break down and identify the deeply imbedded nature of widespread oppressive ideologies this chapter begins by recognizing the foundational premises that have guided Indian policy. This recognition involves the early, and grossly inaccurate, views of Native peoples that were maintained by non-Aboriginal peoples (Brody 1981; Dyck 1991; Smith 1999). The underlying tone, and the debates about Aboriginal culture and identity as to whether Native peoples were in fact human beings deserving human rights, speaks *volumes* about the roots of European/Western attitudes maintained in regard to Aboriginal lifestyle. Smith (1999) states,

> One of the supposed characteristics of primitive peoples was that we could not use our minds or intellects. We could not invent things, we could not create institutions or history, we could not imagine, we could not produce anything of value, we did not know how to use land and other resources from the natural world, we did not practice the 'arts' of civilization. By lacking such virtues we disqualified ourselves, not just from civilization but from humanity itself. In other words we were not 'fully human'; some of us were not even considered partially human. (25)

A second important recognition is in the fact that Aboriginal policy has first and foremost been assimilationist in nature (Brody 1981; Dyck 1991; Smith 1999). Once the colonizers became 'enlightened' to the fact that Aboriginal peoples were in fact human

beings that were not 'going away', they then had to figure out how to manage Native peoples. What has followed has been *years* of inept and contradictory policy. Tobias (1976) confirms how "protection, civilization, and assimilation have always been the goals of Canada Indian policy" (39). The concept of protection stemmed from the initial viewpoint that First Nations communities had to be protected from exploitation by incoming European settlers (Ibid). Integral to this concept was the fact that Aboriginal peoples maintained a "special status in the political and social structure of Canada" (Ibid). This initial recognition of 'special status' was thought to be temporary and later would be phased out after all Aboriginal communities were 'civilized' into Western ways, after which Natives would be viewed as completely assimilated thereby leaving no need for special rights/status, or legislation, for First Nations communities (Ibid).[10] These historically misguided Eurocentric ideologies laid the foundation for all subsequent Indian policies created by non-Native policy makers, particularly in regard to Indian education policy.

What followed was the ultimate culmination of all of the previous unsuccessful assimilation attempts and the onslaught of the residential school era, an era that clearly exemplifies how "Indian Education Policy" has been contradictory and largely mismanaged. This analysis will provide an overarching examination of relevant historical factors that continue to impact contemporary Native educational experiences.

While it is important to recognize how strong and widespread Euro-Canadian's assimilative ideologies were/are, it is equally important to recognize the prolonged, and ongoing, strength of First Nation's resistance to such oppressive ideologies. This point is

[10] Indeed, the debates on special status and inherent rights continue to thrive at the heart of all Land Claims issues.

highlighted by Dyck (1991) who writes "although the relationship between Indians and Euro-Canadians has, in the long run, been dominated by the superior force and power of the latter, native peoples have sought to defend their interests through both direct and, more often, indirect and subtle forms of resistance to Euro-Canadian objectives"(4). These historically misguided Eurocentric ideologies laid the foundation for all subsequent Indian policies created by non-Native policy makers.

Most relevant to the links between Indian policy in general and its manifestation in Canadian Aboriginal education policy, is the notion of tutelage. Dyck likens the widespread treatment of Native peoples to one where Western government/peoples continually perpetuated a self-appointed role of 'coercive tutelage' over Native peoples (24). "Reduced to its essentials, tutelage comprises a form of restraint or care exercised by one party over another as well as the condition of being subjected to such protection or guardianship. It also refers to a situation where disciplined instruction is provided to a pupil by a tutor" (Ibid). Unlike all other forms of 'tutelage-based' relationships, that eventually end, Native Canadians continue to face widespread ideologies that regard First Nations communities as incapable of governing themselves and their communities (Ibid).

Despite all of their policy efforts, non-Native policy-makers slowly realized that the overall assimilation attempts were, by and large, unsuccessful. As a result, government shifted its concentration to policy efforts that focused on the children of Native communities by using education as the instrument to fulfill assimilationist ideals. As a result the residential school era officially began. In order to address the complex issues involved in the residential school era, this section will examine three key inextricably linked issues. Section (1) involves the foundational mandate of cultural

oppression inherent in residential school policy and its deliberate attempt to fragment First Nations communities. This fragmentation will be briefly discussed in section (2). Section (3) discusses the overall poor administration and funding and lack of academic priority that were intrinsic to residential schools. Evident throughout all sections are the multi-layered forms of abuse faced by many First Nations students. "In the memory of many residential school students, the worst aspect of the care they received was the absence of emotional support and nurturing by staff" (Miller 1996:290).

I recognize that the aforementioned sections are just some of the important issues that are of paramount consideration when we seek to examine the significance of the residential school era. I wholeheartedly recognize that critical analysis of the residential school era is not easily compartmentalized into 'neat and tidy' sections of *one* chapter of a thesis. Further, I recognize and support the idea stated in the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council's (1996) community-based research that, "[t]here is an ever growing body of residential school literature. Social scientists continue to produce formal studies. These studies tend to be highly theoretical and impersonal. Somewhere in the process of their writing, the individual that attended residential school is lost" (Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council 1996:1). Further, it is slowly becoming more transparent to the public eye that the residential school can be attributed the poor health and high death rates of First Nations (Fournier & Crey 1997:49; Kelm 1998:64)[11]. The profound impact of the complexities of the residential school era is one that I continue to live through and involves numerous issues that go far beyond the critical analysis offered in this chapter.

[11] And in keeping with honoring my own spirit and experiences I encountered in producing this thesis, this chapter has been one of the most difficult chapters to write. I frequently had to 'stop', face this sorrowful past, and then resume interacting with discourse that depicts the painful history of my people.

(1) The Residential School Era: Goals of Cultural Oppression

In Canada, Western education has been forcefully imposed upon First Nations communities for over 300 years. As noted by historian James Miller: "the first known boarding-school arrangement for Indian youths in Canada began in 1620 under the auspices of the Récollets" (Miller 1996:39). In most of Canada, the final phasing out of the residential schools took place between 1965 and 1970 (Miller 1995: 400-405)[12]. Early forms of compulsory schools such as Indian day schools and boarding schools, varied in their degree of removal of Native children from cultural influences; and were viewed as unsuccessful in accomplishing their main objective, to completely eliminate Native identity. In a similar fashion to the ineffectiveness and contradictions that emerged from previous policies involving Indian Administration, the Canadian government continued to encounter similar problems with Indian educational policy. Simply stated, First Nations people would not allow their culture to be erased. As in all previous government Indian policy, the residential schools were yet another effort to nullify Aboriginal culture (Barman et al [eds]:1992&1994; Dyck:1991&1997; Fournier & Crey:1997; Furniss:1995; Haig-Brown:1988; Jaine:1993; Miller:1996; RCAP:1996).

Historically, Euro-Canadians viewed the 'successful' educational attainment of a First Nations person, as the successful assimilation of such an individual. "An Indian who went to university and earned a professional degree as minister, lawyer, teacher, or doctor could be given a location ticket[13] and enfranchised immediately without going

[12] This was not the case for all First Nations communities as is highlighted in Dyck's (1997) research conducted on behalf of the First Nations peoples from Prince Albert, Saskatchewan (see Dyck 1997:11).

[13] The location ticket was "an essential feature of the civilization process and a necessity for enfranchisement. It was a means by which the Indian could demonstrate that he had adopted the European concept of private property" (Tobias 1976:44). Further, the Native community member had to successfully pass a number of tests, and a 'three-year probationary period' to prove the land would be used

through the probationary period" (Tobias 1976:44). This past continues to impact contemporary First Nations academics. Mohawk scholar, Patricia Monture-Angus (1995) writes, "[re-claiming] our place in formal educational institutions is going to be a very difficult task and it is going to require a lot of patience. We must remember that schools in Canada were once part of the government's plan to assimilate us"(79). Of the many coercive strategies used in attempts to dismantle First Nations culture, the residential schools were significant in fragmenting First Nations families and communities.

(2) The Residential School Era: Fragmented Communities

Recruitment for the schools is often depicted as a traumatic experience, not only for the children who were literally rounded up throughout First Nations to be transported to the pre-determined school destinations, but also for the parents and families who were left behind (Haig-Brown 1988; Jaine 1993; Miller 1996). Often, when Native children anxiously returned home from the residential school, the situation they returned to was disjointed. Traditional language was at times lost, alcoholism prevailed for many parents and/or families left behind, and as well the family structure had frequently broken down (Haig-Brown 1988; Jaine 1993; Miller 1996).

The trauma that students faced was further clarified to me when I performed an opened-ended group interview in 1994 for an undergraduate class with three of my family members who were all attendees of Edmonton Indian Residential School (EIRS). They told me that some students cried all the way to EIRS, which was a long three-day train ride from the Nass Valley area to Edmonton. (Guno 1994). Many children were not

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appropriately and to prove the individual was 'fully qualified for membership in Canadian society" (Tobias 1976:44).

able to travel home for Christmas breaks or holidays, as their families could not afford to pay for the transportation, and consequently they spent a majority of the year at EIRS (Guno 1994). A very important issue arose from this group interview that specifically features how fragmentation occurred. My mother was explaining all the work and time she put into 'care packages' containing baked goods and money, to send to her older brother at the residential school. At this point of the interview, my Uncle Terry looked at my Mum and told her that he did not receive *any* of the care packages. It was only because of this interview that this issue arose. After twenty years, my uncle learned about the care packages his sister, and family sent him (Guno 1994:7). The term 'care package' symbolizes *so much*; further, considering the deplorable food conditions my uncle faced, the food items would have been a well-received treat.

The residential schools fragmented families. An issue that was expressed to me in later years, and in general discussions with younger family members who managed to avoid being sent away to residential schools. I had a chance to hear about how devastated the remaining family members were after older siblings were taken away to residential schools. Particularly, I had been told how heartbroken my late grandmother was at seeing her eldest children taken so far away from her for such prolonged periods of time.

(3) The Residential School Era: Poorly Managed & Under-funded Education

As I have highlighted, the goals of assimilation of Aboriginal culture were clearly adhered to by Euro-Canadians involved in the operation of the residential schools and were firmly enshrined in the policy mandates for the residential schools. An area that

was much less clear was in the overall management and funding of Indian Education. The federal government maintained control of the schools by 'subcontracting' the administration of residential schools out to various churches (Dyck 1997:14; Furniss 1995:26). This was viewed as mutually beneficial for both parties: not only would the federal government deny its fiduciary obligation, but also the churches would gain open access to Native populations (Dyck1995:14; Furniss 1995:27). Yet another key issue to recognize in the administration of the residential schools is the fact that neither the government, nor the churches had the skills or expertise needed to effectively run the schools. As well, residential schools were 'chronically under-funded' (Dyck 1997:14; Haig-Brown 1988).

While there was inconsistency in who was accountable for the operation of schools, there was clarity in the fact that all parties denied the financial responsibility attached to operating the schools. "Inadequate funding for staff indicates the low priority of Native education in the government's budget" (Haig-Brown 1988:69); further "Oblate principals would call 'child labour' necessary to support the institutions" (Gresko 1992:94). Students were over-worked and underfed. Malnutrition prevailed at residential schools: "the second most frequent and bitter recollection of former student concerns food, the lack of it, and its inferior quality" (Miller 1996:290).

In my own research I was told that a student riot was instigated at EIRS, and one of the reasons included complaints about having to eat poor and often spoiled food[14](Guno 1994). It is widely documented that it was often the children themselves

[14] Another reason for the EIRS student riot was to protest the dismissal of a compassionate teacher (Guno 1994).

who were primarily responsible for the laborious maintenance of running the schools (Haig Brown: 1988; Fournier & Crey 1997; Gresko 1992; Jaine 1993; Miller 1996).

Academic excellence was not a priority of Indian education policy. Related literature continually underlines the importance that was placed on chores as well as gender specific roles in terms of home management (Dyck:1991/1997; Furniss:1995; Haig-Brown:1998; Miller: 1996). The main focus of residential schools was assimilation and not academic excellence,

> conversion of the children was more important than book learning. And for both government and church, a major reason for their inconstant dedication to the pursuit of learning was their commitment to the assimilative program that had always underlain their understanding of the purpose of residential schooling (Miller 1996:419).

First Nations resistance is a key factor to acknowledge in the analysis of the residential school era. Haig-Brown's (1998) study involved thirteen former residential school students from the central interior of British Columbia. Haig-Brown (1988) states,

> The most outstanding feature which is revealed by this study is the extent and complexity of the resistance movement which the students and their families developed against the invasive presence of the residential school. The struggles for power and control within the school may be seen as a microcosm of the ongoing struggle of Native people with the Euro-Canadian presence in this country (25-26)

Native parents and students used both passive and active forms of resistance. Resistance ranged from parents physically resisting the removal of their child/ren from communities, children running away from schools, non-cooperation and non-compliance in schools, cultural persistence secretly maintained in schools (in language use and cultural practices), as well as openly defiant behaviour and rule breaking in schools in attempts to 'be sent home' (Barman et al:1992; Haig-Brown:1998; Jaine:1993; Miller:1996). As in all previous failed assimilation attempts, Aboriginal peoples have selectively chosen to accept 'useful' elements of Western 'ways of life', but not at the cost of traditional Native values (Dyck 1991:27). Dyck notes,

> Notwithstanding the unceasing appropriation of their lands and resources, Indians have managed to maintain their communities, albeit at enormous cost to generations of Indians who have had to endure relentless government pressure to assimilate them. The fact that government departments are still dealing with the Indian 'problem' today, in spite of the extraordinary policies and actions that have been countenanced in the past in order to 'solve' it for all times, stands not only as a condemnation of past government programs, and policies, but also at evidence of the amazing determination of Indian communities to retain their integrity as Indian communities. (Dyck 1991:4)

Post Residential School Era: A brief overview

As stated previously, in most of Canada, the phasing out of residential schools occurred a mere thirty years ago. In concluding this chapter I will offer a brief overview of related matters that continue to shape contemporary Native education issues.

In 1969 the Liberal government submitted the White Paper to parliament. Though the government consulted with First Nations communities on recommendations about how to revise the Indian Act, in the end, the White Paper did not incorporate any First Nations' viewpoints (Dyck 1991:108). Rather, the White Paper called for the "outright abolition of federal Indian administration within five years" (Ibid). As in all previous Indian Administration, the government *still* fundamentally adhered to the ideology that First Nations peoples would simply 'go away' and that Native peoples would concede to the elimination of the overall recognition of First Nations' special status in exchange for a pan-Canadian identity (Ibid). The White Paper clearly depicted how far apart white governments were from Native governments in their approach to rectifying Aboriginal social issues as First Nations groups critically opposed the goals of the paper.

In 1970, the Indian Association of Alberta countered by presenting the Prime Minister with the Red Paper (Dyck 1991:109). The overall response from First Nations communities, for the first time, marked how united and strong First Nations communities

were nationally in their political orientation and prowess in using the media as a tool to highlight First Nations issues in this country (Dyck 1991: 109-113). The political activity and organization of First Nations leaders and governments during the 1960's and 1970's marked the birth of a stronger political presence of First Nations communities among Canadian Governments. Stemming from this political arena was the 1972 National Indian Brotherhood's document entitled "Indian Control of Indian Education" (Barman et al 1994:2). The document reaffirmed existing educational mandates in Canada that recognized (1) parental responsibility and (2) local control of education (Ibid). The document highlighted the fact that Aboriginal communities had no say in the direction of Native learners, and that First Nations input is a critical factor in all aspects of Native educational policy (Ibid).

> The National Indian Brotherhood's position paper, accepted in principle by the federal government, was the first expression of a theme that has since dominated discussions of Indian education and ushered in a new era. Its two basic principles continue to shape educational initiatives at all levels, as Indian people become increasingly active participants in the education of their children. (Barman et al, 1994:2)

Since the resurgence of First Nations political activity in the '60's and '70's there have been numerous government documents and researchers who have produced reports about First Nations social issues:

> Since 1972, much has happened. Numerous bands have taken over the operation of schools on reserves. Indian cultural survival schools have been established in several provinces. Curriculum products have been developed in almost every locality. Indian teacher education programmes and other post-secondary programmes have produced many graduates. These initiatives reflect a continuing process characterized by intensive political activity on the part of Indian people, their leaders and their supporters, aimed at wresting control from federal and provincial agencies. Despite the gains and successes, Indian control is far from being realized. (Barman et al, 1994:2).

Many of these reports are produced in collaboration with Aboriginal community members which is now a major premise guiding all current research; however, the same messages are being delivered. This message continues to seek to address and

acknowledge our collective history of oppression and to ensure First Nations' peoples' voices are heard in regard to all policies and governance directly related to First Nations communities. Since the 1970's significant gains have been made in Native education[15]. Education environments are slowly improving for First Nations learners; but this work is far from completed. Mohawk educator, Marlene Brant Castellano, writes,

> Over the past twenty-five years there have been many positive developments in the administration, content and methods of Aboriginal education. It is now common for First Nations and Inuit communities to manage their local schools. Aboriginal school boards have been established under land claims settlements and/or self-government agreements. Specially designed teacher education programs have increased the numbers of Aboriginal teachers in schools. Métis and Aboriginal people living off reserve, who constitute a major portion of the population in some northern regions, have assumed an influential place in regional school boards. Curriculum in Aboriginal schools and some provincial districts has been revised to reflect Aboriginal cultures more accurately. Nevertheless, the premise of an education that delivers the skills to survive in a post-industry global economy while affirming the ethical and spiritual foundations of Aboriginal cultures is far from being fulfilled. (Castellano et al (eds) 2000:xiii-xiv).

One of the most recent reports on Aboriginal peoples is the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. This report states, "[in] 1991, even though Aboriginal youth were staying in school longer, the majority were still leaving before completing high school. The gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in terms of high school completion had narrowed only slightly" (RCAP 1996, Vol. 3:438).

This chapter has highlighted the historical roots of vastly erroneous viewpoints maintained in regard to First Nations peoples. The assimilation tactics used by Euro-Canadian settlers is deeply imbedded in all forms of Indian administration. Aboriginal people have continually resisted policy and administration that has sought to eliminate, and habitually disregard, the importance of First Nations culture and identity. The culmination of previously failed assimilation attempts is clearly depicted in the

[15] For further information on Educational policy initiatives please see Abel, Dittburner & Graham. (2000) *Towards a Shared Understanding in the Policy Discussion about Aboriginal Education.* In Aboriginal Education: Fulfilling the Promise. (pp 3-24).

residential school era. Aboriginal peoples are extremely mindful of this past. Currently, education is viewed as an important tool for future First Nations generations. Regaining control of the education environments that Aboriginal learners participate in is one way First Nations communities seek to ensure that their students engage in culturally meaningful education and ensures that the historically assimilative aim of education never repeats itself.

