

**NATIVE WOMEN'S STUDIES:
DIALOGUING WITH COMMUNITY,
WITH ACADEMIA AND WITH FEMINISM**

by

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Native Women's Studies: Dialoguing With Community, With Academia and With Feminism

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ABSTRACT

At Malaspina University College, a collaborative effort between members of the First Nations Studies and Women's Studies Departments produced a number of courses in the Women's Studies Department related specifically to and taught by Native women. These courses have been very successful in attracting and retaining a significant number of Native women students. Thirty current and former Native women students worked in collaboration with the researcher (a Native women's studies instructor) to explore, through dialogue, questions emerging from the students' experiences in academic women's studies. Analysis of interviews (individual and focus group) reveals three general areas of focus related to the women's experiences: community, academia and feminism. The women talk of their commitment to the re-creation and maintenance of their respective communities, and to their dreams of a larger, inclusive community where they can be present as Native women. This position is both supported and antagonized by their lives in academia, where they struggle continually with the threat of failure to measure up to standards set by the institution, and with non Native people's general ignorance of the histories and cultures of Native peoples. The Native women's studies courses offer a much-appreciated place for the women to congregate in significant numbers to dialogue on issues particular to them. Paradoxically, they engage in intense and often hostile dialogue with the feminisms they encounter in mainstream Women's Studies. They struggle to reconcile feminism with their positionings as Native women, a conundrum that brings into question the purpose and role of Native women's courses in a mainstream Women's Studies department.

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PREFACE

This document names many times and in many different ways the collective of descendents of the peoples that inhabited North America prior to the coming of Europeans to the continent: for example, Natives, Aborigines, Indians, First Nations (or First Nation), First Peoples, Native Indians, American Indians or Native Americans. There are currently many debates regarding the use of some or any of these names to designate a vast number of diverse groupings. Often I am asked by non Native people who, because of the current political climate, wonder, "How should I refer to you?" It is a good question.

I was raised with the word "Indian," a word that some people feel we should eliminate from our vocabulary, because it carries with it the insult of Columbus' misnaming, as well as the painful memories of colonization. My continued use of that word to identify myself and others, however, is more personal than political. It's the word my mother used when she talk to me about my ancestry. She lovingly called me "Indian," and I hold the memory of her voice saying it over and over. In conversation and writing I also use various other names for Indians, but *I* remain Indian; and I use the word lovingly to name other Indians.

In this document, I most often use the words "Indian," "Native," and "Aboriginal," thereby revealing my personal preferences. However, I also use some of the other designations at various points. I do this in order to reflect the fact that there is at this time no fully agreed-upon name for the collective of the descendents of those who were here when the Europeans arrived. A survey of Native literature reinforces this claim, as do the narratives of the First Nations women involved in this research. I do not use this wide variety of names lightly; I am aware of the power of language to influence our lives. I think it important, however, to mirror this particular aspect of the language

environment we inhabit at this time in history, rather than pretend that my preferences have more authority than others'.

CHAPTER ONE:

“WE GOTTA LOTTA WORK”

Native women talking purposefully about Native women’s studies

Buffalo: I think the grandmothers have a plan for you and what you're supposed to do, and what you're supposed to do with other women.

Urchin: Native women’s studies has influenced me to become more involved in the community, to become more vocal and it also helped me strive to make my community a better place to live, because that is what my grandmother would have wanted. It gives me a strong sense of community.

Dragonfly: Native women for so long have been not able to speak out-loud, and not allowed to say anything. And now our voices are starting to be heard and starting to shake a lot of people. And this way these stories that you have or readings or even lectures are of different people...of different women...that their stories need to be heard. It's their voice, and that's how important it is in Native women's studies that finally their voices are going to be shared. By chance you may be reading something and all of a sudden your grandchild or a child next to you will say, "Will you read that to me?" And you share that. Then they know. This is what we call passing it on. And to me that's important, because the story you have learned is passed down. And I think that's what Native women's studies was mostly about was passing traditional knowledge of what women's words were, what their thoughts were...to pass it down, so it wouldn't be lost.

Eagle: We're still stereotyped, right? But hopefully we can rewrite history so that we don't have to be stereotyped as the easy squaw or the siwash or what's-her-name...running bare-naked through the forest? What's-her-name...Pocahontas! So we don't have to be stereotyped like that. And I think it is our responsibility as educated First Nation women to rewrite our history. It confirms that what I've been through, many other women have been through. And we still put one foot in front of the other and we carry on and we hope to be a role model for the people who are still going through that. Because you can't say just because you get an education all that abuse stops, you know. It really doesn't. It still carries on. And maybe we do the modeling and maybe our kids—hopefully, our grandchildren—will see a change in it. I'm an urban Indian, but I think the community would benefit from my empowerment because I get up and speak more and I'm very outspoken.

Cedar: I was crying inside when I went...first began Native women's studies. And I didn't know what I was crying about. And when I get angry, I cry. That's my first reaction. And I harm only myself. And then I began to realize that if I stopped...peace. If I stopped resenting all the things about myself and my past and everything, and stopped blaming everybody for the situation that I was in and took responsibility for it, and stopped making excuses and promises to myself that "Oh well, I'll do this when I do this," and blaming my husband for everything that's wrong with my kids, and my mom and dad and everything, and denying that there was a part of me that wanted to come out, to be talked about. And that it was o.k. to express the shame and the pain and the anger and frustration. And that I did want to hit somebody and that I was keeping this together. But it's also...the fact of women's studies is that there have been excuses and black promises and blame and denial around who First Nations women were, and their place in the universe, and the history they held and the art forms they

held, and the stories. And that's an unfinished question mark, because that was the basic problem I had. I had these questions inside and I was too shamed, too inhibited to...feeling too unworthy to ask them. "Somebody will laugh." In the meantime, if I had asked the question, my spirit would have gone forward much faster.

Dolphin: Well, I've always been known to be a perfectionist or particular or whatever, as to how things are done. And I guess it's the same way in my relationships also, which causes conflict sometimes. I don't know where it comes from over the years to be systematic, you know. I go, I do this, then I do this, and then I do that. And somebody's not pulling their weight, then I'm getting uptight about it. And I'm thinking, "Why is this so strong in me? Is this a good quality or a bad quality?" So, I'm asking myself all these questions because I'm trying to create a balance.