CHAPTER 4: THEORY

From the outset, I would argue that there is no existing academic theory that fully encompasses my work. This is an important fact, as it speaks to the struggles I have encountered in producing this thesis, and responding to questions such as, 'where does my work 'fit in' to academia?' For this thesis, it has been extremely difficult to create a balance between important aspects of my cultural philosophy and current academic criteria. My belief system stems from a strongly rooted foundation of holistic philosophy that involves a fundamental respect for the interconnectedness of all elements of the environment; a philosophy that is neither easily defined, nor described, in words - but involves more a 'way of being'. The fact that no single current academically recognized name exists in reference to Aboriginal "theory" further problematizes this discussion. Dei et al (2000) state: "[a] study of indigenous knowledges brings a complex array of theoretical and methodological issues to the table. There is the problem of defining 'indigenous knowledges' and establishing workable boundaries for studying them" (Dei et al. 2000:5).

For a number of reasons, I cringe at using the term 'theory' in relation to Indigenous philosophy. First, I question if by engaging in 'theorizing' Native cultures we are perpetuating Western practices of validating knowledges? And second, in Aboriginal circles, the term 'theory' has numerous negative connotations associated with it. Smith (1999) states that, "Indigenous peoples have been, in many ways, oppressed by theory" (38). That said, for the purpose of this discussion and in lieu of 'Native Theory', I broadly refer to Indigenous knowledges, Aboriginal epistemology, or First Nations philosophy to encompass Aboriginal ways of being and knowing.

I recognize the problems involved in discussing Aboriginal and Western epistemology in opposition to one another. This chapter is guided by the framework described by Dei et al (2000) who state that in their multiple readings of Indigenous knowledges, their work

> ...is not intended to create a false dichotomy of 'conventional/colonial/external' knowledge as bad, and 'indigenous/marginalized/non-Western' knowledge as good. Our objective is to rupture the present relationship between 'valid' knowledge and 'not valid' knowledge and to introduce 'indigenous knowledges' as legitimate ways of knowing that are both dynamic and continuous. In doing so we interrogate aspects of Western science that have had destructive effects on indigenous communities. We are careful not to treat indigenous knowledges as static, or to romanticize the past of indigenous peoples. We are aware of how complex indigenous knowledge forms are, and we are proposing a multiplicity of centres through shifts in knowledge production. (Dei et al 2000:4-5).

In looking back upon my overall experience in academia, I have thoroughly enjoyed classrooms where there was open room for critical analysis of Western discourse. However, as a general comment, this was not the norm, as there have been many classrooms where there was no room/acceptance for Aboriginal epistemology, nor was there much room for discussions involving First Nations' critiques of Western discourse. As previously highlighted, when I finally got enough nerve (in some classes) to initiate a critical discussion about selected course readings, professors would take the comments negatively, or students would look at me blankly, like *I* was the one who wasn't comprehending the material. Needless to say, both of these scenarios would result a general feeling of disconnection to the class/coursework for the remainder of the semester for me.

As previously stated, a large part of the struggle I have faced in writing this thesis involves how to negotiate my work between these two different worldviews. In the end, I do not see my work fitting into 'normal' academic genres, but at the same time, I recognize the critical implications of marginalizing Native scholarly work as 'different'.

I continue to navigate my way through an institution that places theoretical orientation as a paramount consideration. Linking one's work with a theory in essence legitimates such work; it validates ones work academically. Like other Indigenous scholars, I understand the importance of theory, and the links to methodology and the academic rigor ascribed to within these parameters (Smith 1999:38). However, I can also see the limitations of enforcing such theoretical orientation on individuals that have no 'academically approved' theoretical orientation to ascribe to. Maori scholar Linda Smith (1999) states,

> The development of theories by indigenous scholars which attempt to explain our existence in contemporary society (as opposed to the 'traditional' society constructed under modernism) has only just begun. Not all these theories claim to be derived from some 'pure' sense of what it means to be indigenous, nor do they claim to be theories which have been developed in a vacuum separated from any association with civil and human rights movements, other nationalist struggles or other theoretical approaches. What is claimed, however, is that new ways of theorizing by indigenous scholars are grounded in a real sense of, and sensitivity towards, what it means to be an indigenous person (Smith 1999:38).

In her interview, Phoebe critically addresses theoretical orientation. In ascribing to parameters that she did not truly believe in, she found it difficult to locate the relevance of academic debates. Issues are placed in direct context to her experience of working amongst impoverished communities. Phoebe states she faced challenges in:

> writing from a perspective that is not something that I truly believe in. Writing material, speaking publicly, in a class, not always from the heart. Not trying to appease the masses, or anything, but just sometimes feeling like it is a bit phony. It is a bit - phony. Sometimes I just felt like saying, 'oh why don't you just all fucking shut up'. We all sound like a bit of freaks shows here, like what are we talking about? That whole, the land above the land of the living. Which is "theory". At times you know, I just couldn't relate especially with working with all the poor people that I work with. I don't know, it is just at times, it was like I am dealing with my own family, and just not wanting to have anything to do with the university. {...} Well that is a dislike and a like, because you put yourself in there, and you challenge yourself, like, maybe I am not supposed to be here, but I am here. {...} And you plug and you plug and you plug. And then you have those moments of clarity, I have just as much as a right to be here, as you do.
>
> Interview with Phoebe: Sep/00

I look forward to the day that Indigenous 'theories' unfold more fully as well as the profound positive impact that that will have on First Nations scholars. In the meantime, the 'best fitting' theory for my research is critical feminist anthropology. As

such, this chapter will begin by highlighting important commonalities between First Nations scholarly discourse and feminist perspectives[16]. I will then highlight the important theoretical issues involved with language and voice. In concluding, I will highlight the important multi-layered meanings of resistance found within all First Nations scholarly discourse.

Linking Aboriginal Discourse and Feminist Perspectives

Historically, feminist studies (or Women's studies) was negated as a valid source of knowledge. All too often, stereotypes have negatively labeled feminists and the discipline itself as "too emotional and subjective" and therefore invalid academically. It has taken several decades to come to the point where Women's Studies programs are now accessible on many university and college campuses. It is from these parallels that First Nations scholarly discourse emerges.

Literary critic, Julia Emberley, raises an excellent point in reference to what I view as a key similarity between First Nations issues and feminist issues, in that the feminist paradigm critically examines the oppression and subordination of minority peoples within various institutions and academic discourses (Emberley 1993). Anthropologist, Abu-Lughod states that "feminist scholars, united by their common opposition to men or patriarchy, produce a discourse composed of many voices; they discover the self by becoming conscious of oppression from the Other" (Abu-Lughod 1991:138). Emberley also states that "to see through the eyes of the oppressor, to see through the eyes of the oppressed: when we can accomplish this sense of double vision,

[16] It should be noted that I will refer to feminist discourse in a very broad sense - it is not the aim of this thesis to homogenize/essentialize all women into one category, I recognize the diversity that exists amongst women, as well as the diversity that exists in First Nations communities.

then we can heal the racial violence that separates us, that separates us from each other" (Emberley 1993:151). Highlighting subordination is a clear link between feminist paradigms and First Nations scholarly discourse. A key element in Native scholarly discourse involves critical analysis of how institutions perpetuate the subordination of minority groups for the advancement of their own agenda. In stressing the importance of theoretical paradigms, Indigenous scholar Smith (1999) states,

> [Decolonization] does not mean and has not meant a total rejection of all theory or research or Western knowledge. Rather, it is about centering our concerns and world views and them coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes. (Smith 1999: 39).

Another key area that links First Nations discourse and feminist theories is in the innovative approach to methodology. Reinharz (1992) emphasizes the fact that feminist perspectives are not in themselves a method but "a perspective on an existing method in a given field of inquiry or a perspective that can be used to develop an innovative method. The fact that there are multiple definitions of feminism means that there are multiple feminist perspectives on social research methods" (Reinharz 1992:241). There is a common view that incorporating a more holistic approach to learning is a key factor in creating a more inclusionary space for Native students, an approach that incorporates the interconnected and multi-layered aspects involved in social research (Battiste & Barman (eds) 1996; Castellano et al (eds) 2000; Smith 1999). Métis scholar, Madeline MacIvor writes,

> Traditional cultures had richly diverse approaches to educating their young {..}. The adaptation of traditional teaching methodologies such as experiential learning, storytelling, observation, supervised and unsupervised participation, inter-generational teaching, apprenticeship, dreaming and imagination, and ritual and ceremony, can provide powerful educational tools for Aboriginal (and other) students. (MacIvor 1996:79).

Through feminist paradigms, new ways of approaching research methodologies have come to the forefront of social research. Emphasis on voice, collaboration and

representation of the subject are all key links between feminist paradigms and First Nations research. These multi-disciplinary approaches to research are innovative new ways in which research can be negotiated on the terms of community members themselves. Although feminist perspectives have in many ways, helped to 'pave the way' in creating space for many First Nations, and minority scholars, there are points of contradiction between First Nations and feminist paradigms.

What Language and Whose Voice?

Integral components of theoretical orientation include issues of "language and voice", "authentic/valid" knowledge and "marginality". In terms of theoretical orientation, issues involving language are important, particularly in terms of utilizing language that is widely accessible. African American theorist, Patricia Hill Collins (1990), stresses the importance of incorporating accessible language within her work. "Theory of all types is often presented as being so abstract that it can be appreciated only by a select few. Though often highly satisfying to academics, this definition excludes those who do not speak the language of the elites and thus reinforces social relations of domination" (Hill Collins 1990: xii). Yet another important point raised by Hill Collins is that utilization of accessible language does not invalidate the discourse academically (Ibid). Hill Collins also takes a position where she begins by placing African- American women at the center of her analysis, rather than on the periphery. She also utilizes "multiple voices" to achieve the "diversity, richness and power" of her subjects (Ibid). In terms of voice and language, Hill Collins (1990) raises excellent points in terms of how to incorporate voice, as well as utilizing a methodology that begins from a different

standpoint (minority as center) in an attempt to deconstruct many of the underlying premises currently prevalent in 'elitist' work.

Critiques of feminist discourse involve issues of voice, language and speaking for the 'other'. Emberley (1993) stresses the fact that many feminists are involved in re-creating "textual violence" as they speak more to an intellectual elite, they also do not incorporate the voice of those women about whom they choose to write (Emberley 1993:50). Despite the fact that feminist discourse aims to incorporate space for minorities, there are exclusionary elements to feminist paradigms. Emberley states,

> I am not suggesting a naive or uncritical approach to the 'voices of oppressed'; I am, however, insisting that feminist scholarship cannot deny that its work, whether explicitly acknowledged or not, is often in dialogue with the political, intellectual, and creative contributions of women for whom it, somewhat ironically, purports to speak. (Emberley 1993:50).

Emberley also stresses that there are many cases in which 'First World Feminists' take a stance where they claim to know what is best for 'Third World Women'. She cites Egyptian scholar, Nawal el Saddawi, who has raised critiques of 'First World Feminists' stating that it is crucial to recognize that by critiquing Third World practices - they are ultimately assuming a position of superiority, or tutelage, over minority women and their lives (Emberley 1993:55). In essence, the space which Third World women seek, is being defined by First World feminists. There are 'First World feminists' who claim a form of superior knowledge over 'Third World Women'. "'First Worldist' feminist practices, as well as providing a critical space in which to recognize that the formation of a feminism of decolonization, must attend to an inevitable antagonism between the (at times contradictory) values, interests, and aims of feminist and decolonist struggle" (Emberley 1993:101).

A key critique raised by First Nations' women/scholars in response to feminist issues is in the act of defining problems. Who is defining what the problems are? One view is that the community members themselves should directly address issues. Highlighting problems 'from the outside' can ultimately be used to perpetuate stereotypes of First Nations peoples. Emberley writes,

> The decolonizing of feminism, a critique of the imperialist assumptions in feminist theory, involves an investigation into feminist scholarship produced in the 'First World', particularly those works which reproduce imperialist relations of domination of the 'Third World Woman'. This homogeneous representation of the 'Third World Woman' often functions as an instrument of consolidation for liberal feminism (Emberley 1993:54).

In spite of the fact that feminist perspectives have critically highlighted problematic issues of subordination, there is an element of hierarchy inherent to discourse produced in some feminist literature.

"Giving 'voice' in print culture is one way Native writers empower themselves and claim themselves as agents of their own cultural traditions" (Emberley 1993:73). Accessible language is key as the discourse is open to a wider audience that can then lead to further dialogue - utilizing elitist language excludes a large number of Aboriginal people. I am not suggesting that First Nations scholars cannot comprehend academic theoretical paradigms, but rather theories need to be critically dismantled and situated in the Western ideologies that they stem from[17]. The issue of 'silencing' is key as is highlighted by Emberley (1993).

> The decolonization of feminist theory and a supplementary reading of postcolonial theory from a feminist perspective might be said to have critical value only inasmuch as it is possible to recognize the colonizer's own self-critique. {...} In other words, a critique of the epistemological assumptions in feminism, which continue to contain indigenous or subaltern women as marginalized, can do no more than call attention to the problem of their 'silencing' (Emberley 1993: 74).

[17] For further discussion on this topic see Smith (1999). Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples.

Anthropologist, Henrietta Moore (1996), calls into question the fact that in terms of producing knowledge, we must continually question who is ultimately viewed as 'producers of knowledge' (Moore 1996:1). Moore highlights the inextricable links between knowledge, identity and power (Ibid). Concepts presented by Moore involve notions of space; including the notion of borderland work, or discourse produced in the margins of academia. She states that

> it is hard to overplay the value of these emerging discourses that seek to establish a space and locale in the borderlands for knowledge production. Part of the significance of focusing on borderlands and margins has to do with questions about how knowledge works in different places, how it gets transformed, but also with borderlands and margins as spaces of transition, transformation and reformulation" (Moore 1996:10).

Moore raises key elements in relation to the creation of space, borderland work is an area where 'transformation and reformulation' can occur (Ibid). As discussed later in this chapter, Aboriginal women's 'resistance writing' resists marginalization but can be viewed as similarly related critical discourse (Emberley 1996:100).

A key point raised by First Nations women in response to feminist perspectives is in recognizing that the social challenges encountered by First Nations peoples must be situated in our current community situations. My aim here is not to minimize the importance of gender subordination; but rather to highlight the fact that many First Nations women identify cultural oppression as a paramount consideration. Lee Maracle (1996) of the Sto:lo Nation writes:

> Liberation is not simple. Re-feminizing our original being is not a matter of gaining equality with Native men, sharing the work of providing for family, obtaining decent jobs and education, moving out into the world and struggling to make the law work fairly for us. First, we must understand the conditions under which we currently live. It is difficult to critically examine our current condition while the power to alter or maintain it rests with those outside ourselves (Maracle 1996: xi).

Cree/Métis scholar Kim Anderson interviewed forty First Nations/Métis women throughout Canada (Anderson 2000). Anderson's work addresses the complex issues faced by First Nations women in their communities to "build bridges and raise awareness of our collective experiences as Native people" (Anderson 2000:31). Further, "one of the goals of this [work] is to create alternatives to the negative stereotypes of Native women as they have appeared in print (Anderson 2000:49). Anderson reminds us that the plight of First Nations women must be viewed within Canada's colonial history. In referring to abuse that some First Nations women face Anderson states, "I see these problems as a sickness that is the legacy of colonization and something we must address as we stand at the brink of decolonization" (Anderson 2000:14). Her analysis offers insight into how European settlement altered the lives of First Nations women by imposing Western ways of female subordination (Anderson 2000). Anderson's work recognizes that pre-'contact' lifestyles for Aboriginal women were varied, and more challenging for some; but as a general rule, Aboriginal women of this country maintained "a common sense of power, a power that was not part of the European women's experience" (Anderson 2000:57) prior to European encroachment. Anderson takes on the challenge of writing about the abuse that continues to impact the lives of a number of First Nations women (a daunting task to say the least). She addresses many complex issues and writes about these issues in a manner that dismantles negative stereotypes of First Nations women and the communities they come from. Anderson's work features the fact that First Nations issues are not divided solely by gender. She states,

> it is uncommon to hear Native women simply blame men for their condition. I think many Native women are aware that the social problems that hit them the hardest are the outcome of colonization. The struggle, then, becomes a struggle against the systems, policies and institutions that were enforced upon us by the colonizer. It is not a simplistic struggle against men or individuals. (Anderson 2000:55-56).

Many Native women consider cultural assimilative oppression as a fundamental and paramount consideration. (Anderson 2000; Monture-Angus 1995; Maracle 1996). Further, the issue of resistance is an integral component to First Nations discourse.

First Nations Resistance

The notion of resistance is an integral factor in Aboriginal scholarly discourse; moreover, there are multiple forms of resistance each with complex meanings. Many First Nations students pursue academic goals as a means to help their communities and yet while they attend these academic institutions they encounter a paradox as they engage with historically assimilative institutions. For some Native students the act of resistance is one way in which this paradox is handled. Resistance may be viewed in the literal sense: the strong urge to leave a situation which causes great unease and discomfort as in Patricia Monture's experience in law school (Monture-Angus 1995:59). In terms of the residential school experience, Haig-Brown's (1988) analysis offers insight as to how Native students maintained their own forms of silent resistance while attending residential schools. Métis scholar, Howard Adams (1995) views resistance as a response to colonization. He writes, "Intrinsic to our history is our people's sense of resistance and struggle that emerges from a growing counter consciousness and realization that we have suffered injustices and oppressive inequalities because of our race and colonization (Adams 1995:35). Notions of resistance are key as they can be viewed as ways in which First Nations peoples are creating the parameters of Native intellectual discourse on our own terms.

First Nations womens 'resistance writing' is highlighted by Emberley (1996). She states "texts by Aboriginal women demand to be read in the context of resistance, in particular, resistance to the structure of internal colonialism in Canada" (Emberley 1996:99). Emberley (1996) identifies "three sites of resistance that pertain to Aboriginal women's writing". First "the texts resist the normal conventions of literary classification"; Emberley stresses the important connotations involved in categorizing Indigenous discourse; in how we situate First Nations writings in relation to other minority work and also in "conceptual borders" and labeling certain discourses as fiction/non-fiction. Second, "the writings resist alignment of Aboriginal women with other critical practices such as feminism". Emberley recognizes "[though] I have suggested that Aboriginal women's writing is feminist in impulse, the colonialist assumptions in academic feminist theory make it difficult for Aboriginal women writers to align themselves with this and other dominant forms of feminism". And finally, "a third site of resistance that these texts can be said to address is their inscription of an agent of resistance. Both in their characterization and as writing subjects, Aboriginal women are writing themselves and their people into history as subjects to and of their own making". A critical point highlighted by Emberley involves reader response to Aboriginal writings "how does s/he "read Aboriginal writings of resistance as an alternate form of critical practice, not as un-theoretical or non-theoretical critique, but as writing produced by subjects engaged in critical praxis?" (1996:99-100). This question sums up this chapter, and the problems I have encountered in situating my research in current theoretical paradigms.

A question posed at my prospectus defense, involved further explanation of "what makes resistance work?" Elizabeth McIsaac, antiracist educator, states "[for] resistance to be considered a legitimate concept in a discussion of social agency, it must be such that it truly challenges or subverts dominant culture" (McIsaac 2000:91). Her work is based upon concepts presented by Giroux (1983) and Scholle (1990). She identifies three main premises identified by Giroux:

> First, resistance assumes a dialectical notion of human agency. The dynamic nature of domination demands an analysis of the complex ways that people respond to their experiences and to structures of domination; this in turn involves considering intentionality and consciousness. Second, the concept of resistance recognizes that power is never one-dimensional; rather, it is practiced as both a mode of domination and as an act of resistance. {..} Third, resistance contains an expressed hope for social transformation. (Giroux 1983: 108 cited in McIsaac 2000: 91).

McIsaac also utilizes Scholle's (1990) work that "insists that for resistance to be politically significant it must be more than defensive: it must be able to foster a solidarity of interests and alliances that have the potential to effect change" (Scholle 1990:103 cited in McIsaac 2000:91). I would add to these discussions by stating that clearly the multi-layered forms of resistance used by Aboriginal peoples have worked based upon the fact that we are still here. Cree/Métis scholar, Kim Anderson states that, "[my] journey as a Native person, my recognition as explored in this book, is one way of telling the assimilation-makers that it didn't work. We may be struggling, but we are still here." (Anderson 2000:31).

As I stated at the outset, it has proven to be a difficult challenge for me to situate my research in an existing theoretical paradigm. I have clarified that the best fitting theory is critical feminist anthropology. This chapter has illustrated key common denominators in feminist praxis and Aboriginal scholarly discourse. Issues of voice and marginality are intertwined concepts illustrated throughout my discussion. Inherent to

the discussion of voice and language are notions of whose knowledge is being validated; and equally important, who are viewed as producers of *valid* knowledge? Many Aboriginal scholars locate their research in opposition to elitist academic discourse. There is a deliberate emphasis placed on experiential knowledge and subjective knowledge (Adams 1995, Garrod & Larimore (eds) 1997, Monture-Angus 1995, Maracle 1996). A key guiding objective of this thesis is to place Aboriginal experience in the center to illustrate the important experiences, and voices, of First Nations students.

This chapter has highlighted the inter-related complex issues that arise in seeking to create and define theories produced within First Nations scholarly discourse. As well as the power dynamics involved in seeking academic institutional recognition, or approval or legitimization of Aboriginal epistemology. Further, for a multitude of reasons, isolating Native intellectual 'theories' within the confines of academic institutions is problematic. In looking back at Canada's history, there have been many diverse agents of colonization, which includes educational institutions. Aboriginal peoples vividly remember the assimilative aim and profound impact of educational institutions.

With these important issues in mind, and as I have highlighted, there is a strong emphasis within First Nations communities to utilize academic institutions as a tool to improve the current impoverished social state of Native populations. "Despite all of our differences, I still believe in educational systems as a site of future change" (Monture-Angus 1995:69). The intellectual room we are seeking to create within academia must be on our terms, not only to ensure the success of our students, but also to ensure that assimilative and oppressive practices cease to dominate educational institutions.

In conclusion, if I could envision the creation of Native theory I firmly believe that complex and multi-layered meanings of resistance would be a key factor involved, as would the sacred teachings of the Medicine Wheel[18]. Further, in recognizing and embracing Aboriginal epistemology, academic institutions would symbolically open the door to many complex and important issues for First Nations peoples. This would open the door to educational environments that First Nations scholars seek to participate in. It is my view that it is only when we remove the current oppressive factors that continue to prevail within abstract theoretical discussions, that we can we begin to truly dismantle oppression and begin to find solutions which ensure equal accessibility to academic institutions for all Native learners.

[18] For further reading on the Medicine Wheel please see Battiste & Barman (eds) (1996) First Nations Education in Canada: The Circle Unfolds. Castellano et al (eds) (2000) Aboriginal Education: Fulfilling the Promise. Haig-Brown et al (eds) (1997) Making the Spirit Dance Within. Joe Duquette High School and an Aboriginal Community.

CHAPTER 5: METHODOLOGY

> The word itself, 'research'', is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary
>
> (Smith 1999:1)

In completing this masters thesis I have learned first hand that there are numerous inextricably linked issues that continue to impact the relationship between First Nations peoples, and the overall research process. There have been a number of complex issues that I have encountered in completing this research project that need to be documented. That said, this chapter will outline the stages of how this research project unfolded. I will begin by setting the context of issues that shaped how I originally set out to conduct this research. The debates regarding 'insider' research are integral to this discussion. From this point we will move to issues that arose for me in the process I encountered in gaining ethical approval from SFU. Once this process was complete, I was then able to 'go out there' and 'do the research'. I will write about how this research actually unfolded, and clarify the process involved in: locating research participants, conducting the interviews, data analysis and the decisions involved in 'writing it up'.

"Insider" Research

I will begin by setting the context of issues that shaped my thoughts as I approached this research project. Throughout my academic experience, I have encountered certain undertones of a taken for granted perception that somehow, because of my Native ancestry, I would have an easier time engaging in research. It is difficult for me to articulate the nuances of such presumptions. Often these viewpoints surfaced

in friendly casual conversations with well meaning white[19] students who were genuinely interested in my research. The underlying assumption was that somehow, because of my Native ancestry, First Nations community doors would fly open, and community members would openly embrace me as their researcher, giving me open access to all avenues of research topics and research participants. This just hasn't happened. Nor would I expect it to *ever* happen that way. As I have highlighted throughout this thesis, First Nations peoples have been continually faced with assimilative tactics inherent to various institutions, including educational institutions. Not only has the residential school gravely impacted how First Nations people interact with educational institutions; but also, many early forms of research on Native people was very poorly conducted, with no regard for Native knowledge, voice or cultural values. Further, this research usually stemmed from the disciplines of archeology and anthropology. This early research sought to document the lives of what was widely thought to be 'vanishing' races, a popular Western misconception at the time. This early 'bad' research continues to impact how First Nations communities regard research. I am acutely aware of the implications of this early research; and therefore, acutely aware of the important criticisms, and community parameters, that First Nations peoples maintain in regard to research.

Not only have I had to clarify the fact, to non-Native students, that Native research is not as easy as they presume, but I have also felt the need to defend the work I do to First Nations community members. In previous informal introductory meetings with First Nations community members, I am commonly asked what 'I do' which invariably leads to discussing my research focus. This has in some cases led me to a

[19]In the age of political correctness, I recognize the importance of language, but of the words: Canadian, Western, Euro-Canadian, (for me, all these words imply blended cultures) no other word than 'white' really fits what I mean to say here.

general feeling of discomfort, as not only am I a *'researcher'*, but I am also an *'anthropologist'*. There have been times, where I have felt a need to defend the discipline of anthropology itself! Keeping in mind the negative impact early Eurocentric research had on First Nations communities, and also in thinking about what I appreciate when I participate in research projects, led me to incorporate the issues of respect and collaboration that are key factors guiding this project. Further, throughout this entire thesis, I have intentionally centered First Nations voices as a paramount guiding factor of this research project. Not only does this research seek to document what First Nations students have to say about their experience, but also, this thesis has continually supported the work of other First Nations scholars by highlighting their work throughout the entire thesis.

I have difficulty with the term 'insider' as it seems to me it is yet another form of labeling First Nations peoples, by labeling our scholarly discourse. Narayan (1993) suggests a reconsideration of the term "insider" as the term "polarizes "native" anthropologists and "real" anthropologists" (672). She suggests that we *all* come from varied backgrounds and is opposed to the homogenous category of *the* native (676). Questions of authenticity are commonly placed upon Native scholarship. The undercurrents of these oppressive ideologies are found in the subtle undertones of various academic debates. Not to oversimplify these debates, but the undertone remains; if a Native scholar is 'too connected' to his/her research topic it is not objective enough and therefore invalidated as 'solid' research. On the opposite side of the same coin, if a Native scholar 'is not 'traditional' enough, does not live on reserve, essentially is not "Indian enough" than her/his work is viewed as not 'authentic' enough. So, either way

you flip the coin, Native scholarship comes under excessive scrutiny that no other research would be expected to measure up to. This point was raised by Phoebe in her interview:

> I think everybody's experience is different, but sometimes you hit the wall, and you have too many questions, to even think and write. Sometimes you just have to hit the wall and just put everything in perspective and realize you are just one person, you can just do what you do, you are working within the confines of your own experience. Especially with interviewing and anthropology, it would be different if we were not trying to do something interactive and something with other people – if we were writing *about* people but when you are trying to collect people's stories, and make sure that everybody's voice is in there - it is daunting. But it can be done, you just have to keep plugging away.
>
> Interview with Phoebe: Sept/00

Indigenous scholar Smith (1999) writes "I think that indigenous research is not quite as simple as it looks, nor quite as complex as it feels! If I have one consistent message for the students I teach and the researchers I train it is that indigenous research is a humble and humbling activity" (5). She writes about the multi-layered historical issues involved in all levels of engaging in the research process. Her work clarified to me that I am not alone in the experiences I have encountered as a Native researcher. "Many Indigenous researchers have struggled individually to engage with the disconnections that are apparent between the demands of research, on one side, and the realities they encounter amongst their own and other indigenous communities, with whom they share lifelong relationships, on the other side." (Ibid). I am extremely mindful of conducting research that is sensitive to the oppressive historical legacy faced by First Nations peoples. My research is bound by some very important research guidelines that stem, first and foremost, from Aboriginal communities. And although these community guidelines have not been articulated to me in any sort of formal outline, I am extremely cognizant of their existence and feel they are, in many ways, more important than standard university research guidelines.

Methodology: Open-ended interview

I decided to use open-ended interviews to allow for incorporation of multiple perspectives. "Interviewing offers researchers access to people's ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher" (Reinharz 1992:19). This is an important point when one attempts to create a space where marginalized voices are often ignored or spoken for by others (Ibid). Further, open-ended interviewing creates a connection between the researcher and the participants. As well, there are opportunities for checking and seeking feedback for clarification of points raised (Reinharz 1992). Open-ended interviewing allows the active participation and mutual construction of the research material (Ibid).

I agree with Haig Brown's (1995) approach. She states "people doing research engage in a process called gaining access. For me, it conjures up a vision of breaking down a gate or arriving with a search warrant. I prefer to think of the start of research as the beginning of a relationship"(33). As a Native person who conducted research within an urban Native community, I have a vested interest in methodological, ethical and moral considerations. I am acutely aware of the 'weariness' Native peoples maintain in relation to being the 'objects' of academic research (Ibid). As such, it was imperative for me to maintain the utmost respect and collaborative effort throughout the entire project. Cree/Métis scholar, Kim Anderson, also writes about how she approached research participants, "[my] relationship with the interview participants has been really important to me. We exist because of and for the relationships we hold with everything around us"(46). Further, she writes about the uncomfortable feeling she had about approaching First Nations women for her research,

> [w]hen I decided to interview women nationally, I felt awkward and uncomfortable having to approach people I didn't know and with whom I have no established relationship. It seemed to go against my need to work with material that is based on relationship. However, I made the decision to interview women across Canada because I thought that the book might then be more accessible to people in other communities, who could then relate to their aunties and grannies who appear in the book. I wanted a broader Indigenous perspective that would be accessible to members of the Aboriginal community overall (Anderson 2000:46).

The issue of sharing and reciprocity was also a guiding premise to Anderson's research in that she found women to interview through word of mouth and calling upon Native organizations to help identify women to interview. Further, she "offered each interview participant tobacco and asked them to share their knowledge in the spirit of helping all of our people" (Anderson 2000:46).

By looking at the bigger historical context as well as my experiences in academia, and in conjunction with readings from First Nations scholars as well as issues highlighted in critical anthropological discourse and critical feminist discourse; *all*, of these combined factors shaped how I planned my methodological approach. Before outlining how the research unfolded, I would like to draw attention to an important experience that occurred as a part of this entire process, and highlight what happened when I sought to gain university ethical approval of my research.

Gaining Ethical Consent

All students, faculty and staff who engage in research at Simon Fraser University are required to fulfill ethical guidelines as set out by the university. I did not anticipate how daunting this process would turn out to be for me. I did not expect there to be a problem with my research focus, as my questions involved documenting how First Nations students navigate their way through university environments while balancing family and community obligations.

I am slightly embarrassed to include this information, as I do not really know why this is *such* a big issue for me, but filling out forms is a *very* intimidating process for me[20], I sense the de/legitimization that goes along with powerful bureaucracy behind 'paperwork' has something to do with it. I remember how intimidating this process felt. Nonetheless, I submitted all the appropriate paperwork that included a number of standard forms, a clear outline of how I planned to go about locating research participants, and an outline of my research questions.

Little did I know what lay ahead. When I heard back from the ethics review committee for the first time, there were five points that needed further documentation or clarification, (in my initial nervousness I inadvertently missed a few questions). But a key question arose, from the first ethics consultant I dealt with, that involved a concern with question: "Can you tell me about the things that take up your time outside of academia?" The following question was posed to me by the SFU Ethical Review Board, which I directly quote:

> Have you given consideration to the possibility that such an open-ended question might result in the subject revealing ILLEGAL activities of some kind?[21]
>
> Emailed Ethics Consultant Response
> Date not indicated on my copy.

This question caught me completely off-guard, I simply *could not fathom* the *outright* presumption that Native students are engaging in illegal activity. I responded as follows,

> I do not believe that illegal activities are relevant to my research project. Illegal activities are not part of my research interest. I anticipate that subject responses will include outside activities such as childcare, sports, extended family care, part-time work and traveling home for family and cultural events.

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[20] I recall speaking with a First Nations consultant who works extensively with Native communities on how disempowered I feel when filling out forms. This individual thought that my feeling was shared by others. I will not say this is general commonality amongst Native people, but I cannot help but wonder if this is a shared experience.

[21] In looking back at this documentation, I find it so odd and telling how the word ILLEGAL was capitalized. The word just jumps off the page.

> Further, as I have previously stated in my response to your question #3, I will be clear to each potential research subject that they are welcome to respond to any, or all, of my proposed questions that they feel comfortable with.
>
> My first response letter to Ethics committee
> Dated April 8, 1999

This led to a number of back and forth requests on the part of the Ethics Review Board that involved revising my 'Informed Consent Form' a number of times. Aside from my primary concern of implying that Native students are engaging in illegal activity, I did not want to have my Informed Consent form go beyond one page – I felt a long, verbose, fine print, 'legal looking' document would be intimidating to participants. I continually had to clarify my objections to the amendments they were asking of me. Further, I had serious concerns about the implications of the requests they were requiring of me by including certain statements in my research consent form. I felt that the inclusions of certain statements would reflect poorly on my research and would offend potential research participants. To clarify, SFU wanted me to make it extremely clear to my research subjects that in the event of disclosure of any illegal activity I, as a researcher, would comply with the law and disclose any illegal activity if required by subpoena. The lowest point of this 'discussion' involved me revising my research questions page to include the following paragraph at the top of the page,

> As a part of Simon Fraser University's ethical guidelines I am required to state that my research interest does not involve any form of "illegal activity". As an Aboriginal student performing research within the Aboriginal community I would like to clarify that it is not my assumption that First Nations students are involved in illegal activity – as I am well aware of how such a negative assumption is highly offensive. It is not my aim to offend, and I do not enter my research project with such assumptions, but again would like to stress that I am <u>required</u> to include this statement.
>
> My amended draft of proposed Research Questions
> Date not indicated

From this point onward, I was no longer dealing with an ethics consultant, but rather the chair of the ethics committee. Further, my senior research supervisor was actively

involved in this discussion, dealing with the ethics committee in collaboration with me, and on my behalf. In one of my final formal letters to the ethics committee I was required to put the following statement into writing,

> Please accept this letter as confirmation that in the unlikely event that should I be subpoenaed I understand that I may have to divulge my sources of information. Therefore, my intention is to confirm that in the unlikely event that a research subject begins to disclose their participation in illegal activities; I will immediately stop the interview and explain to the research subject that should I ever be subpoenaed I will not be able to maintain their confidentiality.
>
> Ethics letter April 29, 1999.

This process went on for a few months and finally on May 11, 1999, I formally received a letter confirming approval of my research project. I kept the most important correspondence from this process; but in frustration (and in order to minimize the excessive drafts I produced) I threw out a number of the revised forms. I regret not keeping all of the revisions, as I then could clarify exactly how many times, and how many requests were made of me. I remember there were a number of requests placed upon me each time I submitted the newly revised form. At certain points, they got quite ridiculous and 'nit-picky' in their criticisms of my work. I am sure it goes without saying, but to be very clear, this was an arduous, *intimidating* and *extremely frustrating* process for me. I have set the context for all of the factors that impacted me before I even began the research process. From here, we can move to how the research unfolded.

Locating Participants

After being granted SFU's ethical approval on May 11, 1999, I began to solicit research participants. Participants for the research project were sought via personal networking, advertisements posted in Native student lounges at Simon Fraser University and University of British Columbia campuses. I also posted emails to two First Nations

e-mail student group lists, (at SFU, and provincial Aboriginal student caucus list). I also attended First Nations conferences and passed information out on my research, particularly to individuals linked to local post-secondary institutions. When there were bulletin boards available at these conferences, I would go post up my research 'ad'.

From this process a potential research candidate responded to one of my email postings, and invited me to attend a Provincial Aboriginal Student Caucus meeting, held in Prince George, in October 1999. She indicated her interest in participating in this research project and felt there might be other students at this conference interested in my research. I had very short notice to attend this conference. I had no money, but was told that I could hitch a ride up with delegates driving from Victoria. I nervously threw all caution to the wind (as I never did anything like this before) and thought, 'what have I got to lose?' and accepted the offer. The ride up was crazy, as we drove through the night. I arrived exhausted, but in retrospect, this weekend was a good overall experience as I met some great First Nations students. In the end, and after meeting with this potential candidate three more times, and though I made it very clear from the outset that I was interested in completing the interview that she initially stated she would give, I realized that this individual was not going to commit to doing the interview.