Partridge: The other part of that is that I always got the sense that we were still trying to prove ourselves in the system as viable enough to have a program of our own in the institution. I still feel like we're still trying to prove ourselves to the white culture. Well, I think that we're important enough. But it just seems macabre to me. We're still playing their game in order to hopefully one day beat them at their game. At the same time, I think there's a place of teaching...of mutuality. It's not that equality thing, but a meeting place...finding a meeting place. I don't see that we are in a meeting place...at that place yet in the institution. I think we're working towards that. I think we're filling that place with trying to prove ourselves.

Quail: I really enjoyed...going in there with all those ideas and then you're questioning, "Ah! Gee, I didn't know that. Or I knew that, but I've never talked about it." But to actually put it down on paper and discuss it... It was really opening a door.

Eagle: I don't know, I think in our people...with our people, leaders are born. And if you don't... if there isn't anyone when you're younger to encourage you into leadership, eventually it will come through in you, because you want to make things better. You want to take those steps, and you want to be heard. And after you read some of those Indian women like Beth Brant, Lee Maracle and Maria Campbell...that they've had the guts enough to just go up and put it in print, and say, "Yeah, this is me. Here I am, like almost bare-naked. Here I am. You know, guys, this is who I am. This is what I was. So I wasn't a good person. What the hell, I did the best I could!"

Fox: Well the thing that comes into mind is that, the way I was taught, sometimes when we're in an academic situation we get so panicky we think we've got to have it all figured out before we even get there. And I was taught if you have good intentions, if you have good beginnings, you'll get there. You'll get where you want to be. If we're in a privileged position of being able to go to school, I think it is our responsibility to help out. That's one thing...to be strong and just do it and do the work. We gotta lotta work.

Alder: It's quite a painful process in your emotion, because the first year...I know when I took the first year, I couldn't even write, because you have to look at everything and that is your issue. When you present the material, those are the issues, but how you deal with it is up to you. If you're going to really deal with it, then look at it, and say, "Hey, this is me! What am I going do about it?" And then you yourself have to do something.

Cedar: When I realized that there were some answers that I could never answer, and there's some things that I could never heal for myself and for other people, I just started to say, "All right, I'll forgive myself for whatever it is that I've done that brought some of these things on. I forgive the people who acted in my best

interest, and I'll forgive those people who did the things they did, and I can't find the answers to." Because I don't want to carry that anymore. So it was like I gave it all back to the Creator and said, "O.k., I don't know what your purpose is for me, and this is how I'm feeling, and these are all the things that are there. And there are all these women around me who are helping to heal me. You take me where you want me to go. And you show me what it is I'm to do and what direction to go." And doing that was just like...there's lots of space around me, and I wasn't heavy anymore. And I began to really study and move forward in earnest. I still have days like that. I still have weeks like that. I went into Native women's studies believing that I was the lowest earth form, that I had no absolute use on this earth, that there was no purpose for me. And that isn't what I was taught, but that's how I had encapsulated myself in that, not asking questions, not going to anybody for help, dealing with all this myself, and blaming myself and all the people around me. And the anger kept getting worse. I had to let go of that and say, "O.k., this isn't what it's about. It isn't about me. It's about everybody. Take it and do what you want with it." And that's where change began to come.

Buffalo: I think being able to come to a place in university where, to learn how to articulate my rage, not to just have blind rage, is something that I'm doing. That for me is important because blind rage perpetuates violence for me in my life. And I think that all the language, all the academic language that's really up in the head helps me do that...helps me detach somewhat from it. Because I find that my presentations always end up being a combination...they're always a combination. Any presentations that I do are a combination of a lot of academic—"O.k., this is how it works."—and then, "This is how it makes me feel." And so I think the thing is, I am motivated by my anger and I haven't let go of any of it. And I think sort of honor that for myself, to say that this is my anger and

this is my energy and if I vibrate high, that's o.k. But how do I take charge of that? How do I manage it? And not waste it in blind rage has been my thing. I honor outrage and anger. I think that it's rightful. If you murder my sister, I'm going to rage and scream and then I'm going to figure out how it works and I'm going to articulate it. So, for me that's sort of where I am around anger or around what point I let go. I think that there was a point where I wanted to stop blind raging and just coming apart at...and not be able to articulate that. There was a decision made when I came to university. "O.k. I'm going to harness this, and I'm going to find out and I'm going to articulate this." And so, yeah, we need to have this conversation, and say to people, "You don't have to like me, and I don't have to like you, but if we can figure it out together here and now, that'll be cool with me. We don't have to hurt each other, but I will confront you, and you can tell me what you think."

Elk: Some of the non Native students are really offended by the content of the Native courses, but I think to me in the long run non Native students would...their curiosity would be tweaked so they would look into it more, and they could find out for themselves that it's in the history books, and it's in writing so...

Indigo: I remember being afraid of the non First Nations women in the class, and thinking what they were thinking about. I'd hear them sometimes, and one of them would speak up and go, "Yeah! Yeah! I like that!" And I'd think, "Boy, settle down!" They wanted us to speak up. They didn't want us to just sit there and hold our thoughts. And when one of us did start sharing, they were just so excited. I'd just look at them and think, "Don't get too excited!" But they really wanted us to open up and share what we were thinking.

Cedar: It's like Paula Gunn Allen said in "The one who skins cats." And it's like Fox Woman and Zitkala Ša said. There are different ways of doing things, and if one

way doesn't work, try another, and if that doesn't work, try another. And maybe you need to take points out of all three or four to make something work, but just keep trying, just keep doing it, and just remembering the history, and remembering the things that these women did for us. They gave us the possibility of doing these things. Just to put the information out where it could be read like we're doing with the end of this. Because there are young gals out there who, like myself, do agree that there are things that need to be changed. Because a mark on one woman is a mark on all of them, and a slight against women, or even a racist remark... And I really believe that by change...that by involving First Nations women, and involving them in a way with family, community and with their men, in this way, you change a lot of things faster.

Eagle: You know, you read things written by other Indian women, and it makes you think that we...all us First Nation women can do it. We don't have to be beaten by our men, or do drug and alcohol. We can get up and we can do...we can really change the world. And I really believe the world will be changed by women. Women who are getting educated and speaking out. They're not holding it back anymore. They're just telling it the way it is, and it's not very nice some of it. Yeah, I think we become a threat. We become a threat to the band. We become a threat to our spouses, until they realize it's an empowerment. We're not going to go man-beating. It's just an empowerment of ourselves.

Fox: I took a Native women's studies at the Enow'kin Centre, and they talked about the issues of respecting writing, and that we're really respectful people and want to not say anything bad. But they said also at the same time, being a writer, you put yourself in a public sphere. And that's just the way it is, and you hope that the coming generations will make some improvement on the stuff that you have put out. And they actually encourage critique in the courses that I took. They

encouraged you to do that, or you're not going get better as a writer. They really talked about getting stronger as people...as women.

Raven~*~Magic: For me, the biggest thing has been...is, because I couldn't take Native women's courses, I've never dealt with any Native women's issues other than the research that I tried to do myself, personally, and that was violence against Native women in communities. It was a paper that I chose to write for a women's studies course that I was taking through correspondence. And I could not find any material. And I was phoning bands, friendship centers, healing lodges... everywhere. As far back as Winnipeg I was phoning and trying to get information, and there was no information out there for me to gather. And that was discouraging, so it lead me to believe that not only are the issues not being discussed, but they're not even being researched. So that was a great concern to me.

Buffalo: Yeah, I would like research being done on Aboriginal women everywhere, and what they are contributing to the world, and what that means for inspiration for generations of Aboriginal women. I would really like to see that.

Fox: I'm really glad that this project is happening. I think it's really important. I think it's easy for us to say that this Native Women's Studies is important, but I know that after this project is finished, it'll give something that the academic people can eat up...to digest and say, "O.k. Wow! Maybe it is important!" Because I know that is the reality of being in school and developing programs and curriculum, etc. We're on to you guys...just kidding!

Purpose of the study: Being irritated

One day, several months before this project began, a Native woman—a student in my Native women's studies course—came to my office. I was working in the Writing

Centre in First Nations Programs, and she wanted some help with an essay she was writing. I was very happy that she would ask me. We talked a bit about what she was attempting to do, and I was both surprised and dismayed that I seemed to be part of her motivation for writing on the topic of how it happens that people do not understand or know her and her culture well enough to allow for good communication. She told me of moments in the classroom when she was very frustrated with me and saying in her mind, "What is wrong with her? How come she doesn't know me?" I did not ask her to explain. Something told me to listen and not attempt to clarify at that time.

Although my first reaction was that there was something wrong with me, in the end I understood it wasn't about me. Later, I saw this woman's essay as her way of taking responsibility for her presence in an academic setting, and for having people there know her and her culture. Unlike my first impression of what she said, she was thanking me for her irritation. She was learning and teaching. She reciprocated by "irritating" me, gifting me with the challenge to reflect on how I see the world, and to learn more about what I don't see. Through my initiation of this project, I accepted the challenge, and I can only hope that it will approach the generosity of the original gift.

Dorothy Smith (1999) tells us that a women's standpoint in research means "beginning in the actualities of people's lives as they experience them" (p. 5). According to her, from this standpoint evolves a method—one not exclusive to women—which does not treat experience as knowledge, but as a place to begin inquiry. This line of thought cautions us that if we treat as knowledge our experiences—especially bad experiences—we will become stuck there, unable to move on, to let go, and to learn. Lee Maracle (Sto:lo/Métis) (1990a) writes, "In particular the telling of our lives, the backtracking, the map-making through the treacherous terrain of our individual experiences is perhaps a more important exercise than we Native people readily appreciate" (p. 15). To do research, to backtrack, to question, and to be heard is to be irritated and know that you have to do something about it. This is the case in terms of the

relationship between the Native women participating in this research project and some of their experiences in women's studies courses at university.

Background

Maracle (1996) talks about the 1960s and 70s when she was shocked by concepts of sexism coming from the mouths of young Native men; no one would have dared doubt the intelligence of women ten years earlier. At the time, the alternative to this sexism was a feminist movement that objected to the role played by women in the home and the inequities between men and women in child rearing and work. To Maracle, sexism, racism and the total dismissal of Native women's experiences had little to do with who did the dishes and who minded the babies (p. ix).

By the 1980s, it was apparent that the Native women's movement—as well as movements by women of other ethnic minorities—did not relate or align itself to more mainstream feminist movements¹; and other Native women, both troubled and perplexed by this fact, began to speak about it in various ways. In 1981, Rayna Green (Cherokee) (1981), speaking on the topic of Indian humor, mocked both the stereotype of the feminist bra burner and of the large-breasted Native woman, saying that Native women did not join the movement because they feared that burning their bras would cause too big a fire and a good deal of pollution. There remained, however, according to Joanne Fiske (1990) in her study of reserve politics, “a discrepancy between the traditional respect accorded to Indian women and the reality of gender tensions generated within the community” (p. 131). Looking at this paradox, Kate Shanley (Assiniboine/Irish) (1988) provided some further detail regarding political reasons for many Native women's resistance to the feminist movement: differing notions of equality, differing notions of family and

¹ I realize that there is no universal or single, well defined “mainstream feminist movement.” I ask the reader's indulgence in my attempt to speak more generally at this point. The participants' narratives reveal that for many of the women in this project the term “feminism” refers generally to the values and goals of white, middle-class women, not those of Native women.

community, the need to concentrate energy on issues of tribal sovereignty.

In the 1980s, there were strong challenges to women's studies over the notions of a universal feminist approach and a homogeneous category of "woman." These challenges called for a rethinking of feminism (de Groot & Maynard, 1993, p. 149), including a look at how a feminist analysis limited exclusively to the issue of gender risks displacing the ways in which "racism and assimilation are major determinations in the specific uses to which sexism is put at any historical moment" (Emberley, 1997, p. 103). In the wake of such criticisms, the Women's Studies Department at Malaspina University College sought a concrete way to respond to requests by Native women for Native women's courses, and to enter into meaningful dialogue with the fast-growing population of First Nations students attending the institution, the majority of whom were women.