From the Prince George conference I also learned about an email list at the University of Victoria. I posted an email and received a strong response from students. All of these respondents resided outside of the Greater Vancouver Lower Mainland area; which is the primary reason I was unable to secure these interviews. Further, just getting

to talk to most of these individuals was a difficult task, due to their busy schedules. In time, I lost touch with these potential candidates[22].

At the time, I was quite discouraged about the how the process was unfolding. I slowly became disengaged from this entire process. I gave up on locating people that would commit to completing the interview. I met with a number of potential candidates, but I could not secure interviews with these individuals. After a period of time, I re-started the process, and this led to a couple more candidates coming forward. A contact of mine gave me the phone number of a woman interested in doing an interview. We discussed the project over the telephone, and then I emailed her the information package. In a follow up phone call, she verbally agreed to completing the interview, so we set a meeting time and location. I borrowed a vehicle to go to her home, but upon arrival I immediately sensed that we would not be doing the interview. She clarified this fact to me, and said she wanted me to include her comment that *she supports my research, finds my research really important, but because of a bad experience she had with research she participated in as an undergraduate, she felt she could not complete the interview because she was worried about the implications of her interview.* She felt that the previous researcher misrepresented her views. We continued to sit, and talk for 2-3 hours about our academic endeavours. I assured her that none of our 'private' conversation would be included in the thesis, but she clarified she wanted me to insert her initial statement. I vividly remember leaving this woman's home, and driving home thinking, 'that is it, I am not going to finish this thesis'.

[22] I have felt uncomfortable with the fact that I lost touch with these individuals, but also have concerns about 'intruding' in these student's very busy lives. After I complete the thesis, I plan to send out letters/emails to thank all individuals that expressed interest in my research and offer a copy of my thesis to anyone interested.

At this point I had completed three interviews and needed one more and had been struggling for sometime to get the last interview[23]. I can now see that the individuals that responded were genuinely interested in supporting my research; but more importantly, they were interested in affiliating with another First Nations student. In all of the 'initial' meetings that occurred, (whether it be in person, by telephone and/or over email) questions were posed to me that included information about my research, but more often, involved questions about how have I gone about my educational experience and general questions about my background. Not only did the potential research candidates share information with me, but I shared information with each person, and I often followed up meetings by forwarding information on current publications, and or emailed copies of my research proposals for their reference. Locating four research participants was a long haul for me, and consumed much of my time and energy but I thoroughly enjoyed meeting all of these people and am grateful for their supportive words. Further I am very grateful for all of the supportive people who generously offer me contact information throughout this entire process.

I would like to briefly address how the issue of passive resistance surfaced in my research. With the exception of the woman described in the previous example, none of the potential candidates specifically indicated that they would not participate. For the most part, the prospective candidates in the Greater Vancouver area, would just 'fade out' of the picture. I realize this happens in the research process but now that the process is over and I reflect upon the overall research process I believe this issue deserves attention.

[23] I joked with family and friends that I felt like an Avon lady, getting the door slammed in my face time and time again!

In the initial introductory meetings, a few potential candidates indicated their interview would be rather critical and I was asked 'if that was okay?' I indicated that they could discuss issues they saw relevant in their interview and if this involved critical reflection then I would document these issues. Moreover, in my analysis of the data, one participant asked me to turn off the tape recorder twice when she had raised criticism; also, this same participant's voice faded to a whisper when she had raised a criticism in the interview. I translate these examples of passive resistance as forms of Aboriginal students actively engaging in critical resistance praxis. Further, the question if 'it is okay to be critical?' indicates that some students feel uncomfortable in critically commenting on their experiences in academia. I wholeheartedly understand this apprehension toward engaging in research with an 'unfamiliar' researcher; and fear of using one's voice. Further, it should be noted that I *laboured* over the inclusion of my experiences particularly my graduate level example. First Nations students are still engaged in academic institutions, institutions that continue to hold significant power over their academic careers. One of the primary objectives of this thesis is to document how Aboriginal students continue to successfully navigate their way through academia. I translate these examples as forms of how silence as a form of resistance can then be linked to one of the strategic employs of First Nations students[24].

The issue of reciprocity was an important factor in this project. When convenient, I met with research candidates/participants, over a meal, that I covered. I felt it was the least I could offer them in exchange for taking time out of their busy schedules to meet me. I have written this thesis utilizing accessible language. When the thesis is completed, I will offer a copy of this thesis to interested community members.

[24] Plank (1994) examines silence as a form of nonverbal communication amongst Navajo students.

How it all unfolded

The four women that I interviewed for this research project were located primarily through networking, and by posting advertisements in various community sites. Prior to conducting the interview, I clarified to each participant my research plan by offering each person a brief written outline of the project (that included the informed consent form) as well as the research questions[25]. I confirmed to each person that I would clarify any questions or concerns they had and that their participation in this research project was voluntary and they could withdraw at any point. Further, I clarified that if there was any specific research question they did not want to answer then that question would be omitted. I also clarified that at any point in the interview they could request that the tape recorder be turned off. I explained to each participant that her participation was confidential. I indicated that they would also have the option to decide if they chose to remain anonymous with the use of a pseudonym of their choice[26]. After the candidate agreed to participate, they read and signed the 'ethical consent form', I provided each participant with a copy of the signed ethical consent. At this point we went ahead with conducting the tape-recorded interviews at a time and location that was convenient for each participant. I interviewed one participant in my home, and another participant in her home, for another participant I traveled two hours to conduct the interview in her home community. For all three of these participants, the research was completed in one interview that lasted between one and a half to two and a half hours. For the fourth

[25] See appendix material labeled 'Research Information Package'.

[26] With the exception of Candice, the participants indicated they preferred the use of a pseudonym. I asked if they could consider an appropriate pseudonym. In the end, this decision was left to me. I felt quite uncomfortable 'naming' these participants. After much thought, I decided to use the names Phoebe, Pauline and Joan. The names of my three matrilineal late grandmothers. I felt these names were appropriate as they stemmed from powerful matriarchs, who were impacted by education in the residential school era, and for a multitude of reasons, incorporating these names from the past into the present research just seemed appropriate to me.

participant, the interview was conducted in two separate one and a half hour blocks; the first interview was conducted in a boardroom at her work office, and the follow up interview in a private cubicle at a restaurant. All of the interviews were tape-recorded.

The Participants

I recognize that there are limited numbers of First Nations graduate students currently enrolled in the Greater Vancouver Lower Mainland Area. To ensure confidentiality, I will now describe the four participants as a group. Participant ages ranged from 24-43. Three of the four participants identified with a specific First Nations community as 'home', and one identified as a Métis person who became interested in investigating her roots later in life. Three of the four women identified their 'home' community as 'back east', and one as a B.C. coastal person. Two of the four participants transferred from college to university. All four women worked throughout their academic endeavours. Two of the women were mothers at the time of the interview and one has since had a child. One of the participants was a young single mother throughout all of her academic endeavours, the remaining two became mothers while still students. At the time of the interviews, one participant had just completed her undergraduate degree and was in the process of applying to a graduate program (that she later told me that she succeeded in being admitted to!) One participant was currently enrolled in her masters degree; one participant had just completed her masters degree; and one participant had finished her undergraduate degree and is working for her 'home' community and continues to give thought to 'going back' to pursue graduate studies.

Three of the four women are involved in the area of community health; three of the four women are currently working within First Nations community organizations.

Three of the participants were individuals who knew me prior to the research project. I recognize that there is a level of trust that is needed in the research process. All of the women who participated in this research placed their trust in me by sharing their valuable experiences with me, taking time out of their incredibly busy lives, and in trusting how I would incorporate aspects of their lives into the final paper. This is particularly the case for First Nations peoples, when we examine the historical factors of how Aboriginal peoples have been, and continue to be, subordinated and silenced in this country.

Swaying from the original research plan

As stated, the issue of collaboration is an important aspect guiding this research. As such, my original research intention was to offer each participant two optional stages where they each could read and edit their interview material. In the first optional 'read/edit' I would give each participant a copy of their transcribed interview, where they would have complete editorial control over any changes they saw necessary. The second optional 'read/edit' was in reading a copy of a draft of the thesis where they could offer comments on the research. At this point, I would maintain editorial control, and if any changes where necessary, we would collaborate on how to incorporate each participant's comments. Although I tried to make it work, this did not pan out as I had hoped. I gave a participant a paper copy, and a disk copy, of her interview, and asked her to edit the transcription as she felt necessary. She generously took the time to do this, and made the

changes to the disk copy, but when I got the disk copy back the changes were not evident. We discussed the situation over the phone, and she expressed her confidence that there were only a few minor changes that we could do over the phone at a later date when her schedule permitted. In an effort to remain true to my commitment to collaboration, each participant was given the option to read a copy of the draft thesis for review and comments. One participant expressed clear interest in reading the draft thesis, the remaining three indicated that they were interested in reading the final thesis outcome, and that they 'trusted me' and did not place a priority on reading the preliminary draft.

Analysis of Interviews

In their analysis of their research data both Te Hennepe (1992) and Haig-Brown (1995) sought the re-occurring themes that surfaced in their interviews. Relevant categories were created, as well subset categories emerged from the larger themes. Both found color-coding a useful technique in managing the large amounts of data collected (Haig-Brown 1995; TeHennepe 1992).

In a similar fashion to Haig-Brown (1995) and Te Hennepe (1992), I analyzed the interview transcripts a number of times. By reading the transcripts over a number of times I could highlight key themes raised. I also re-listened to each of the interviews for nuances or 'shifts' in the flow or tone of the conversations. I sought to identify any re-occurring themes or commonalties amongst all interviews. I also sought to identify any contradictions that arose in these four interviews. I grouped together ideas into sections. By eliminating 'interrupters', and words like 'um', 'like' and 'you knows', I felt this made the data read more clearly. I have used {...} to indicate when I have skipped over

some words, or side thoughts that I felt could be taken out without significantly altering the meaning of each quote. It was important to me to keep as much verbatim data as possible, but in an effort to focus on the bigger themes and include more quotes I omitted some data to try to make quotes more concise. I have used [ ] around words that I have added in to specific quotes to clarify what each person was referring to, or to take out identifiers. I have *italicized* certain words to indicate when the participant was stressing a point through expression and tone of voice, I have CAPITALIZED certain words to indicate when the participant was expressing in a more pronounced manner than italicized words, by using louder voice. I have used – to indicate a slight pause in speech; in certain spaces this break was longer, so I used more ---. I have also used {laughter} to indicate laughter. Translating these stories will never be the same as sitting and talking to each individual, but I felt that including indicators of expression would be helpful. From this analysis I selected excerpts of transcribed data that I included in the final thesis. Further, I take sole responsibility for how all of this material was put together.

This has been a daunting process for me. It is of utmost importance to me that each participant feel comfortable with how I represented their experiences in this thesis. Further, as I highlighted in setting the context for this research, I am critically aware of the multi-layered complex parameters that continue to shape First Nations scholarly discourse. This research involves the reflections of four Aboriginal women, but also reflects my experience in how I undertook this research, formulated my questions, and how I put it all together.

And finally, I am very honored that each of these Aboriginal women generously shared their experiences with me. Upon completion of this thesis I will offer each

woman a copy of my thesis and a gift to show my appreciation of their support. I also want to note that every time I met with these women, either for an interview, or just to touch base, I was empowered to be in their company. Each of these women gave me far more than an 'interview': they gave me courage to go on, renewed spirit in our shared laughter, and strength in realizing that there are other individual First Nations students out there that I can relate to. All four of these First Nations women encouraged me, and I also believe that I encouraged and supported them; I have a strong sense that our life paths will continue to cross, and for that I am grateful.

In concluding, I have outlined some of the many interconnected issues involved in my research methodology. The issue of respect has been a key guiding factor involved at all stages of my research. Further, I have highlighted the important issues such as voice, language, and collaboration as integral methodological factors. Native voice and experience are central guiding factors to this project.

Like all other students, I have read literature that highlights important issues for consideration when we engage in the research process. As 'green' researchers we all read this material and have very clear ideas of how we will 'go out there' and conduct our research. The reality is, that the clarity of the insight offered on the crisp clean white pages they are written on is not anywhere near the realities of engaging in, and with, peoples' lives. I don't want to appear as a 'jaded' researcher, but I do think there were a number of important factors that shaped how my research unfolded that I have illustrated in this chapter. In closing, I would like to comment on Smith's (1999) insightful words, "Indigenous research is a humble and humbling activity" (5).

Tell it like it is, sister. Tell it like it is.

CHAPTER 6: IN THE SPIRIT OF SHARING

This chapter illuminates the important issues that each participant shared in the interviews. I have rearranged and grouped the material into categories; I have also placed these categories into a chronological order roughly similar to the process a student would go through in becoming a graduate student. I realize that my logic of ordering is contestable. As well, data that I placed under one category could easily 'fit' under another category. Overlap definitely exists, as there are several complex issues that are inextricably linked within all of the research data. I would like to state that I did not seek to order the data in level of importance; all of the experiences shared with me are important, but because of the constraints of this thesis, I had to make some tough decisions about how best to include as much of the interview material as possible. I tried very hard to ensure that each participant's voice was represented equally. I don't know if this is possible within the confines and limitations of a thesis project. Most importantly, when combined, the following shared experiences illuminate the complex and multi-layered issues that have impacted these four First Nations scholars.

Home and Community

The interview began with questions involving home and community. All four participants identified that they had originally moved to the Greater Vancouver area specifically to attend post-secondary education. One participant specifically indicated her fear of moving from a small community to the larger city. Joan also identified her family as a 'transplanted' family from their original home prairie community to their new 'adopted' community. This point emphasizes the importance placed on feeling connected to a First Nations community. Joan states,

> Home is a couple of places. {...}I am from Manitoba, we were adopted into a community called Sea Bird Island. And they are Sto:lo, and that is where we went to school until we had to go to high school, because Sea Bird Island only went so high back in those days. So that became kind of like our home away from home. So there was always a community that *we* belonged to; my mother and myself and my brother. But I was really scared to move to Vancouver, mostly because of the size, and I didn't think the people were very nice. {laughter} I was really sheltered.
>
> Interview with Joan: Jan/00

Further, Pauline clarifies the strategies used to 'get back home' throughout her academic year, as time permitted and/or around her job that involved extensive travel; when permitted she made it her priority to get home as often as possible. Pauline states,

> I moved here from Ontario. But I get to go back quite often. {...} I get to go home at least 4 times, minimum. And often more than that, depending on where I am at with my studies and for the new job that I am taking. I will be traveling back to Ottawa probably as much as every 6 weeks or so. So I will go back to Ottawa and I will take an extra flight at the end, or beginning of my trip and then go home for a couple of days. So it works out pretty well. I have been able to do that for several years now.
>
> Interview with Pauline: Mar/00

The issues involved with moving to the city for the first time as a new student also brought up the importance of home and issues involved in feeling 'homesick'. Further it is important to note that in Candice's case the long distance that she felt from her community does not necessarily equate to an extensive geographical distance. Candice attended post-secondary institutions that were a two-hour journey from her home community.

> I completed a full two years at Capilano College. My first year at Capilano College was a real transition. It was night and day to be away from my parents. {..} I was almost in a depression my first year, not fully realizing it. Because I would go to school, go to class, come straight home and play solitaire all evening. And the only time I would not be alone, my roommate and I were best friends but we were so homesick. We would sit beside each other's, on our coffee table, and play solitaire for hours, not even realizing we were not talking to each other. We were not mad at each other, we were both homesick. We both played soccer, I think that really helped us. Meeting girls, from other places, mostly from the city, but there were some girls from small towns like we were, so they were people to relate with, and I thought playing sports was really helpful. I remember going in to talk to the First Nations coordinator at the college and thinking I am just going in to chit-chat with her, introduce myself and getting in there and just breaking right down, and floodgates just coming down, and that is when I realized it was a really difficult transition and I wasn't really fully aware of what I was experiencing until I talked with her. She never really provided me with any examples, she was just there with a friendly face, just encouraged me. That was my first year.
>
> Interview with Candice: Jan/01

In a similar fashion to the strategies used by Joan's family and their 'adopted' home community, Candice chose to reach out to what First Nations community was available to her. On campus she located support from the First Nations student advisor at her college, she also formed links and relationships with local First Nations families.

> In the second year, I met a young First Nations man, and we dated. His family was from the city, and they were a real source of support. Because I spent family dinners with them and his mother really encouraged me in school, and she was like my mom away from home. I really look at those points in my life, and my school experience, I can really see where I was fortunate. Not all students had that opportunity, that comfort. And I was close enough to home, if I really needed to be home, I could get home, not like some people that lived up north.
>
> Interview with Candice: Jan/01

Not only are connections to home communities important for the students interviewed but also, the strategies they use to get home are important. Further, making links and connecting to local First Nations communities, is important in the fact that not only do 'transplanted' students reach out for support, but also in the fact that local First Nations families and communities reach out and offer their support to peoples that are living away from their 'home' communities.

Factors that shaped the initial pursuit of Academia

> It just was a major big deal for me, going to university, the pressure of the family, 'what the hell am I doing' all that stuff combined and also just not really believing in myself and not being sure if I was going to be able to cut it.
>
> Interview with Phoebe: Sept/00

Each of the participants were one of the first, if not *the* first, person in their family to attend post-secondary education. This is important as it indicates the fact that First Nations students are engaging in institutions that are 'unfamiliar' to their previous experiences. In being the first in one's family, or community, to pursue post-secondary education, these students have no one, or limited numbers of people, to identify with in

their community that have gone through the academic environment to help them navigate their way. A point expressed by Phoebe,

> Think about it, if you are from a middle class, whatever background, and everybody you know, or the majority the people you know, and you have grown up around, are academically educated, then it feels right. But when you are not from that background and you put yourself in that, and you have a family wondering when will you be done? And you are not even yourself anymore, they don't understand why you are so stressed out. It is a different experience, it is totally a different experience. Even if you are working on something that is meaningful, not only meaningful to yourself, but to the larger community, {..} you are still going to face the pressures. You are going to face 'you are still a student, what are you doing, why are you doing it, who are you doing it for?' And most of all you do it to yourself. But you face it from other people, but most of all you question yourself.
>
> Interview with Phoebe: Sept/00

Her comments also speak to the fact that it is both student and family engaging in unfamiliar territory. Pauline emphasized the influence of family, and the importance that family placed on education:

> I lived in [the United States] and a lot of my friends in the inner city who were either dropping out of school, in grade 11 because they were going to work for the [local] car factories. Which at the time, paid what seemed like a lot of money to them, and so they would drop out of school. And my mom always told me that, "If you don't go to school you are going to have to go to work, you are not going to just lay around and do nothing." I was never like that anyway, I have always had a strong work ethic, I knew that I didn't want to work in a car factory. Just something within me - I always knew I didn't want to do manual labour, and that I always wanted to go to university – but I just didn't really know what field, I thought maybe social work, maybe a teacher, maybe this, maybe that. But that age, 17, you don't really know too much - of what is happening and that is when I found out about the Trent University Native Studies program, and that is how I decided to go there. Because that is one of the only options open to me - without a grade 13.
>
> Interview with Pauline: Mar/00

Joan's decision to go to a post-secondary institution was influenced by her family's strong focus on her academic pursuits; this focus started at an early age. Educational focus is an important issue within many Aboriginal families,

> [My decision to pursue post-secondary as an] undergrad was easy, mostly because it was expected of me. {..} It was just like, '*WHEN* you go to university' {..}and I used to have these visions in my mind as a small child as what I would look like as a university student. So it all came from strong visualization as a youth. Which is *totally* what I thought university was, was *TOTALLY* different than what it ended up to be. {..} I don't know if all kids think like this, but you think it is *really* prestigious, really, *really* up there, especially from my family because I was the first university grad, my generation and also I actually ended up graduating university ahead of some of my aunts who had returned back to school. So it was something really new to us. And, anyways, I just grew into that. {..} So - undergrad was easy, because it was pretty much planned out for me.
>
> Interview with Joan: Jan/00

This excerpt confirms that Joan's family actively participated in her educational pursuits from a very young age. These First Nations students give much thought and preparation for post-secondary education long before they actually begin engaging in the process. In addition, Candice placed priority on selecting a discipline that incorporated First Nation issues.