I have been involved since 1995 in two concerted efforts: one by the First Nations Studies Department to influence curriculum content within other departments; and another by the Department of Women's Studies to interest more Native students in women's studies. Starting in 1995, the Women's Studies Department hired First Nations faculty to teach courses in Native Women's Studies (NWS). During the first six years of the initiative, introductory courses remained routinely waitlisted and populated by a majority of Native women; and after three years the department also offered both introductory and upper-level courses in NWS. As well, in the spring of 2001, the department offered for the first time an upper division course team-taught by Native and non Native faculty.

Up until the time I became involved in this endeavor, I had virtually no involvement with women's studies. Neither I nor the other Native women who have taught in the department have even close to a degree in Women's Studies. Although I am not ignorant of feminist theory and research, I have never taken a women's studies

course; in fact, throughout my post secondary studies I intentionally avoided them. It is somewhat ironic, then, that my First Nations colleagues and I have developed women's studies courses in this peculiar academic space intentionally created for us: a space not empty, yet not clearly defined.

Initially due to circumstance and eventually due to preference, I have taught and helped develop many of the Native women's courses. I could find no blueprint or already-developed and tested framework for the particular study *of* Native women *by* Native women within the context of academia, so I and other Native instructors in the department had to make it up as we went along. General learning outcomes for the courses involve promoting a knowledge and appreciation of the histories of Native women, as well as the various oral histories, literatures, films and other cultural materials that Native women produce. In accordance with the courses' placement in a women's studies department, there are also learning outcomes related to students' ability to understand concepts and to use effectively vocabulary related to feminist theories. I have become increasingly irritated, however, about our inability to articulate clearly the cultural outcomes of Native women's courses and of Native women's increasing participation in women's studies. In other words, are the Native women's courses truly *for* Native women or are they in fact but a re-decorated study *of* Native women within a framework of western ideologies? How would we even articulate the parameters of a course "for" Native women? The term assumes that someone must know what Native women need and want from such courses. Besides exposure to Native women's histories, do they also need or want specific instruction in cultural ways, or is the purpose of the courses to put all cultural ways up for discussion only? In other words, what is "Native" about these courses other than the general study of Native women's histories and productions—which risks not being any different from an academic study *of* Native women? Is that something we should avoid? Are these courses the best that the academic institution can provide? How do they impact Native culture and communities?

The Native women's courses are located bureaucratically within the Women's Studies Department, but can one assume that any or all of the feminist theories apply? As Devon Mihesuah (Choctaw/French) (2000) cautions, "Though the integration of American Indian women's studies and feminist studies would seem a logical project for the new millennium, the progress on such an initiative should be both cautious and deliberate...[and] care must be used in researching, interpreting and formulating ideas about 'others'" (p. 1247). Certainly, the initiative at Malaspina University College was deliberate on the part of the Women's Studies and the First Nations Studies Departments. On the other hand, if one views caution as a metaphor for decreasing speed, hoping to avoid accidents, one could hardly say that the initiative was cautious. The convergence of circumstance—a request from Native students for a Native women's course, an opportunity to influence curriculum content in another department, and a general educational climate promoting post-secondary education among First Nations peoples—did not provide any clear signposts for caution, especially for the instructors attempting to develop the courses. Given the cumulative effect of the departmental, curricular, and political circumstances, perhaps Native women's courses had no choice but to start up and develop without a critical analysis of the possible impact on First Nations women, on their education, and on their First Nations cultures.

Native women in these courses were the resources that I needed to hear speak about the impact of women's studies. I needed to listen not just to their responses in class, but to listen in a more concerted and intentioned way in order to understand what together we have developed and are developing. Only they could help me articulate what happened and is happening in those courses, what experiences they have, what they inquire about, what knowledge they produce, what theories emerge. Nor does the irony of the situation escape me: in many ways the students are more qualified than I, the instructor, to talk about women's studies courses; they, unlike me, have taken a number of them. Their presence provides the framework for the study.

Formulating the project

The purpose of qualitative research is learning, and its general process begins with wondering, with questioning or with being irritated. It ends with something that is not fully developed, but promises to become increasingly clear as well-intentioned people seek meaning from it. Qualitative research does not promise that all irritation will cease; in fact it generally promises just the opposite. One of its main characteristics is movement. One must not remain stuck in one irritated viewpoint, one example, one position; otherwise, no learning occurs. For example, the word "balance" appears often in the narratives of the Native women in this project, but one would be mistaken to assume that it means for them a philosophical or utopian balance describing a state of perfection with its implied stasis. As Dorothy Smith (1999) states, "The social *happens* [original italics]; included in the happening/activities are concepts, ideologies, theories, ideas, and so forth. Their deceitful stasis is an effect of how the printed text enables us to return to them again, find them again, as if nothing had changed" (p. 75). This notion is similar to ideas found in Anishnaabe author Gerald Vizenor's writings (1993, 1998, 1999) where he imagines that balance in the world of humans is a trick, or a contradiction, or an opposition waiting to happen. It is not static, but a promise or a shadow of movement, of upheaval, of reversal, which will then recreate its own balance; and the cycle begins again. In this way, Trickster is always at play in this or any academic work that attempts to commit to writing the fluid, interactive and nuanced communications between and among speaking subjects.

Our elders-in-residence at the university college continually remind us in terms of our learning to "take what is good and leave the rest." In regard to this research project, their counsel puts me squarely in a position of responsibility, which is often an uncomfortable or irritating position. It forces me to face my own issues of identity, to bare myself in some manner to both Native and academic communities. Yet the elders' words are for all who are involved in the project, either directly as participants or

indirectly as readers of the final report. I must remember that responsibility is not a zero-sum concept where the responsibility that others shoulder reduces mine in any way; and, at the same time, it would be arrogant and even sad for me to think that I am alone in this responsibility.

One of the common threads that runs through the narratives of the women in this project is a feeling of purpose, whether it be actual or historical. The women invoke the words and ideas of other Native women such as Maria Campbell (Métis) who, during the writing of her autobiography Halfbreed (1973), had a close friend say, "Maria, make it a happy book. It couldn't have been so bad...so don't be too harsh" (p. 9). Her response, like some of the responses from the women in this project, was not harsh, yet not "happy": "This is what it was like; this is what it is still like" (p. 9). Supportive of this same stance, Gerald Vizenor (Anishnaabe) (1998) writes, "The consumer notion of a 'hopeful book' is a denial of tragic wisdom and seems to be a social science paradise of tribal victims" (p. 14). Emma LaRocque (Métis) (1991) writes that she has "been made impatient by the social-worker types who receive Native writers by their 'pain' or 'anger,' rather than by their intelligences or analysis...The white audience likes a 'sad' story but it can be indifferent or hostile to Native intellectual analysis of white society" (p. 195). Still, LaRocque confirms that a Native person cannot be liberated unless she or he has articulated what that pain is about (p. 197). But the stories are meant for psychological and intellectual healing, not for entertainment. They are meant to establish the presence of Native women.

The grandmothers and other Native women authors inspire the women in this project. For example, in an interview, Maria Campbell (1991) tells of how the grandmothers looked after her. They came to her in a dream, after which she began to write her/their story (p. 53). Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo) laments the loss of the words of long passed grandmothers such as Sacagawea, whose silenced presence—thus, absence—in the history of the Lewis and Clark expedition to find the Northwest Passage,

has served to entrench stereotypes of Native women as both drudge and noble savage. Gunn Allen, in her poem "The One Who Skins Cats" (1988), imagines in a first-person monologue the lost words and stories of Sacagawea's life, breaking down the romanticized image created of her, and bringing forth a woman, a wife, a mother, a grandmother whose choices in life reflect the vagaries of history, the contradictory nature of responses to those vagaries, and the drive to survive as an individual and as a community. This woman, like those in this project, is complex. She is elusive:

for I am like the wind.
I am legend. I am history.
I come and I go.
My tracks
are washed away in certain places.

She is blasé:

Yeah, sure. Chief Woman. That's
what I was called. Bird Woman.
Among other things. I have had
a lot of names in my time. None
fit me very well, but none was my
true name anyway, so what's the difference?

She is practical:

But I did pretty good for a maid.
I went wherever I pleased, and
the white man paid the way.
I was worth something then. I still am.
But not what they say.

She is vain:

Even while I was alive, I was worth something.
I carried the proof in my wallet all those years...
I had papers that said I was Sacagawea,
and a silver medal the president had made for me.

She is humorous:

...I liked the Apaches, they was good to me.
 But I wouldn't stay long. I had fish to fry.
 Big ones. Big as the whales
 they say I didn't see.

She is courageous:

I left St. Louis because my squawman, Charbonneau,
 beat me. Whipped me so I couldn't walk.
 It wasn't the first time, but that time I left.
 Took me two days to get back on my feet
 then I walked all the way to Commanche country,
 in Oklahoma, Indian Territory...

She does honest personal analysis:

I can't complain
 even now when so many of my own kind
 call me names. Say
 I betrayed the Indians
 into the White man's hand...
 Oh, I probably betrayed some Indians.
 But I took care of my own Shoshonis.
 That's what a Chief woman does, anyway.

She is defiant:

And what I learned I used. I used every bit
 of the whiteman's pride to make sure
 my Shoshoni People would survive
 in the great survival sweepstakes of the day.
 Maybe there was a better way
 to skin the cat,
 but I used the blade that was put in my hand.

She is critical:

...those white women, suffragettes,
 made me the most famous squaw
 in all creation. Me. Snake Woman.
 Chief. You know why they did that?
 Because they was tired of being nothing

themselves. They wanted to show
 how nothing was really something of worth.
 And that was me.

Reiterating how difficult it is to break the entrenched monolithic images of Native women and to rewrite their histories, Sacagawea/Gunn Allen states simply, "It's not easy skinning cats / when you're a dead woman." The women in this project express in their own way that it's still not easy "skinning cats," but that they are committed to it.

A. Rodney Bobiwash (Anishnaabe) (1999) of the Center for World Indigenous Studies writes that the most important cultural understanding that Native North American peoples hold to is the necessity and rightness of "living a good life," which he interprets as "the sense of balance and beauty that is the result of the taking up of one's responsibilities," and the failure of which "can have minor or major effects ranging from a sense of things not being right (dissatisfaction with self) to bad luck and may even result in injury or death" (par. 5). Lee Maracle (1990a), invoking the grandmothers, remembers: "We have a saying among our people 'If you live right the grandmothers will take care of you,' conversely, 'if you don't live right they will forsake you and you will sicken and die'" (p. 199). Both of these authors refuse the idea of letting life "just happen." Lewis Owens (Choctaw/Cherokee) (1989) writes that to give oneself up to "chance, random event, would deny the responsibility of individuals for the world they inhabit, a denial not part of the traditional tribal world view" (p. 146). Some of these admonitions may seem harsh, but they provide another view of the persistence of irritating situations that call on us to be present, to listen, to be humbled by the words of others, to remember, to testify, and to have the courage to listen to the response. It is in this spirit that I humbly offer this testimony to the words of a group of Native women who over the years have inspired, humbled, irritated and guided me and the development of Native women's Studies.

CHAPTER TWO:

THE PRESENCE OF NATIVE WOMEN: AN ONGOING DIALOGUE

Many writers observe Native women's absence from the dialogues that have articulated their identities, and the ways they re-enter the dialogic circle in which many of their grandmothers were respected and powerful members of their communities. This chapter reviews literature about the absences and the presence of Native women. Most of the sources are writings by Native women. There are also references to the writings of Trinh T. Minh-ha, Sherene Razack and Gayatri Spivak, who write from the perspectives of other women of color living in postmodern times. I also use texts from Native author Gerald Vizenor who writes on postmodern issues related to Native peoples. Finally, I use some non Native authors, primarily in the area of dialogics, with Mikhail Bakhtin's work receiving a good deal of attention.