> When I was in grade ten, I was told that in anthropology, you could actually study First Nations peoples, and I thought 'Great. I am going'. So I have always been focused on anthropology. Even though I did not fully know what it really encompassed, it was just the thought, that I could study my own people and our history, through the discipline of anthropology.
>
> Interview with Candice: Jan/01

I think it is a brave move for any person to engage in a process that has both a historically assimilative objective, but also, is an area that is 'uncharted' territory to one's family and community. Candice emphasizes both of these facts,

> Although, my mother actually graduated, that is pretty unusual given her background being a residential school survivor and her last two years were spent in a convent. She graduated from there at the age of 20, because she started school late. Of her children, I am the first to graduate and I am the youngest. So that is a real milestone in our family.
>
> Interview with Candice:Jan/01

Like many 'new' students in academia, Phoebe and Pauline stated that they entered academia without a clear idea of what specific discipline they were interested in majoring in. I think this is important information prospective Aboriginal students who may feel they need to clearly know 'what they are going to study' prior to enrolling. For myself, and these two participants, finding a major was a process that unfolded.

> A friend of mine started talking about education, I really never knew anybody that went to college, or university, and he was, at the time, attending [school], and he convinced me that I had something to offer. To go for it, to apply, so I did {..} I went and wrote one of those LPI's cause I hadn't graduated from high school and passed that with flying colors. Got admitted, I didn't have a clue of what I was doing, didn't have a clue of what program I was even interested in. I just started doing some courses at the college, and thought '*what the hell am I doing here*?' {..} And then after, I think it was the first full year, at first I was like, 'oh I like sociology', and I liked criminology. And at the time, I just noticed that I *liked* school again because the high school thing just wasn't cutting - it was just too restrictive and I just didn't enjoy it at all. {..} I realized, 'oh, learning doesn't have to be like that'. So I enjoyed the freedom and I enjoyed the interactive aspects, with other students and with the profs.
>
> Interview with Phoebe: Sept/00

Another important issue involves the fact that prior to entering school, and even though the students felt that they did not have entrance level requirements, they still felt a strong determination to pursue their academic endeavours. Phoebe indicated she did not have a grade twelve diploma, and Candice indicated that she graduated with 'average' grades. Regardless, both of these participants successfully completed their undergraduate requirements. I think this is important as it indicates to educational administrators that despite the daunting post-secondary entrance requirements, First Nations students who otherwise might have been 'overlooked' and denied access *can* and *will* complete their programs. It also verifies to prospective students that there are ways to overcome what may initially seem as weak entrance grades.

> I guess I always had a really strong sense that I was going to pursue post-secondary. I honestly did not know how I was going to get into post-secondary because I did not have a very strong background, in literacy to be honest. I was always a hardworking student and when I graduated from high school my grades were not very high. Some B's some C+'s, I think how I got entered into college was with my sports, I made the team. I don't know if my Native ancestry played a role, if it did that is fine with me, because I definitely think I was ready for post-secondary.
>
> Interview with Candice: Jan/01

The importance placed on having a role model to ascribe to in academia played an important factor in Candice's experience, during her struggles at school, thinking about her aunt was attributed to her successful completion of her post-secondary experience.

> I have had some older cousins go away [to school], and fell short of their goal, and come back home due to homesickness. One key example is my mother's younger cousin [she] has her degree. Her example is fundamental to my experience, because in those stressful times as a student, partially or mainly because of my time management, but it is, it is a long haul. I can remember being in my third year, up very late, writing papers and studying, and it has such an emotional impact on you because you are fatigued. I was actually thinking at one time, you know you go through those moments when you are so stressed, you think 'ok, I am quitting – this is it'. You are about to snap because you have been up two nights in a row, writing papers. A lot of the times, I would just think about my mother's cousin, because she raised three children and got her bachelors of education. And when she came back to the community I was one of her first students.
>
> Interview with Candice: Jan/01

I was interested in finding out how Aboriginal students got through their studies. Pauline identifies how long the process was for her to complete her undergraduate degree requirements. Her example confirms that she focused not only on her academic studies, but also was working within the Aboriginal community at the same time. This fact led to her taking longer to complete her undergraduate requirements. Three of the participants (plus myself) required more than four years to complete the undergraduate degree. This is also an important factor for band administrators to consider when allotting education funding. Pauline states,

> [I took a diploma] program that was 2 years, I got my diploma in Native Studies. {...} and then I came out [to BC], worked at [a local Native organization] and different places like that, and intended to go back to school to do my BA. {..} That was my intention and I did go actually back for 1 year, {..} and I *slowly* - did a one course - at a time - at a time - at a time - till I *finally* graduated with my BA. So it was a long torturous process! {laughter}
>
> Interview with Pauline: Mar/00

In addition to taking longer to complete degree requirements Pauline highlights that returning to post-secondary education as a mature student resulted in her having some extra coursework and 'catching up to do'. Pauline states,

> When I came back to school, I was sort of feeling like I had a bit of catching up to do. I knew that I had the abilities and the skills, and the knowledge to do it, but I was a bit rusty. And some of the things that were required - it had been a few years since I had been in school. So, that is an issue - as a returning student.
>
> Interview with Pauline: Sept/00

For Joan, learning how to navigate her way through university involved learning the language of professors. Joan refers to her previous culturally based learning experience. She describes her experiences with words such as 'uncomfortable' and 'I missed being taught' which exemplifies the disconnection she experienced. Joan also identifies the hierarchal nature of post-secondary learning environments.

> I think [figuring out how to navigate my way through university] had a lot to do with understanding your professor's language, especially in the sciences. I really didn't understand what they wanted from me. I mean, I knew you had to read the textbook, go to all the lectures,

> study the notes but it seemed like there was kind of a step beyond all that- that *I just wasn't getting to*. And that was the whole interpretation part of what the professor was saying and what the professor wanted from you. These people, these professors, they are up there *so high*, and even the way that they talk to you, I had never been taught like that and I don't even think that the way that they talk to their students – you could really classify it as teaching, *more like preaching*. And I was uncomfortable with that, I missed being taught. And it was missing, and *I needed* that, that is my pedagogical background. And they don't incorporate any of your senses, you know you are just there to turn into a machine person, and if you don't have the brain juices, *right there*, at 8:30 am in a calculus class - to absorb all this stuff, then you get left behind. I think that was one area; the other was area was study skills, I knew what I had to do, but you never ever, do as much as you think you know you should have to, it is always such a reach to do all the readings on time, and stay up. That was part of it too, my own studying skills.
>
> Interview with Joan: Jan/00

The Challenges

I would like proceed in identifying the challenges that were highlighted in the interviews. There were a multitude of issues that came up and many issues overlapped into other areas, defying succinct categorization. I have broadly categorized the data. Many of these issues overlap, but when combined they are powerful examples of what it is these four Native students view as important issues in their academic process.

Of the numerous challenges raised, one of the issues involved difficulty in engaging in learning environments that focus primarily upon 'performance goals' rather than overall 'knowledge goals' as emphasized by Joan. Issues such as professors' teaching styles is also a key factor raised here.

> I believe that [in post-secondary] you are taught - as if you are not supposed to remember – that is the other thing. You are taught to perform, it is all performance goals, rather than knowledge goals – I didn't like that either. I definitely think they teach to make students perform, rather than to make them successful learners. You know, like after an exam – it is like a big mental enema! {laughter} You know ask me about 300 level biochemistry and I couldn't tell you *sweeeeet*, (in a whisper) f-all!!! I took it in six of my courses, I had to memorize it, six or seven different times and I couldn't reproduce it for you. And I think that is just the nature of the way. So probably just the *whole* way that – that - *professors teach you*.
>
> Interview with Joan: Jan/00

Phoebe also discusses the challenges she encountered in engaging in coursework that ascribed to parameters that held little meaning to her. In discussing the challenges Phoebe states she faced difficulty in

> debating, discussing or writing from a theoretical standpoint or from various theoretical standpoints, that I didn't even necessarily understand. That were being covered in a course and that I had to work with. Sometimes I didn't even know what I was writing about. {..} I have always done well in writing. But sometimes it is like, I don't even really know what I am doing here. It is basically like I am just playing a game. I knew before I even got into SFU, how to write a paper, how to make an argument, write convincible, support it with X number of facts, I figured all of that out. {..} Sometimes I wish I would have challenged it more – and wrote more from the heart. But then you have more to deal with.
>
> Interview with Phoebe: Sept/00

Phoebe alludes to the difficulties of having 'more to deal with' when students 'challenge it more' by writing 'from the heart'. I think this raises an important issue, as Phoebe does not elaborate upon what 'having more to deal with' means. I liken this comment to the similar tension that I have faced in classrooms where I have tried to bring up First Nations' critical perspectives. In the process of speaking to all of the four Native women, it became salient that issues arise when one challenges Western pedagogy. There was a common underlying thread of understanding of the nuances inherent to the meaning of Phoebe's comment 'having more to deal with'. These issues speak to the tension we encounter in classroom settings when we engage in critical praxis based upon First Nations worldviews.

Pauline compares her previous experience in a more culturally based post-secondary program. Aboriginal epistemology is not widely recognized in her current graduate program. Pauline pauses a number of times as she speaks, I translate these pauses as an indicator of her hesitancy to raise criticisms. She states that

> the thing I liked about [Trent] was the support system. And the cultural [focus], there is a lot of strong cultural component, in everything we did there. I *really, really* think that is important. Likes and dislikes of [my current program], well --- it *really* feels like an institution. And it is. And of course we know it is *an* institution, it is a university. But it *definitely* feels like it is an institution --- and *that is* the difference between the other school I went to --- I could probably go on more, but I think for now --- I will just leave it at that.
>
> Interview with Pauline: Mar/00

Both Pauline and Phoebe identified that in approaching their professors, they felt uncomfortable and that they were intruding on the professors. Regardless Pauline found

a way through this uncomfortable feeling to ensure clarity, and success, in her academic requirements by clarifying her professor's expectations.

> Things need to change, and I think it will happen as a slow process, but some of the instructors - I am disappointed in, and some of the ones that I had. I don't know if it is just my department, if they are just weird there or what, or is it everywhere? {...} With my supervisor I could approach him but he was looking at his watch and I felt like butting in more than anything. [But,] I know what he wants now though - so that is good.
>
> Interview with Pauline: Sep/00

Phoebe clarifies the fact that she recognizes the parameters from which professors' work, she likens visits to professors during office hours, to 'going to my doctors office'. She also identifies that not all professors are unreachable, and that this directly impacts the separation between professor/student, in the 'us/them' analogy.

> It wasn't that I ever had a professor that I felt was being unfair per se --- it is just different. I don't know how else to explain that, it was just a different experience from the college which is more welcoming, more accepting, and I think the constraints of the university, the larger classroom size, just the whole formality of the university education means that there is more of a 'us/them'; it is like no, you are on that side and I am on this side. But at that same time, those barriers were broken down with certain professors at the university, there are some professors who do it well and who make you feel comfortable, and [other professors] that make you feel like you are not [welcome]. Sometimes when I would [go see a professor during] office hours, I feel like I just entered my doctors office. They are looking at their watch, 'you are on the clock, 15 minute visit people here people, come on!' {laughter} '15 minutes my time is important, my time is precious!' A bit of that, which I did not feel at the college. And the whole thing with publishing, the pressure for a professor, it is not that I don't understand it - it is just that is the way it goes.
>
> Interview with Phoebe: Sept/00

Further, Phoebe identifies the factors involved in participating in larger university settings as opposed to the more interactive aspect of her college level experience. In the next excerpt Joan explains that even though she has felt a disconnection to her professors, she refuses to let that impact the importance she places on learning.

> I like knowledge. I am not saying I don't like knowledge or that I don't like what I learned. I always felt as a learner you shouldn't feel scared of your teachers. {..} I was scared of my professors, I was scared of these educated people. Because I was pulling in these lousy grades, and that is how I thought that they saw their students through that filter first. And I never really had much success talking to professors – probably because of that hang-up. I have to say my major complaint was the way that professors presented the information – *and their attitudes*. {..} Because I think the professors are used to being at the top and then everyone else being down. {..} I had five female professors, in my whole university experience at SFU. And three of them were in humanities and two were sciences, and I was mostly a science student. {..} they were mostly guys - they were really high on themselves - and I didn't like that.
>
> Interview with Joan: Jan/00

The importance of gender cannot go ignored in this example. Another important issue that came up in Joan's reflection on her academic experience involves the important issue of voice, and her lack of ability to use her voice in a classroom setting. It was a process for her to find a classroom and professor that she felt she could feel safe to use her voice.

> You know - this is going to really blow you away -- *but I never asked a single question* -- all the way through my five years. {..} I had one science class that was in a seminar and it was just a fluke how I got into that, because it was only people with good GPA's get into it, {laughter} I somehow got into it! {laughter} {..} But I got in - and that's where I learned how to speak up. I learned that I could do public speaking and that professor was really supportive of me, and that is probably the closest I ever got to opening up to a professor, {..} It was nice to get validated by an actual professor that teaches in the system, who believes the same way as me. So, that was nice. And, he was the one who said, that I would never be an academic! {laughter} But then you know, he wasn't all bad.
>
> Interview with Joan: Jan/00

Candice also shared the importance of needing to feel connected to mentors throughout her academic experience. She identifies the importance of sharing, caring and compassion that each of these mentors offered her at times when she doubted her ability.

> All through my education I have had key people in my life, mentors. People who believed in me, people who have recognized my abilities. One of them obviously, was Dara Culhane, just a supporter through and through. When I had struggles, when I doubted myself I would always carry myself to her office. I had Peggy Shannon at the Cap College, Dave O'Leary, and whenever I was freaking it, [my Aboriginal girlfriends] were always calm and politely just said oh you will do fine, like don't sweat it man'. And I would, I would chill about it, about how my little world was falling apart, and I am not going to make. You always need that older, big sister around {laughter}. And even when someone confirms what you are experiencing. Like we do have our struggles, from time to time, but just that sharing and caring, a level of compassion.
>
> Interview with Candice: Jan/01

The Importance of Connecting to other Native Students

The following examples highlight the importance that participants placed on feeling connected to other First Nations students. The sense of affiliation, and sense of community are highlighted in the following excerpts. Joan recognizes that 'she was getting sick' because of the difficulty she was encountering in ascribing to 'university culture'.

> It wasn't until my third year until I started kind of hanging out in a lot in the downtown bars, with other Natives, and then I really realized that I was reaching out to my people again. And I was getting sick. I was getting sick - sick because university culture wasn't something that I was adapting well to. It was something I tried to do, but then as a result, I found the FNSA [First Nations Student's Association]. And I found there were like-minded Native people who were in the same boat as me. I really discovered them late, in my last year, in my fourth year, but I really didn't [connect] with them until my 5th year. And then that enabled me to find a community within a community. {..}[Hanging out with Native Students] *must have* helped because my grades were so much better! In my last semester anyway. I never really made that connection until now {..} My last semester I *really* leaned on the people at FNSA and I let myself do that, and I never really let myself lean on people before; not even my teammates, it was like I never fully trusted them. But I could trust these people. We hung out together, we partied together, we studied together, and you know, they were like best friends. Because we could talk *a lot* about what was happening with us personally, we could talk about our families, and back home, and there were so much more similarities than there were differences. I don't want to say that all First Nations peoples are the same, but we sure have a whole lot of circumstances working on us that *very, VERY* similar – and it shapes our lives.
>
> Interview with Joan: Jan/00

Her search for other First Nations students eventually lead her to finding and then reaching out for support from a Native student organization on her campus. Her grades were stronger and she found the connection she originally set out to find. Pauline also has tried to 'reach out' and connect with graduate students from her department.

> No there is no other Natives in my program, just me and that is it. {..} It's not that I dislike [my fellow grad students], I just really don't have that much in common with them. And so I thought it over, and it is not an age thing, I don't know what it is. {..} they are all wealthy they don't have to work. They have either funds coming in from their parents, or they know how to get the grants, because they have the experience – that kind of thing. {..} Some of these wealthy grad students have nights when they get together and they have a book club, and a movie night and stuff, and they have invited me. But I just - I just don't know. I went to one, and it was ok, but wasn't my thing. In the limited amount of time I have left after everything else, I just don't have the energy to put there. They are always like 'oh hi, nice to see you' but I feel really like there is no connection honestly.
>
> Interview with Pauline: Sept/00

Not only does this example clarify that Pauline is the only First Nations graduate student in her faculty, but it also underlines how the social and economic status of her non-Aboriginal student colleagues is a factor involved in her inability to connect, and relate to their experiences. Pauline also identifies that in the minimal amount of free time in her schedule, she prioritizes where she will place both her free time and her energy. She chooses to not place a large focus on establishing connections to students she has

difficulty relating to. This is an important issue, as I think it speaks to examining how First Nations students actively manage, and prioritize what is important in their busy lives.

Things that take up time outside of Academia

Pauline is an extremely busy woman. She works at a number of jobs that require significant amounts of travel, both within the province and also nationally. To make it to our second interview, she actually postponed her schedule to catch a later flight, to give us the hour and a half we needed to complete the interview. Pauline's pressing work schedule has temporarily pulled her away from her graduate studies. A point she articulates,

> I am not actually [engaged] in coursework right now, and because I have not been working very much on my thesis project I would say that I am not really involved in academia right now. Although I think I should be {laughter} - because I am in the program. I am trying to do what I can and I am getting back in touch with it through a couple of my professors. But for the most part, {..} it is mostly travel, travel, travel, travel. Lots of travel, lots of meetings, some writing, mostly travel with my job. {..} And I am on a couple of volunteer boards. {..} One of the [other] things I am doing is teaching a course.
>
> Interview with Pauline: Sept/00

Pauline's words stress the importance of her career. Dyck (1991) points attention to the burnout effect that many First Nations community leaders go through. Because First Nations communities continue to face socially disadvantaged circumstances, and because of the low (but slowly improving) representation of Aboriginal graduates from post-secondary institutions, Native students are in high demand. I think this speaks to an important paradox, or pull, that exists for some First Nations students in that many First Nations students enter post-secondary education with a predetermined goal of using the education gained within their communities, but at the same time they are faced with communities that need Aboriginal professionals *immediately*. In my own experience, I can think back to a specific career opportunity that I turned down, because I knew it

would demand more of my time than I could give. Turning down this amazing career opportunity, and also the financial security it offered, at a time of pressing economic poverty was a very difficult decision to make. Further, this offer stemmed from my home community and community members I know well, that made it even more difficult to turn down.

Phoebe also stressed the importance of work. Her comments dispel the myth that all Native students automatically receive 'band funding' and just like many other students she faces continued financial difficulty.

> I have a lot of backed up bills going on here. The finance thing {..} I have always worked [while going to school]. {..} especially because I am on student loans. I maxed out, because I am a single parent and I get larger loans, I maxed out on my BC portion of my student loan, and I was only getting the federal portion of my loan
>
> Interview with Phoebe: Sept/00

In reference to economic challenges faced, Pauline explains the difficulties faced in locating and securing finances. Pauline affirms the economic challenges she encountered in her response to my question about challenges she see relevant.

> Not knowing how to go after some of the grants, and not feeling that I had the ability to do that. Because I wasn't encouraged to - there was a grant for $17,000 and I really wanted to pursue it and I wasn't encouraged to pursue it from one professor. In fact I feel that he was discouraging me to pursue it, because he knew there was somebody else going for it and she was his pick. {..} We are missing out on so much, there is so much we could do. {..} I don't think that we are incapable, but I think that we think that it is *strictly* Indian affairs funding that we can get. {..} We are just kind in a [position] of ghettoizing Indian Affairs funding. We could be getting so much more.
>
> Interview with Pauline: Sept/00

In my general discussions with Native students, there have been times when I have spoken to Native students who have thought that because they receive band funding they are not entitled to apply for any additional funding such as scholarships, awards or bursaries, this is simply not true. While band funding is extremely helpful, it is not a secured resource for all students of Aboriginal ancestry. Further, for those students that

acquire band support, they continue to face financial struggles as the amount of monies received only partially subsidizes basic living costs.

Candice focuses on issues that took up time outside of academia include dealing with family. Candice illuminates a number of issues that she dealt the following story,

> my time was fairly taxed as a student. Because of family responsibilities, and needing to feel that connection to your community. {..} So when there was a community event, I would always try to make a best effort to travel back home to attend, whether it was self-government day, family feasts; because I needed that just as much, for my perseverance and for my own strength. Other things that were really taxing were family struggles, tragedies within the family, losing cousins, attending funerals; all, while I was in school. My mother is very ill with a mental illness disorder, and after my very first year in school, we lost our home due to my mother's illness. Dealing with those things, primarily my mother's illness, because she has been in and out of institutions, since I was 12 years old. And yet she is a key person in my life because she has always been a believer and supporter in her children. We lost our older brother when I was a child, and that has always had an impact on our family. My parents are alcoholics, I was raised by my mother and my stepfather here in Sechelt, but my father in Vancouver, I am also very involved in his life. He is also unhealthy, he has a major heart condition. In 92 my mother burnt down our home and was hospitalized. In 1994 my father had a massive heart attack and I always remember that very well, because I think then I could have just threw my hands up in the air, and no one would have questioned it. Because our family was going through so much. When my mother was sick, my only brother that I have left – he is older than me, everybody wanted me to go back home to help because my mom was so sick and there is no facilities to take care of people with mental illness in my community, and he kept saying "no Candice, stay in school" and he took on that burden. Which is a *huge* burden, while I stayed in school. I would come home on weekends and help. And then when my father had a massive heart attack. It was around midterms, and exams, so I would literally, we didn't know if he was going to live or die, I was in his hospital room studying. There was nothing I could do, I just had to wait it out. {..} Low and behold, he beat the odds, the doctors did not think he was going to make it, and he became conscious, and a week later he was still in very poor health, but he was helping me write me papers! {laughter} So I would go to school, go to class, and then would go straight to the hospital, for three weeks we did this, and I would be by his bed studying, when he slept, what else could I do. I actually had had a really good semester! {laughter} Probably one of my best semesters, where I had a B+ average. It was a very spiritual moment in my life, because you really know what is important to you. When you go through those struggles with your family. Especially the thought of losing a parent. I found my papers then, were just so strong, I was so clear on what I was writing. With my dad's background as a Native administrator, his insights were shared in my paper. I was just doing so well that semester! It was hilarious! {laughter}
>
> Interview with Candice: Jan/01

Despite huge pressing factors, she made the best of a situation that for many students would have been enough reason to withdraw for the semester. In a multitude of ways her story portrays her incredible resiliency as well her dedication to both her family and her academic studies. Like Candice, I know first hand that the poor health status of our family members has a 'rippling-effect' to reach all of our community members.

Resisting Oppression

Candice's example of taking a challenging situation and turning it around into a positive situation is further supported in the following examples that clearly indicate how Aboriginal women seek to work through oppressive situations they endured. Joan's story begins when she is talking about the idea of applying to graduate school. As this story unfolds, the limiting nature of her professor's expectations of her work becomes salient. But again, Joan resists victimization and pulls a positive out of a negative experience.

> I was very jaundiced on the idea of going back to school. And then, I always knew that if I *didn't go back* to school that I would always feel like a failure. *Even* though I wasn't a failure – *I passed everything*. I got that B.Sc and I worked really hard for it. {..} But still, you know, the basic university standards - if you are not like in the top half of your class or something{laugh}. So – and so – some professor, who is actually a really good person, he said something really negative to me that I really pulled out a positive. And that was, 'well you may never be an academic, but ---- *you will be all right*". And that pissed me off. Because that was a limitation - that somebody had *actually* come right out and verbalized to me. I may not be an academic, but - *I am sure* he didn't mean anything bad by it -- it doesn't matter how he meant it, because (a) I am still in touch with that professor and I have a lot of respect for him and (b) it really turned me around. And I kind of went back to that statement and thought – I can be an academic, I can do it. Our people are academics and we have a lot to offer. And I just, never had room to offer it - before and I am going to find a place where I can! And then I have always been interested in health care counseling, it is something I have done since I was 16. Alternative medicine a lot of it was traditional medicine too, so I thought gee that is a way that I can work with the things that I love; and also do it as an academic. So I decided to go into counseling, because that seemed like a valid way to apply this type of knowledge that I had with people that I wanted to work with – other Natives. So, I went back, I applied to [graduate school]. {..} I got in – I was shocked. {..} And I went in and took five courses last semester, one of which runs all year, so I am still in it, and I got first class standings. I was really happy, and learned a lot about myself as a learner as well. Especially making that transfer, and it was all very discussion oriented, classes were smaller. {..}I *definitely* learned better that way.
>
> Interview with Joan: Jan/00

When asking Candice to comment on her likes and dislikes of education, the following experience she had at the college level is a telling experience of the racism that First Nations students continue to experience on campus.

> I like the challenges. I can't really say I had some dislikes. You always question your environment, you always question your situation. {..} But for the most part, I have always had a real appreciation for school. I am sure there were times where I really thought, 'oh, this is a crock of shit'. But when I look back, it was all relevant, like coming across people who had really strong racist assumptions, stereotypes and being a First Nations woman in a post-secondary, you ran across that. {..} Even when I look back, I was attacked in class by a - professor. I politely questioned one of his viewpoints, and he lost it. I can remember thinking then, 'oh what a negative experience this is, I can't believe this is happening'. It was at the college level. I

> remember it really well, he was saying "Native society is simple, European society is complex". It was in intro anthropology course, and I kind of put up my little hand and I said "Excuse me." I brought up a few points where Native society traditionally is actually very sophisticated, and I provided a few examples, he didn't like that. So, he went all red, and he was shouting, in my face. "All of you Indians are always losing! Well here is your chance to win!" Like he was emancipating us or something. Caught me off guard at first. I was literally almost sliding under my desk, because I could not believe it was happening. How he was treating me at that time; it was more his own issue. But right after that, I kind of caught my breath and I went right up to him and I was giving it back. I was not being disrespectful, but I just let him know, I said, 'you have no right to treat me like that'. I said, 'I am a student, I have a right to question.' And he apologized to me, and he was just trying to apologize to me to get me out of the room, all of the students in that class were completely flabbergasted, Native and non-Native. So I think it was a valuable lesson - for many people to learn that day. And I got over it. {..} I reported this to his supervisor, the supervisor wanted me to carry through and have discipline. I was not interested in the professor being disciplined, I just wanted to make sure that I was going to be safe in a classroom.. Most people can look at that as a trauma, and rightfully so, I look at it as a building point in my life.
>
> Interview with Candice: Jan/01

This example is a shocking experience as not only did it occur in front of an entire classroom, but also the racial insults came straight from a professor. This example confirms the stereotypes that continue to impact the experiences of First Native women. This powerful example speaks to the importance Candice placed upon 'feeling safe' in a classroom setting. She had the ability to use her voice, to resist oppressive actions. The following example exemplifies how Joan utilized forms of silent resistance within classroom settings where she 'felt like she was going to lose it'.

> My favorite thing to do in the middle of a lecture when my mind was wandering was make a list – of everything I wanted to do. And if I go through any of my old lecture notes, I have all these neurotic little messages, of what I was going to do – and I was going to plan the times I was going to phone people and go grocery shopping and plan the times for what I was going to study that night. And it always ended up being – *like if I had a 30 hour day!* – {laughter} it would work out. Or if I forgot to sleep or something. But that made me feel like I was in control of my life. And *the only time* I ever did that was when I was in the middle of a lecture – and I felt like I was going to lose it. So, and I met another Native person who said she did the same thing! {laughter} {..} I didn't actually write it down, but I used to have all these staged arguments in my head. {laughter} I would be like re-enacting what I could say if [I] had the voice to do it.
>
> Interview with Joan: Jan/00

Joan selectively disengaged from lectures when 'she felt she was going to lose it'. Her inability to use her voice in these classroom settings resulted in her using her voice in her miscellaneous notes. She resisted the classroom setting by engaging in writing personal notes that allowed her to control her environment and to use her voice.

Finding Balance

These examples led to the question of how do Native students get through academia? In asking First Nations women how they balance their lives while in academic environments. I found it interesting that participants commonly replied that they still sought to achieve balance. Perhaps this is more telling of my perception, but to me, that fact that each participant completed their undergraduate degree was an indicator that somehow in that process they achieved a way to balance academia with numerous family/community issues. However, this perception can only be viewed as mine.

Candice, Phoebe and Pauline placed the importance of physical activity as a key issue to managing stress and maintaining balance. Physical activity was situated in a multitude of ways, for Phoebe being outdoors renewed her, Candice strongly identified with her team sport youth activity as the endeavor that produced her first success and confidence. For Pauline balancing physical workouts and her busy travel schedule proves to be a challenge.

> It gets bad, I was conscious of it. I wrote in my diary all the time, I am out of control, these are the things I need to work on. {...} One of the things that I noticed was way out of whack was the physical side. And I just started putting lots of energy into that - that helped tremendously it totally helped me get rid of some of the anger I had and the negative energy that I had. Put it into the workouts, the walking outside, being outside. Totally helped. Totally helped. You know what? I don't think that if I would have got on track without [working out], I don't know if I would have finished [the degree]. Especially when you are in front of the computer for that long. When I had a physical break it was just like 'that felt so good', I just needed to release.
>
> Interview with Phoebe: Sept/00

> Sports is for most people, just sports, but it has also played a real key point in my life. Being a young girl, I was labeled a tomboy, but I really look at sport as fundamental to my life; because that is where I achieved my first successes. That is where I knew as a young Native girl, that I could be on par with anybody else. As long as I believed in myself, as long as I worked hard and tried, and I have always carried that principle with me. It did not matter who I played against, whether it was Native boys or non-Native children, I always gave it my very best, and I have always excelled. {..} And when I went to college, I played soccer for one year, and then my mother got *really* sick and I let go of soccer, because I traveled back and forth [to home on weekends] at the time for my mother. And in general, I started playing less sports, it was hard for me, because it was just a part of how I identified myself - as an athlete.
>
> Interview with Candice: Jan/01

> I am just learning how to balance. I am *trying* to find a good way to do that. Sometimes I feel like I have the answer, doing it like in the spring when I was doing my exercise really well, but kind of fell off of that when I started traveling so much. So, it is difficult, *it is very difficult to balance.* But I know, that I have to do it! But I haven't been doing it.
>
> Interview with Pauline: Sept/00

Joan highlighted the importance on taking care of the spirit and that learning to find balance is a discovering process. She also found it imperative to maintain connections and travel to her home communities. Joan states finding balances involves,

> talking to family, *definitely*. Always have the communication lines open, talking to friends, and going home. I don't know, I always feel that if you take care of the person, if you take care of the spirit - *everything* else falls into place. If you somehow manage to just to keep your act together enough, to get to your classes, you may not get to the readings, as long as you get to the classes, as long as you are in touch somehow, to your academics, and you are taking care of your-self - - then you are ok. {..} But when you are so young, when you are 18, 19, 20, 21. You don't know anything *really* about your – *self*. You don't know how to take care of your self, you try to, but you are still discovering. For me, it was always necessary to go back east – go back to [home]. Just to get grounded again; and also to be with my family, my close, my nuclear family, my mum and dad and my brother. The balance was hard and I can't even say there was always a balance all the time – and if there was – I didn't know where it was.
>
> Interview with Joan: Jan/00

Candice also emphasizes the importance of spirituality. Throughout her life there are certain periods that are devoted to specific areas. Her analogy reminds me of the holistic approach ascribed to in the Medicine Wheel. She states that while working on her degree, she was not able to fully incorporate the important spiritual aspects into her lifestyle.

> I believe in the whole realm of your life, there are certain times where you are supposed to focus those areas of your life. Like academe is the intellectual of our spheres. And when I was a youth it was more the physical. In the whole realm, I think I am achieving balance in my life. But it was just at that time, with the requirements of completing the degree, you don't get to work all the spirituality in. The mental, the emotional; it is never a 50/50.
>
> Interview with Candice: Jan/01

Joan also clearly identifies that, yes, school is important, but family issues take precedence. She recognizes that at times this will impact her academic performance, but maintains that family issues will always come first.

> Oh. I don't know if I can say *how* I do it. It just kind of - it just kind of falls into place – I think. Personal *always* comes first for me. It has always been that way, *and always will be.* I don't know why, but I know some people that put school first, and they are able to do that, *but I can't.*

> Couple of days ago, my cousin, was having a baby and she was born with a heart defect, {..} she is so young and her baby is so small. - *that* was a real concern, for me, *still is*, she is recovering but – I will think about that first. And it will take up – take up - a lot of my brain waves, [my pre-admission graduate exam] wasn't the only thing on my mind you know. Where as, a lot of the students that went into that examination room – that was *the only thing* they were eating and breathing, that [exam]. And for me, I just walked in and did it. And sometimes I feel foolish, when I am not as prepared as other people, but my personal will always come first. There is *always* family stuff coming up, {..} as long as you are ok between your ears, and in your heart, and then everything else seems to manage ok. I remember what I said when I graduated, and it just kind of came to me, when we were allowed to get up and talk. I was spending my time at university on autopilot, and I was just kind of going through the motions, what were appropriate. And I was always, my heart and my mind were always – devoted to something else first – *more than my studies*.
>
> Interview with Joan: Jan/00

Candice also draws attention to the significance of her family ties. Her comments indicate that she faced a number of crisis situations while in school. And even though these critical issues pulled her away from her studies, she views these experiences as integral to her strong connection to her family foundation.

> As much as family can take you away from your studies it is needed. I could have done with a few less crises, but {..} I still needed my family. So, I am not really sure if I maintained balance, because I certainly did a lot of long, late hours. I still needed [my family], just as much as a young child would need their parents, their aunts and uncles. {..} I just needed my family they were my foundation. Even though we went through struggles, they were *our* struggles. I was still just as much a part of that.
>
> Interview with Candice: Jan/01

Another aspect of family that is very important is in the pressures encountered in being a single mother, and balancing childcare and the support offered from the extended family, her parents. In Phoebe's experience this meant a yearlong separation from her daughter. In her experience the stress she encountered at the end of her graduate studies funneled to both her daughter and her parents. Phoebe sates,

> Childcare is tricky, but it works out, it seems to always work out. You have to negotiate your way around it, {..} You just put it out there, 'oh my god, I need help' and usually the help is there. I have been very fortunate that way, {..} my parents offered to take [my daughter] for a whole year, and she went to live my parents in Kelowna. That was when I was doing the coursework for the masters' degree. {..} She was gone for a whole year, she did a whole year of school at Kelowna. It was a long year without her. So that is one of the things about school, we have had some separations, [my daughter], that we wouldn't have otherwise had. {..} I think for sure that has probably affected our relationship. {..} One day, I was working on the computer, this was during the graduate material, and [my daughter] just said, 'when are you going to be finished the dammed degree?!' And she was just done. She was done. And unfortunately I just wasn't done, that was when I was in the midst of writing, that when things were starting to come together. {..} You

> have to make sacrifices to juggle everything, and to get the dam degree done. And I could see, I could see that it was bothering her and that is just not a good feeling - but, you just do what you have to do. {..} [Since finishing the thesis] I feel one hundred percent better, my parenting skills gotten way better. {..} I can tell with her, she is happier, she is *way* happier.
>
> Interview with Phoebe: Sept00

Phoebe adds that family and community support was instrumental in her ability to finish her graduate studies.