I indicate in parentheses after the name of a Native author her or his First Nation(s), attempting to use the term that she or he uses. I do this to respect an important way in which Native peoples mark their presence, and also to highlight literature written by Native people. This study addresses ways in which a group of contemporary Native women in postsecondary women's studies, through dialogue with their past and their futures, establish their presence as Native women. It is therefore logical and important to foreground the literature of Native women when conducting such a study. At the same time, I feel it appropriate in some cases to use literature

authored by Native men and non Natives. As a Native woman interested in the continual flexing and re-creation inherent in storytelling and dialogue, attempting to isolate a view of Native women separate from those elements that form part of their pasts, their present and their imagined futures seems to me reactionary and unrealistic. My work here is about the presence of Native women in dialogue with their environments. Like it or not, those environments include the Other: men and non Natives. I believe that to be present is always to be in dialogue at least to some extent with even those who may seek to make me absent. I have chosen my sources with care and with specific intention, hoping to use them in ways that respect the presence of each one, while focusing on the ways in which they might enhance an understanding of the presence of Native women.

One of the important ways I attempt to enhance that understanding is by citing a good deal of poetry and some fiction to support this study. I warrant this practice necessary for several reasons, the most prominent of which is the fact that without the inclusion of poetry and fiction, my study would contain only a small number of Native women's voices in written texts—a situation that I suggest should be considered unacceptable in an academic research project about Native women. Devon Mihesuah (Choctaw/French) (1998a) writes, "Because many Indian women writers possess empirical data that cannot find acceptance in historical or anthropological works, literature is one effective outlet for their stories" (p. 47). As well, Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) claim that the use of fictional literature can help sensitize the researcher to cultural themes, images and metaphors involved in a study (p. 131). I therefore make use of poetry, fiction and non-fiction sources in this document, realizing that doing so threatens to plunge me into the morass of academic and legal fiction/fact/faction controversies. It is not my intention within this document to detail all sides of the debate. I wish to point out, however, that storytelling, within the last 15 years especially, has

become a force with which Western academic disciplines (outside of literary studies) and the legal system have had to contend.

The longstanding land issue in *Delgamukw vs. B.C.*, in which the Gitksan and Wet'suet'en nations introduced as evidence oral histories, is a powerful case in point of the increasingly important presence of oral histories and storytelling. The original judgment of the BC Supreme Court (McEachern, 1991) relegated oral tradition (stories) to the category of "beliefs," not to be viewed as having the validity of documented "facts." Six years later in 1997 the Supreme Court of Canada overturned the ruling, stating that the laws of evidence must be adapted in order to accommodate and respect such stories on an equal footing with other conventionally accepted evidence. Even this judgment is problematic in that "a definition that equates oral history with archival documents reinforces the idea that what academics...write is 'history'," and that local stories and practices are merely data for "official" documents (Cruikshank, 2002, p. 23). However, the case highlights the opening of important dialogue between the hegemonic influences of historical (or empirical) "fact," and oral or written "fiction."

Other authors, rather than debate the validity of fictional works alongside of non-fiction, see the separation of the two as problematic. Lee Maracle (*Sto:lo/Métis*) (1990b) refuses to address the binary distinction of fact and fiction, indicating instead that the point is moot. She tells us that "doing requires some form of social interaction and thus, story is the most persuasive and sensible way to present the accumulated thoughts and values of a people" (p. 3), and that theoreticians and philosophers kid themselves if they think that their presentations are not stories (Maracle, 1991, p. 171).

Along the same line of argument, Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) contends that the real and the represented world are integrally connected in continual mutual reaction; a literary work and the world represented in it enter the real world and enrich it, and the real world enters the work and its world as part of the process of its creation (p. 254).

Bakhtin claims that life is experienced through dialogue in which the “real” exists not in a single type of utterance (or text), but in the space between multiple utterances. Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989), alluding to this same idea, sees an inherent connection rather than separation between fiction and non-fiction. She suggests that they have both important and complementary roles: while history or non-fiction tells us what happened at a specific time and place, the story or fiction tells us what might have happened, as well as what is happening at an unspecified time and place (p. 120).

Angela Cavender Wilson (Wahpatonwan Dakota) (1998a) observes that academics often avoid using oral or storied sources, preferring to use only documented or archival sources of information—most often written by non Natives—in order to keep their “scholar’s integrity” safe within the bounds of “factual,” “valid” and “trustworthy” sources. While she does not suggest that archival sources are without merit, Wilson claims that the degree to which they can provide information on the Native peoples is quite small relative to what can be gained through an understanding of oral tradition (pp. 24-25). Although academics may tend to view novelistic or poetic depictions of personal conflicts, confusions, and expressions of happiness as inappropriate sources for social science research, Mihesuah (Choctaw/French) (1998a) claims they serve the important function of making the histories of Indians interesting, personal and real (p. 47). Native stories not only illuminate the broader picture of Native peoples, they are an essential component in the survival of culture (Wilson, 1998b, p. 27).

For Native peoples, the abovementioned arguments are much more than academic. Their cultures stand as testimony to, and a continuing pronouncement of the power of story. They challenge the legal system and academic disciplines, especially when addressing issues involving Native peoples, to acknowledge a way of knowing that is integral to those cultures. I live increasingly in that way of knowing, and in this document I acknowledge the potential of all utterances—oral or written, fiction or non fiction, “fact” or imagination—to inform the subject about which I write.

Native women and absence

Where are your women?

The speaker is Attakullakulla, a Cherokee Chief renowned for his shrewd and effective diplomacy. He has come to negotiate a treaty with the whites. Among his delegation are women....

Implicit in the Chief's question, "Where are your women?" the Cherokee hear, "Where is your balance? What is your intent?" They see the balance is absent and are wary of the white man's motives. They intuit the mentality of destruction.

I turn to my own time. I look at...the hierarchies of my church, my university, my city, my children's school. "Where are your women?" I ask. Awiakta, 1993, p. 9)

I often use this narrative excerpt from Marilou Awiakta (Cherokee/Appalachian) within the context of Native women's studies courses. It refers to the political power that women in some tribes had previous to colonization, but perhaps more importantly it prophesies the subsequent absenting of Native women within representative delegations—both Native and non Native—that continue to negotiate the parameters of Native life. The white men had come to negotiate with other men, and eventually that patriarchal influence reached into the heart of tribal life. Native women remained physically present, but became increasingly absent *as* Native women due to the pervasive influences of stereotypical, essentialist and patriarchal images of the Indian.

Gerald Vizenor (Anishnaabe) (1998) claims that the words and symbols that colonial powers use to name or identify Native peoples as Indian have permeated both Native and non Native society, creating a simulation so powerful that it effectively makes absent Native peoples. To Vizenor, the Indian, from the moment of its "discovery," is a simulation created by western society as a sign of the absence of Native peoples. The Indian is an invention of a discourse of dominance, and therefore not "real." "The *indian*

[original italics] transposes the real, and the simulation of the real has no referent"² (p. 15). Unlike Native peoples, whose history moves far beyond a western history of North America, Vizenor states that Indians are "the faux memories and reasons of an untraceable real, and with no antecedence outside the histories of dominance" (p. 67).

Most of the histories of dominance not only absented Native women, but even their simulations were comparatively infrequent in documents, making the women doubly absent. The histories of the stereotypical bloodthirsty savage or the noble Indian chief were accounts of Indian men by other men. Much less attention was paid to Indian women. Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo/Sioux) (1997-2002) remarks, "As soon as you have soldiers the story is called history. Before their arrival it is called myth, folktale, legend, fairy tale, oral poetry, ethnography. After the soldiers arrive, it is called history" (par. 2). As Awiakta's story implies, the soldiers—including the "soldiers of god": Christian missionaries—did not acknowledge the presence and power of Native women or of their stories. The stories that became history were stories of men.

In later instances, some Native people, themselves influenced by western history that repeatedly ignored women, began to ignore or forget their own histories in which women's presence was substantial. A report from the Aboriginal committee of the 1992 Child Protection Legislation Review in British Columbia states, "Cultural values, based on...a respect for women, have been eroded by authoritarian and paternalistic attitudes...[and] male chauvinistic attitudes of a male prerogative to control 'their women', with force if necessary, has become part of Aboriginal life" (Jacobs, 1992, p. 61). A 1998 Canadian Status of Women report observed, "The Canadian state, Canadian society in general and the Aboriginal male leadership have paid scant attention to [Aboriginal women's] particular needs and concerns" (Stout & Kipling, 1998, p. 6).

² Vizenor at times does not capitalize the words "indian" and "native." One sees this especially in his later writings.

After the explorers and missionaries and soldiers, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries ethnographers, archaeologists and historians (the great majority of whom were male) sought to document the last vestiges of “real” Indian culture, and women were again notably absent as authoritative informants. A study of the prevailing historical literature suggests that Native women were either ignored or seen as having roles ancillary to those of men (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), 1996, sec. 1, par. 2). Women’s stories tended to be rich in the minute details of everyday life, details which either bored or embarrassed the male researcher who preferred men’s stories of war, hunting and diplomatic events that captured the attention of national image makers (Albers, 1983, pp. 1-2). Men’s stories became the recorded “facts” from which historians wrote “Indian history,” a history that “has largely painted images of forests peopled only by men, momentous councils visited only by white and red males, or battles in which warriors performed feats of courage” (Fur, 2002, p. 76). Gerald Vizenor (Anishnaabe) (1999) criticizes the academic world for courting “the *authentic* [original italics] evidence of absence, the romance of ethnic dioramas and cultural simulations” (p. 84), rather than evidence of the presence of Natives. Wendy Rose (Hopi/Miwok) (1995) comments, “What price the pits where our bones share / a single bit of memory, how one century / turns our dead into specimens, our history / into dust, our survivors into clowns...” (p. 208).

This would appear to be doubly true in the case of Native women whose real lives, according to Albers (1983), became all but non-existent in western history. Accounts of their lives were replaced by biased and contradictory images seen through the eyes of mostly white euro-canadian and euro-american men. Marcie Rendon (Ojibwa) (1993) observes that “the enemy has recorded / our greatest warriors’ names / Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull, Geronimo, Chochise / resistance fighters all / and yet / my own grandmothers have no names” (p. 127).

At the time of the arrival of white men, there were hundreds of tribes across North America, representing a wide range of social systems that were quite diverse. Yet, according to Paula Gunn Allen (1992), they shared characteristics of being "earth-based and wilderness centered... 'animalistic,' polytheistic, concerned with sacred or non-political power" (p. 78). Janice Acoose (Nehiowè-Métis/Ninahkwawè) (1995), speaking about the incongruity of Native social systems with Christian patriarchal attitudes of male superiority, writes that "Indigenous Elders teach us that our beings come from the Earth and that at the time of original creation, our [female] beings were infused with powerful energies from the Great Spirit, not the Great Spirit-he" (p. 35).

An important part of those powerful energies manifested as economic power. The *Aboriginal women and treaties project* report (1996), sponsored by the British Columbia Ministry of Women's Equality, states that although there is great diversity among First Nations, women were central to the economy in most traditional First Nations societal structures (Absolon, Herbert, & MacDonald, 1996, p. 74). Historically, female economic authority extended to all of the materials that men brought into the community, and goods coming into the village belonged to the women, who determined what was essential to the survival of the nation, and then the excess was handed over to the men for the purposes of trade (Anderson, 2000, p. 61; Whitehorse, 1995, p. 56). These questions of who held tribal and political and social powers historically, and why, is one of the important threads that, according to Mihesuah (1998a), should wind through studies of Native women (p. 40).

Gender relations shifted, however, as Europeans colonized the Americas. Native women during the fur trade of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were eventually displaced from their central roles of disposing of hides and furs. Increased Native trade for European goods shifted Native subsistence economies to production-for-exchange economies, thus further marginalizing Native women's authority within the economies of their communities (Anderson, 2000, p. 62; Absolon et al, 1996, p. 13).

The arrival of Christian missionaries also contributed to the marginalization of Native women, who were subsequently taught that their place was one of subservience to men. "Our system worked well until the missionaries came and said that we were 'living in sin'...They said that the men are supposed to run everything. That threw everything asunder" (Whitehorse, 1995, p. 57).