> But without my family there is no way in hell I would have finished the degree. There is *no way*, there *is no way*. {..} [My parents] really came through for me, a lot of the time, in a big way. And friends, especially the network of single parents I have, not just single parents, but I have a big network of single parents that are in the same struggle and it is basically just juggling, {..} Just like things that we know we can count on each other for. You know, I am broke, I am tapped out, I have got to feed my kid; [my friends] are there. That has been awesome really, really helpful.
>
> Interview with Phoebe: Sept/00

In Deciding to Go Back to Graduate School

When I formulated my research questions I had specifically asked each participant to discuss factors that impacted their initial pursuit of academia, in essence, how did they decide to pursue their undergraduate studies. In the latter section of the interview questions, I again asked the same question but was interested in discussing how each scholar decided to go back to pursue graduate studies. In designing the questions in this manner I was interested in documenting how their undergraduate experience impacted their decision to 'go back' and re-engage in post-secondary institutions.

Joan's comment demonstrates the difficulty she experienced in deciding to pursue her graduate studies. She states,

> [deciding to go to] graduate [school] was *really - HARD*. {laugh} I mean, after my university experience, my self-esteem was very low compared to how it was going into university mostly because, I don't know why, I had an inferiority complex it could have been a lot of things, and it could have had nothing to do with the school at all; but it just *seemed* like everybody at SFU was adapted *so much* better than I was and my grades were just kind of *stuck* at the C+/C – never, never land -- and I always went into the semester thinking it is going to be different this time, and as soon as midterms would roll around it just seemed that *I couldn't get it together enough*, and then I would just fall right back into that same category of students. I don't think I really *conformed* to the system until my last semester - which was really successful for me. Although, personally it was really hard but, my grades were *so* much better. It was like I figured it out all of a sudden.
>
> Interview with Joan: Jan/00

In a similar fashion to the uncertainty faced in not really knowing what focus of study she would pursue as an undergraduate, Phoebe states she continually questioned her decision to pursue graduate studies. She states,

> I did not really know what I wanted to do. {..} I put in an application for graduate school. {...} Was not accepted at first, was accepted later down the road. Nothing else had come up in between the time I applied and the time I got accepted, so I started graduate school. I question that decision numerous times, I question that decision more than - probably more than any decision that I have ever made. The decision to go to graduate school. I have questioned it, and questioned it. I have numerous diary and journal entries, of why did I do this? It doesn't feel right, it feels like I am pushing toward something, I don't know---it just did not feel right. I just was not sure for the longest time. I felt like I had made a decision that - that I had jumped the gun. I should have thought it out more. Plus I didn't take a break, I finished the [undergraduate] degree and just jumped right into the graduate program. That works for some people, but in retrospect, I think a break from the academic experience could be super, *super* valuable. To work, to parent or do whatever it is that you do. But just not academic studies, and then, if you are missing it and you feel like you still need to do book learning - then go for it. Now that I am done, I do not regret graduate school, probably a lot of the questioning was about questioning my own ability and was I going to finish. That was probably the larger dilemma with graduate school.
>
> Interview with Phoebe: Sept/00

I was also interested in documenting the factors that impact Native students' decisions to not return to academia. For Candice there are a number of family, community and career issues that greatly impact her decision to pursue graduate studies. She further elaborates,

> I am always considering my future, so it is something I think about quite frequently and I discuss it with my husband a lot. Now I am a mother, and I have financial responsibilities, I have a sense of dedication and obligation to [my career] position. When I went to study initially, and received my BA, I never really anticipated doing the work that I am doing now. Because of that, when I took this position I actually told my Chief in Council, when they were considering hiring me, I told them that most likely I was going to leave after two years working in this capacity. And then return back to school, and pursue my masters. I always thought that I would pursue my masters in anthropology, {..} that was my vision as a youth. {..} But now, I have had an [career] experience [in] the field of education, I find there are still directions to pursue that are really innovative, in terms of assisting our young people in succeeding in the public school system, the band schools. {..} So, ya, I have contemplated returning back to school, all the time. One week I am going back to school. Then I talk to one my supervisors, Chief in Council, and they don't want me to leave. So I feel the pressure. On a personal level, they know how much school means to me, but, we just don't have a lot of young members like me, that have a background in post secondary, so I am in high demand. To be honest, that is why there is a pressure to stay. And I do want to work for my community. But I just feel like I need to catch my breath sometimes. Sometimes, I get tired. I feel like I have been plugging away, even from high school, then post-secondary, right into this position. It has always been my personal practice to always try to step back and reflect, but when you are in a position like this, it is very difficult to do that.
>
> Interview with Candice: Jan/01

The demands of her current community work, her role as a wife and mother, and the financial responsibilities are all important factors in achieving her goal of pursing her

masters degree; issues that I sure impact many individuals who are contemplating pursuing graduate studies. However, unlike non-Native students, and as I have previously highlighted there is an urgent and overall need within First Nations communities to hire community members for professional/leadership roles. This leads to a paradox for many First Nations graduates in their desire to continue on in academia, but at the same time knowing that the communities that we come from require trained professionals; all of these factors contributed to Candice's decision to pursue graduate studies.

In applying for graduate school Joan's anticipation confirms the determination she maintained in regard to pursuing her studies. Her commitment to her program is salient in this example. She states

> If I get a refusal letter, then I get a refusal letter. Everyone thinks I am going to do it. Nobody assumes that my bad grades will *ever* hold me back. Although, I am going about it all the hard way, starting off with lousy grades, and that is the *hardest way* to apply to grad school. But, *I wish, I am praying* that the admissions committee with have the wisdom to see that I can do this. And that I can bring a lot to their program, without sacrificing too much humility, I think that it is important to have people who are committed to the wellness field and I feel like I have really demonstrated that, especially in the last ten years of my life. People who are *really strongly* committed - not just these people who don't know what they want to do, and then all of a sudden, "oh well, let's try this" you know, and they just happen to have better grades than me.
>
> Interview with Joan: Jan/00

Positive Aspects of Academia

I was interested in documenting what each participant viewed as positive aspects of her academic endeavours. Up until this point this thesis identifies that, yes, there are challenges inherent to being a First Nations student, but there are also many positive aspects in pursuing post secondary education. I deliberately ordered the research data to highlight the previous issues or 'challenges' first. The remainder of the research material focuses more on what I will broadly depict as 'positive' issues or participants

recommendations for change. Again, I realize these broader categorizations are contestable. Nonetheless, it was important to me to try and keep a balance in this thesis in highlighting both the challenges and triumphs encountered by First Nations scholars. I think it is important for prospective students to hear positive feedback from the participants in this study. This information is also useful to educational administrators and professors that seek to recognize what positively impacts First Nations' learners.

Culturally Based Learning & Culturally Based Support Programs

Both Pauline and Joan had previously experienced culturally based school programs; Pauline in a culturally based post-secondary program, and Joan at the elementary band school level. Both mentioned the positive impact this had on their previous learning experience. Pauline states,

> I think if I hadn't gone to Trent I wouldn't be the person that I am today. I really think that it *really* helped shape me as a young person, without getting too emotional. I was only 18 and my mind was really open. And I had a chance to meet a lot of *really* interesting people that I am *still* friends with today. That I am really good friends with, in fact – one of my friends who I met through the Native Studies program was just out here last week or so, and she is just now finishing her PhD, {...} and she is teaching there now at Trent. So things like that. I email people all the time, I see people from Six Nations and different places — that I met there, and it *really, really* turned me on, to what my potential was, and what other Native peoples experience.
>
> Interview with Pauline: Mar/00

She elaborates by discussing the culturally based pre-admission program adding,

> Yes, in fact [Trent University was] very keen to create the environment for young Natives to come in and to retain us. Because they knew there was such a high dropout rate, and that sometimes the environment can be really intimidating and not very welcoming. You get there, and maybe stay for one month, and then leave. So they had {..} a success to program {..}, a pre-admission [program], you would go for 6 weeks before the [semester] actually started. So you would go, in mid July and you live in residence with the other students, and they give you some of the stuff that you need, and some of the foundations for going to school, living there, but also helping you brush up on some of your academics. Which is really good. {..} So we brushed up on a lot of our academics. Meanwhile-me coming out of grade 12 - it wasn't that hard for me; but there were some mature students who needed that too. Life skills-kind of within the university setting. And we really got to know our core professors, {..} it was a real supportive environment, and I think that is the key to their success. I really do. And they had a Native studies lounge, and they had an organization called TUNA, Trent University Native Association, and we had a Pow-Wow every year and an elders conference. So it was pretty culturally focused.
>
> Interview with Pauline: Mar/00

Joan recalls how her early experience in a culturally based elementary program has made a marked difference in her overall learning process. The culturally based curriculum moved the learning environment to community sites outside of the classroom setting. This involved recognizing the importance of elder and community knowledge as well as the importance of learning from peers, all of these multi-faceted aspects of learning were incorporated into the program curricula. Joan states,

> I think because I learned – *how to learn* – in [an elementary] community based school and it was through the movement of Indian Rights for Indian Education, and a lot of the way you were taught at [this] community school was with shared discussion and shared thoughts, and you learn from your peers, and you also learned from your teacher. It was an all Native [school]. I think there was the occasional non-Native person. But why would they want to go there? They could go to public school and learn their own pedagogy, and elements of their culture. It was funny, I made that transition from the reserve school to the public school - and my grades sucked – and then they got better as I learned how to adapt. And I had quite a few years to adapt because I was [in public school from] grade 7 to grade 12. {..} *just* when I got that mastered you make the switch to university, and then the grades suffer and then they get better. And now that I am doing work towards my graduate studies, my grades are better. They are *really* good. That is why I am on a slow learning curve {laugh}, but I get, I get there eventually. But I think when I talk about learning - it must have been - you know - it was how I was taught to learn from the very beginning. In the Native way. Because we used to go to the elder's houses and see how we would make baskets, and we would do our sciences classes at the river, and elders were always incorporated, it was a good school. And we had our language lessons, although it wasn't my Indigenous tongue, it is still a Native worldview that is enclosed in the language. And that –you know, when you are taught as a small child that becomes part of your identity - *like nothing - like nothing else - ever really.* So I always had my own kind of ways of learning.
>
> Interview with Joan: Jan/00

Phoebe also stresses the importance of the social aspect of learning, in the diversity she encountered on campus.

> One of my likes of school is the socialization aspect of it, you meet so many people from all over the world. And especially living in the student residence: {..} 'the family dorm/athletic dorm'. The Louis Riel Dorm, that place is just a plethora of people from all over the world. {..} That is one of the things that I like about learning too, it is just learning about the diversity, and trying to get a grasp on the diversity and understand different cultures different peoples and why things play out the way they do. That is one of the things, anthropology was one aspect of that, but also living in the dorm, meeting people from all over the world, that was definitely a great thing about SFU it was just living in that diversity. I loved it.
>
> Interview with Phoebe: Sept/00

Phoebe also adds that in her educational endeavours she encountered discussions regarding mixed ancestry. The discussions she encountered involved not only the student community she was surrounded by, but also Native authorship provided her with

examples of commonalities shared with like-minded people. Views that helped her negotiate her ongoing contemplation of her mixed ancestry identity.

> In my family identity was always skirted around, it was ya ya ya, you have some Native background. In hearing other students, students of mixed background, or other Native authors, discuss in their writing, issues involving identity was a bonus. {..} It has just made me realize that other people are questioning, other people are wondering, other people are struggling, and that has been an excellent experience. It is an issue that I continue to think about all the time and I had the outlet, at certain times, in certain papers, in certain courses, with certain professors to think about that, and to write about that.
>
> Interview with Phoebe: Sept/00

I would like to add a comment to Phoebe's point. There have been times in my academic endeavours when I have worked for the most part in isolation. With the exception of conducting the interviews, the process of researching and writing a thesis is largely a solitary experience. During these times, one way for me to continue to feel connected to my First Nations community is through engaging with discourse written by Native authors. Further, Aboriginal discourse filled a void for me, in recognizing that I am not alone in this experience, and provided me with role models of other First Nations scholars engaged in similar activities as me. This is one of the key reasons that I have incorporated the discourse produced by First Nations community members throughout this entire thesis.

Advice to Other Students

Phoebe calls to attention the overall need to see more discourse, and research, produced by First Nations scholars. In taking a moment to offer advice to Native students Phoebe states,

> have faith in yourself. Have faith in yourself. Also, do it in your own time, do it when it feels ready for you. It didn't feel right for me, for the longest time, but when it did come together, it came together quickly and it meshed. {..} I am proud of the fact that I finished. I am proud of the piece of work that I came up with. It is not perfect, there are lots of flaws, it cannot cover everything, and especially if you are dealing with Aboriginal issues. There are so many inter-related issues, that you want to deal with. Even just doing a historical review, well that is a whole

> bloody thesis in itself. {..} It is daunting. It is scary. And you want to cover all these areas, and you can't. You just can't. That is when you have to have faith in yourself. You can only do, what you can do. Just keep plugging away. {..} We are not all experts here. That is another big fallacy of academic writing and just academe in general. The whole idea of being an expert on the topic. Like every time I listen to the CBC, professor so and so, is expert of so and so. I am always like, ya right. They are just one person too; one opinion. And you know, there are lots and lots of voices that need to be heard. And that is the other thing that makes you finish. There is not enough Aboriginal voices in academic writing, and that gives you power, that gives you strength to keep going. It is like, I am going to finish this I am not going let this beat me.
>
> Interview with Phoebe: Sept/00

In a practical step-by-step approach, Phoebe describes what her graduate experience was like, this information is particularly useful for students who have minimal previous exposure to what is expected from a student in graduate studies programs. She warns that in graduate studies it is easy to fall away from the university environment. She views this as a critical factor to keep in mind when trying to complete independently conducted graduate research.

> When you are a graduate student, you do your course work - you go through the whole research proposal stuff, you work things out methodologically, theoretically, you put something together, you have got your proposal, you defend, you go through the ethics review, you get through that, and then you are on your own. You are on your own. {..} I think that the university could definitely do a better job that way too. Fine you are doing original research. Fine they are giving you more independence. But at the same time, I think [for] me, stepping away from my studies was a bit too easy. I would have like a bit more of 'what are you doing?' {..} a bit more direction. Maybe even amongst the students themselves, more 'lets get together and talk about where we are all at'. {..} And that is one of the things about academic community, you have this community and then it all falls away. {..} And then you are on your own, and it is like, I am not really a part of that anymore, and at graduate school you can get away with it. And unfortunately, that is what I did. That was a big mistake. That was one of the hardest things, I did not even know if I knew how to write an academic paper, a year and a half later, 'do I even know how to write?' You do, it is there.
>
> Interview with Phoebe: Sept/00

Upon completion of her graduate studies Phoebe stresses how 'good' it feels to be done, and that her life is resuming and returning to a situation she is happy with, all within a month of completing her degree.

> Now that I am done, and I have perspective now, I don't regret it. I am still me. Everyone is still themselves, and it is all good. Things are getting back to normal and it has only been a month since I finished and I already feel this good. Now I am happy with the way I am communicating with people. And not just with my family, but with everybody. With my friends, with other children in the co-op. It is like I am back. Come on over, come visit.
>
> Interview with Phoebe: Sept/00

Community Work After Completion of Degree

I would like to move to address issues that came up for Candice when she completed her degree. The whirlwind nature of how quickly her career opportunities unfolded is revealed in her experience. She states,

> I anticipated coming straight back to the community. I finished off, as soon as I graduated, I had my daughter a month later. And, two months into my daughters life, I went back to work, part-time as a researcher {..} I continued with my research and by the time my daughter was four months, the women in the position that I hold now, as Department head of education for our community was leaving to start her own business. She recommended me for this position, and council hired me. I have been functioning as the Education Department Head/Coordinator for just over 2 and a half years now.
>
> Interview with Candice: Jan/01

Candice describes the multi-layered transitions she encountered in disengaging with her student identity to accepting, and adapting to, her work at a managerial level in her community. She expresses the challenges she faced in maintaining an authorative position amongst family and community members.

> But taking on this position, that's where issues started to come in. {..} It was more I did not adapt, people adapted to me being in a high profile position, with authority, but I wasn't willing to accept that. {..} I did not want to accept that role. I think that is where we dichotomize our traditional upbringing with age. Because we respect older people, and yet there are changes where, these positions sometimes require younger people with training to fulfill those areas. It sometimes clashes with our outlook on how things should be; our elders in charge, our older uncles and aunts, I struggled with that all the time because the many people that I supervised, they are my aunties they are the people that taught me, they are the people that babysat me, and I have a hard time being a "supervisor". It doesn't even have to do with them doing something wrong, it is just me playing the role as a supervisor in a department, it is just really foreign; that is what I don't enjoy.
>
> Interview with Candice: Jan/01

She underlines relevant factors such as navigating community politics, the stress of working in a managerial role. Candice states her work,

> is a stressful position, and it can be political. And I go through my stressful moments and I tend to just focus. And if I need to cry, I'll cry. I find that a lot of my life, my young adult life, has been in crisis management. {..} How many people get to {..} have influence, or a role in, making decisions for their community, assist the future. I look at that - that is a dream. {..} And it is just trying to keep that focus, because, I struggle with staying in this high profile position, and working many long hours, when I have such a young family. All those transitions, graduating, coming back to community, getting married, having a child, having a stepchild, a youth in his adolescence. So it just seems like constant learning. I am just not getting 'credits' this time!! {laughter!}
>
> Interview with Candice: Jan/01

Looking Forward

In concluding this chapter, and in looking forward, Pauline identifies a need for more support for First Nations students to navigate the unfamiliar 'academic maze'. Pauline recommends post-secondary preparation programs that assist Native learners through educational institutions. She states,

> I think a lot of it, at this stage in the game, for me is not so much that I would like to have [more] moral support - but a lot if it is just the need to have someone help through the maze, the academic maze that is out there. {..} And especially for me as a First Nations person – you know, there are a lot of things that are not that clear for me {..} but because I haven't gone through a lot of this before. My family hasn't. I think that we need to have more support for First Nations students to stay in school - to keep going. {..} like in preparing us for graduate programs, when we are undergrads, and then to let grads know, when we are in the graduate programs. Some of the things that probably seem pretty straightforward to some people, may not be to others.
>
> Interview with Pauline: Mar/00

Candice sees First Nations communities standing on the brink of positive changes. She underlines the importance of holding on to our traditional cultural values.

> Before we had no opportunities, or very little, and now we are going to have many opportunities The biggest challenge we are going to face in the future is -- how we are going to communicate in a healthy ways, to have equity. And how to deal with opportunities, because sometimes that can be just as much of a challenge as dealing with your struggles. And this is where our traditional way of life, our belief systems, are going to come in and help us out.
>
> Interview with Candice: Jan/01

This chapter has highlighted the complex and multi-faceted issues that each of the participants shared with me. It is from the spirit of sharing, that these four women illuminated the numerous important issues for consideration in the dialogue that seeks to identify issues encountered by First Nations students. By allowing me to document their valuable stories, these four Native women symbolically offer their support to other First Nations scholars, and also to all interested in contemporary Native educational issues. When combined these powerful examples illustrate the multi-layered aspects integral to the experiences of these First Nations scholars.

CHAPTER 7: FINAL REFLECTIONS

As I end this thesis project, there are a number of reflections I would like to share. My first involves giving thanks to each of the women that stepped forward to share their amazing stories and reflections with me. In my viewpoint, the fact that it was four First Nations women who shared their stories in this thesis, re-affirms to me the important role that First Nations women maintain in our communities. I come from a matrilineal Nation. I wholeheartedly recognize that Aboriginal women are the backbone of our families and communities, they are the caregivers that maintain a vital role in the healing process of our Nation's.

I realize that this project has been very much about the process that I encountered in conducting this research. But without the experiences shared by the four First Nations women this project could not have materialized. I describe the great challenge I faced in locating four First Nations students willing to share their experiences. I have highlighted throughout this thesis the important historical factors, as well as current ideologies, that continue to impact Native research in a multitude of ways.

There have been many times in this project when I truly believed that I would not be able to finish this thesis. It was difficult for me to isolate if my experience was an indicator of what all graduate students go through. I did not know what to expect nor who to turn to in my community to seek guidance from in specific reference to my academic endeavours. This is not to minimize all of the support my family and community offered me. But, like the participants in this project, I am the first in my family to pursue graduate studies. At the same time, I wondered if what I was encountering in this graduate work was more a result of the oppressive issues that I have

continued to face in all facets of my life as a First Nations woman. In the end, I realized that it was imperative for me to not minimize what I was going through, but rather - to appreciate and find trust in the process I was going through. To learn to trust my voice and find a way to express my voice again.

As I have stated, one of the most difficult challenges I encountered in producing this thesis was overcoming my fear of using my voice. I have also highlighted that this thesis is one of the most pronounced, most permanent and most public forms of expressing my voice. When I look back at my previous papers, I can immediately tell if I was writing from a 'guarded' perspective; which results in my work being unclear and not as strong. I wrote my strongest papers under the supervision of professors whom I greatly respect and trust. Writing this thesis, sharing my voice with individuals that I do not know, has been an extremely daunting process for me. I *laboured* over the inclusion of my personal experiences. I worried about how easily stories can be used, or interpreted in a manner that works against First Nations peoples. I also appreciate the learning process is a life-long journey, and as my life unfolds I wonder how I will look back at this early work of mine. I have had to continually remind myself that First Nations are dynamic populations, our work should not be 'frozen' as *the one* Native example that represents *all* First Nations peoples. I also had to continually remind myself of the powerful pervasive factors that continue to silence First Nations voices. Like Cree/Métis scholar Kim Anderson (2000) I ask readers to accept their responsibility in how they will respectfully handle the information that has been shared in this thesis. To neither romanticize nor victimize the important stories shared within this text. I would

argue that both of these stances would only add to the challenging barriers that continue to impact First Nations scholarship.

In contemporary anthropological discourse, it is *slowly* becoming a more common practice for researchers to identify their background and ideologies in connection to their research. However, I recognize that this paper stems from a vantage point that is different than most academic discourse in that I situate where I stand, I include my voice and my experiences all in conjunction to contextualizing my background as a researcher. I approached this project first and foremost as a First Nations person, even though I must work within an institution that holds little regard for this fact. I continually resisted the powerful 'Western pedagogical forces' that kept pulling my work into different directions. These forces did not stem from my supervisory committee, but rather from the overall impact that Western doctrines have had on my thoughts in my prolonged exposure to them.

As an overall comment, academic environments continue to valorize academic discourse that is written in an impersonal manner and from a 'god like' vantage point. All too often we read about 'institutions' as if they are insurmountable non-human entities. An example here would be statements like 'institutional oppression'. Phrases such as this are often overlooked, and widely accepted. I think, phrases such as this foster an overall desensitization to what is actually being referred to; once truly dismantled, 'institutional oppression' refers to: human beings oppressing other human beings. Writing from this perspective perpetuates subordination by obscuring our collective participation in such environments. I also recognize that writing from a perspective that does not support the 'objective/scientific' vantage point creates an

uncomfortable tension for individuals who are unable to truly identify, and/or accept their role in these 'institutional' communities.

I recognize that I am one of the fortunate students to be working under the supervision of professors who are attuned to First Nations issues. My aim here is not to flatter these professors, but to critically highlight that without such supervision, I don't think this paper would have (a) even materialized or (b) unfolded the way it has. I have tried to incorporate cultural practices that were important to me, but I recognize that these multiple factors and meanings often do not translate onto the flat, white pages they are written upon. But in the end, I recognize that we need to have research produced by First Nations and in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples. This research has highlighted the important role professors hold in regard to how Native learners' dis/connect to academia. All of the participants expressed their respect for professors, and the important role they maintain in post-secondary institutions. Professors maintain powerful roles in educational institutions. A professor's 'approachability', teaching style, selected course readings and classroom setup, greatly impacts how First Nations scholars dis/connect to academia. If this thesis could carry a message to professors unfamiliar to First Nations peoples, it would be, we respect what you have gone through to get where you are, we respect your knowledge, but we ask that you respect where we come from and what we have gone through to get here, and to respect our knowledge that stems from the complex forms of First Nations epistemology.

I have learned much about myself in this research project. For me, it has been an emotional journey and at times a very spiritual journey. In the 'pull' I have faced in producing this work, the roots of my culture grew stronger within me. I expressed these

thoughts to a First Nations woman who accomplished two amazing goals. She has gone on her vision quest. She has also completed her doctoral work. She stated to me, that she sees the importance of placing our contemporary experiences within our traditional practices. The vision quest is a sacred important journey and I do not seek to minimize or disrespect that fact. With her permission, I am compelled to share her powerful reflections. She viewed her graduate experience in a similar manner to going on a vision quest. In that graduate studies involves an individual 'going away' from family and community for a long periods of time, to complete work that is meaningful to that person. In similarity to a vision quest, often this academic journey involves support from family and community members that may not fully know what one goes through in this highly individual journey. This paper has illuminated how Aboriginal families and community continue to place the utmost importance on supporting their family members that engage in this individualized academic journey. As well my research portrays how First Nations students continue to seek solace and comfort in their First Nations communities. I found her analogy of graduate work to be a powerful one that helped me think through and negotiate in my thesis work.

Kim Anderson (2000) discusses a key issue linked to my research on how we situate ourselves in reading First Nations' scholarly discourse. I have emphasized how Native scholarship is often unjustly depicted as being 'too connected to research subjects' in the debates about subjectivity versus objectivity, while at the same time, if a First Nations scholar isn't 'Native' enough our work is further scrutinized or invalidated. To reverse this discussion I will offer a rather crude analogy. We would never think that a researcher is too 'white', nor not 'white' enough to perform 'white' research. Nor would

we ask a 'white' person to prove, or erase, their 'whiteness'. And yet these exact questions are placed upon all First Nations peoples and scholars. In translating these larger debates to this research focus, I think it is important to recognize that First Nations students that migrate away from their communities continue to find creative and resourceful ways to locate family and community. I wholeheartedly recognize our important connections and ties to our territories, and the importance implications of these debates in our self-determination and land claims struggles. But I would like to stress that we need to respect why certain First Nations peoples choose to live away from their communities, and we should not view them as 'lesser' First Nations. I think we all need to continually critically examine, and dismantle, the roots of oppressive debates that seek to divide First Nations communities. When students migrate to urban areas for educational purposes, they can and will continue to reach out to local First Nations communities and also continue to engage in traditional practices.

> How you live your life is a ceremony. I have met many people who do not have the language, don't know any ceremonies, don't know anything about who they are as an Indian person, but they are the most traditional people I know. They are loyal, they are honest, they have integrity, they are caring, they know how to be respectful, they are all those things that made our people who they are. [Ivy Chaske (Dakota) cited in Anderson 2000:27]

I can now proudly carry my First Nations identity with me in all aspects of my life. I could not do this until I left high school as I continually faced racism as a young child and for a number of years I carried shame about my First Nations identity. I have let go of the pain that surrounds this experience because I now can see that I utilized the best skills I could as a child trying to navigate my way through the racism that pervaded my childhood school life. That said, I carry my First Nations identity into this academic journey, a journey that I have engaged in for so many years. All of these combined factors involved writing this thesis from a perspective that is important to me. Ironically,

this academic journey, when I am farthest from my homeland, is when it has become most salient to me how strong my cultural roots are.

Producing this paper for me, has been one of the most humbling experiences of my life thus far. It has been quite a journey! A key factor that helped me maintain the final vision of this paper, when numerous blocks stood in the way, involved me remembering the views I maintained about this research upon entering my graduate studies. I firmly believed that this research could be useful for other First Nations scholars. Although the title of this paper did not come to me until very close to the final draft, I have always regarded this research from the spirit of sharing. I could share my work with other First Nations community members in support of their academic journeys. I will continue to work toward the day that my people will achieve the goal of our collective vision that invests in the overall wellness and strength of our First Nations communities. I look forward to the day when we do not need to have research that focuses on the challenges encountered by First Nations scholars. I realize this will not happen in my lifetime, but like much of the First Nations scholarly work that surrounds me, my work is dedicated to our future generations. In closing I would like to honor and give the last word of this thesis to one, of the many, powerful thoughts shared with me by the four First Nations women in this project.

> There is a generation before me, they didn't have the cultural programs, but now we run several cultural programs for our youth. [In our new] long house, the ceremonies are coming back, the winter dances. The children are going to be so strong, they are having the opportunities to learn their culture, we are in a strong revitalization movement, our culture is waking up, and we don't need to hide it anymore.
>
> Interview with Candice: Jan/01

APPENDIX ONE: RESEARCH INFORMATION PACKAGE

Research Proposal

For the purpose of my master's thesis, I would like to examine First Nations graduate student experiences in post-secondary urban institutions. For my proposed research project, I would like to explore what Aboriginal students have to say about their experiences in pursuing their academic goals. By means of open ended audio taped interviews with 4-6 self-identified Aboriginal graduate students in the Vancouver area; I am interested in documenting how Aboriginal students negotiate conflicting demands throughout their academic endeavors while balancing family and community obligations. A key objective is to understand the lived relationship between Aboriginal experience and urban academic institutions.

Aboriginal voice and experience are central to the research project, as is the issue of collaboration and respect; as such, research participants will be offered the option to read and edit excerpts from their transcribed interview data that I propose to include in the thesis. Further, research participants will be offered the option of reading a preliminary draft copy of the final thesis, and offer comments on it. I may incorporate these comments into the final thesis text; this decision will be made in collaboration with research subjects. This work will be useful to both First Nations and non-First Nations peoples interested in creating meaningful and accessible educational environments for all members of Canadian society.

Seeking Participants

Participants will be sought via personal networking, advertisements on SFU and UBC campuses, and in Aboriginal community sites. If unable to solicit 4-6 graduate students, I will then seek First Nations 'mature' students. 'Mature' students will consist of individuals who have completed their undergraduate work in an urban post-secondary institution, or who are in the 4th year of their undergraduate degree. In the event of seeking 'mature' students, all parameters presented in this proposal will be adhered to.

I will hold an introductory meeting with each of the potential respondents in which I clarify my research thesis project verbally; as well I will present potential participants with the research proposal and interview questions. I will confirm with participants that participation is voluntary and explain that the issue of collaboration is an integral issue in the research project and that respect, confidentiality, and anonymity are paramount issues. Participants may decide if they wish to participate. As well, he/she may select appropriate terminology (or pseudonyms) to refer to themselves within the research text. I will clarify to participants the point up to which they maintain editorial control of their transcribed interview data, and clarify that participant editorial control shifts to 'suggested comments' if subjects opt to read a draft copy of the thesis. All research materials will be held in a secure locked filing cabinet. Upon completion of the project, the participant may retain copies of the transcribed excerpts of their interview.

Selecting Participants

Participants will be selected on the basis of Aboriginal self-identification currently, or recently, enrolled in a graduate program. The general time availability of possible candidates will be evaluated. It is my aim to select participants from diverse backgrounds, in terms of gender, varied family commitments, varied academic disciplines, and varied communities of origin and affiliation. My research will not be representative of the wider Aboriginal student population, as the study involves only 4-6 participants.

Interviewing

There will be one (or two) audio taped interviews that will last between 1-2 hours each. The availability of each research participant will largely determine interview scheduling. I will conclude all interviews by inviting the participants to add any further comments he/she may have. Participants may select to complete the subject feedback form upon completion of their participation.

I have outlined the complex interconnected issues involved in my proposed research topic. As I have outlined the issue of Aboriginal voice and experience, as well as respect and collaboration, at a multitude of levels, are key parameters guiding my thesis project. I firmly believe that it is only through a mutually respectful dialogue, between researcher and research participants that one can produce a useful thesis text that begins to explore the unique experiences encountered by First Nations academics.

APPENDIX TWO: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

(included in information package)

Background Information – Interview #1

I would like to begin by getting some general information about your background, if you feel comfortable can you answer any, or all, of the following questions?

- Can you please state your age?
- How long have you lived in the city?
- What is your field of study?
- Where and when did you do your undergraduate degree?
- When/how did you decide to pursue academia?
- When do you plan to graduate?
- What are your likes and dislikes of school?
- Are there any further comments you would like to add?

Graduate Student Experiences – Interview #2

I would like to hear about your experience as a graduate student, if you feel comfortable could you answer any, or all, of the following questions?

- How/when did you decide to attend graduate school?
- Can you describe the process you experienced in becoming a graduate student?
- Can you tell me about the things that take up your time outside of academia?
- Can you tell me about how you balance/manage personal issues and academic demands?
- In your experience, do you believe that there are any special issues that have impacted your academic endeavors?
- Are there any further comments you would like to add?

APPENDIX THREE: INFORMED CONSENT

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
INFORMED CONSENT BY SUBJECTS TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

The University and MARCIA GUNO subscribe to the ethical conduct of research and to the protection at all times of the interests, comfort, and safety of subjects. This form and the information it contains are given to you for your own protection and full understanding of the procedures. Your signature on this form will signify that you have received a document which describes the procedures, possible risks, and benefits of this research project, that you have had an adequate opportunity to consider the information in the document, and that you voluntarily agree to participate in the project.

If you choose, knowledge of your identity is not required and you will not be required to write your name on any other identifying information on the research materials. Any information that is obtained during this study as well as the identity of the respondent will be kept confidential and protected by the researcher and Simon Fraser University to the fullest extent permitted under Canadian Law.

Having been asked by MARCIA GUNO of the DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY of Simon Fraser University to participate in a research project, I have read the procedures specified in the document.

I understand the following:

- I understand the procedures to be used in this research project and any personal risks involved, and that I may withdraw my participation as follows: during the interview or after reading excerpts of the transcribed interview data.
- I also understand that I may register any complaint that I might have about the research project to either Dara Culhane, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, S. F. U. Burnaby, B.C. V6S 1A6 / 604-291-5479 (voice mail) 604-291-5799 (fax) e-mail: culhane@sfu.ca. Alternatively, I may contact the Departmental Chair, Dr. Ellen Gee of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology of Simon Fraser University at 604-291-3146.
- I understand the completed thesis text will be available at the Simon Fraser University library. If I choose, I may request a copy of the results of this study, and/or I may request excerpts of my transcribed taped interview upon completion of the thesis by contacting Marcia Guno at 604-215-1481 or via email at mguno@sfu.ca.
- I have been informed that if I so choose my name and identifying characteristics will be confidential.
- Along with this Consent form I have read the Research Proposal and the Subject Feedback Form.

APPENDIX THREE: INFORMED CONSENT (continued)

I agree to participate in an open-ended audio taped interview with MARCIA GUNO. I am aware that I may review and edit my transcribed interview exerts prior to their inclusion to thesis text. I am also aware that I may comment upon a draft copy of the thesis text to comment upon as explained in the attached Research Proposal.

I have agreed to participate in this research project and will be available for _____ (1 or 2) interview(s). During the period _____.

I will be available for the interview(s) at the following location

_____

Please select one:

I prefer to remain anonymous throughout the research project. _____YES.
I prefer to be identified by my real name _____YES.
I prefer to make this decision after I have read excerpts of my transcribed interview data _____YES.

NAME (PLEASEPRINT) _____

ADDRESS _____

SIGNATURE _____

WITNESS _____

DATE _____

ONCE SIGNED, A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM AND SUBJECT FEEDBACK FROM WILL BE PROVIDED TO YOU.

APPENDIX FOUR: SUBJECT FEEDBACK FORM

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICH REVIEW COMMITTEE

SUBJECT FEEDBACK FORM

Completion of this form is **OPTIONAL**, and is not a requirement of participation in the project. However if you have served as a subject in a project and would care to comment on the procedures involved, you may complete the following form and send it to the Chair, University Research Ethics Review Committee. All information received will be treated in a strictly confidential manner.

NAME OF PRINCAL INVESTIGATOR: _____

TITLE OF PROJECT: _____

DEPT./SCHOOL/FACULTY: _____

Did you sign an Informed Consent Form before participating in the project?_____

Were there significant deviations from the originally stated procedure?_____

I wish to comment on my involvement in the above project which took place:

_____

(Date) (Place) (Time)

Comments: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Completion of this section is optional

Your name: _____
Address: _____
Telephone: _____

This form should be sent to the Chair, University Ethics Review Committee, c/o Vice-President, Research, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C. V5A 1S6

APPENDIX FIVE: RESEARCH ADVERTISEMENT POSTER

Native Education;
First Nations Graduate Student Experiences

My name is Marcia Guno, I am currently a masters student in anthropology at Simon Fraser University. My research interest involves exploring what Aboriginal graduate students have to say about their experiences in pursuing their academic goals. A key objective is to understand the relationship between Aboriginal experience and urban academic institutions. The issues of Respect and Collaboration are two *fundamental* parameters that shape my research project.

I am seeking self-identified First Nations students that have completed their bachelors' degree and are currently, (or recently enrolled) in further studies. Individuals that were unable to complete their graduate program work are also welcome to respond. Interviews will consist of 1-2 open-ended audio-taped interviews; duration and scheduling will be largely determined by the availability of each graduate student.

If you are interested in participating, or would like more information, please contact:

MARCIA GUNO
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY/ANTHROPOLOGY
SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

PHONE: 604-215-1481
EMAIL: mguno@sfu.ca

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