The absence of Native women began with the white men's lack of acknowledgment of Native women's roles in their societies, and continued with the transposition of stereotypical images of the Indian woman, which masked and distorted Native women's presence. The images of the Indian woman "were generally represented in...literature somewhere between the polemical stereotypical images of the Indian princess, an extension of the noble savage, and the easy squaw, a more contemporary distortion of the squaw drudge" (Acoose, 1995, p. 39). Prior to contact, Native women's lives were not always ideal, but as the numbers and power of white people increased and affected the lives of all Native peoples, Native women became increasingly absent. The Indian princess and the squaw drudge displaced these women, at times even in their own societies. A summary statement from highlights of the 1996 Canadian Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples states simply, "We are under no illusion that women's lives before contact were free of social problems. But Aboriginal women told us that, with the coming of colonial powers, a disturbing mind-set crept into their own societies" (Indian and Northern Affairs (INAC), 2002, par. 3). That same report states, however, that although "largely silenced for many years, now they will be heard" (par. 4). They will be present.

Native women and presence

Contemporary Native women live in a "post-al" era: postindian, postmodern, postcolonial, post-residential school, post-Bill C-31³, postsecondary. Native women, like

³ In 1986, Bill C-31 amended the section of the Canadian Indian Act that had previously deprived Native women—but not Native men—of their Indian status and legal rights as Indians if they married a non-Indian.

the prefix “post-,” do not stand alone, but have always historical referents. At the same time, just as “post-” implies future time, so Native women are also linked to an imagined future. The movement between their histories and their imagined futures makes them present, whereas static images or stereotypes make them absent. Beth Cuthand (Cree) (1998) in her poem “Post-Oka Kinda Woman,” adds another “post-al” marker by which she and other Native women live their connections to the past and to the future.

Post-Oka woman, she’s o.k.
 She shashay into your suburbia.
 MacKenzie Way, Riel Crescent belong to her
 like software, microwave ovens
 plastic Christmas trees and lawn chairs.
 Her daughter wears Reeboks and works out.
 Her sons cook and wash up.
 Her grandkids don’t sass their Kohkom!
 No way.
 She drives a Toyota, reads bestsellers,
 sweats on weekends, colors her hair,
 sings old songs, gathers herbs.
 Two steps Tuesdays, Round dances Wednesdays,
 Twelve steps when she needs it. (p. 252)

Post-Oka woman’s strong presence emerges from her everyday reality, which includes her dialogue with the past and the future. There is a continual ebb of reversion to the past and an unstoppable flow toward the future. Her identifier, Post-Oka, also places her in this ebb and flow. The incident at Oka⁴ is in a recent past—1990—and integrally related to a distant past where places on the land continued to be recognized as sacred and inviolable. Although she is post- or *after* Oka and long after the ancestors belonging to the contested land, she is present through those historical times as she dialogues with an upcoming, high-tech and culturally diverse future in which the past plays an important part, but is not the sole marker. She is also postindian; she is *after* the fixed and stereotypical images of Native women. She refuses to be trapped in a still-frame of

⁴ In 1990 there was an armed standoff at Oka/Kanesatake, Quebec, between the Mohawk Nation and Canada-Quebec police and army, over a burial site and land. It lasted 78 days.

history, where her traditions of herb gathering, sweat lodging and singing would preclude her use of microwave ovens, hair coloring and plastic Christmas trees.

Speaking of the irrepressibility of the human spirit to express itself, Jean-Paul Sartre (1963) writes that oppressed peoples will inevitably rebel against the images created of them by others. He remarks that in the rebellion “we only become what we are by the radical and deep-seated refusal of that which others have made us” (p. 17). Post-Oka woman is radical in her refusal to play into stereotypical images of Native women, and she is just as radical in refusing to be chained to the distant past. She lives in the space in-between the past and an imagined future, a space created by ongoing dialogue with both. Marcie Rendon (1988) also writes about that unnamable dialogic space of continual movement that is her presence.

this woman that i am becoming
is a combination of the woman that I am
and was
this journey backward will help me
to walk forward (p. 219)

Gerald Vizenor (1998) sees this space as a way for Native peoples to move beyond reactionary identity politics in order to become present as Natives rather than as the Indian invented by white people. Cuthand’s and Rendon’s poetry implies that Native peoples now live in “postindian” times; and Vizenor states that identifying oneself as Native—which, on its own, often results only in reification of the invented Indian—is not a guarantee of being present as Native, because presence exists beyond things nameable.

The point is that we are long past the colonial invention of the indian. We come after the invention, and we are the postindians. That says more about who we are not, which is significant in identity politics, and nothing about who we are or might become as postindians...Postindians create a native presence, and that sense of presence is both reversion and futurity. (p. 84)

Native identity politics, Vizenor remarks, tend to concentrate on recalling what existed before: before colonization, before residential schools, before pop culture. It presupposes a time and place that can be fixed, pure, and accurately interpreted. Native presence, on the other hand, is both reversion to the past and a simultaneous and sometimes contradictory and oppositional movement toward the future. Native presence, like Post-Oka woman's presence, is not a fixed and nameable identity of the kind that research can discover and document as truth. Nor is it one that identity politics can use as a definitive statement of Nativeness, or a standard measure for calculating shades of Nativeness.

Chrystos (Menominee) (1988a) talks directly to those who would believe in and perpetuate the romantic stereotype of the Indian princess who is sensuous, mysterious and all-knowing of the secrets of an exotic people.

...I'm not
 a means by which you can reach spiritual understanding or even
 learn to do beadwork...
 I won't chant for you
 I admit no spirituality to you
 I will not sweat with you or ease your guilt with fine turtle tales
 I will not wear dancing clothes to read poetry or
 explain hardly anything at all... (p. 66)

Chrystos systematically dismantles stereotypical roles accorded the Indian woman. She writes who she is not, but not specifically who she is. She has swept away old images, leaving a space for her to be present without naming herself.

Indian stereotypes have been very "writeable," their identities created, perfected and made static by western discourse. Specific and various sets of contradictory vocabulary have, over time, come to be associated with those identities. Carol Lee Sanchez (Laguna/Sioux/ Lebanese) (1988) points out some of the binaries inherent in the images of the invented Indian:

To be Indian is to be considered "colorful," spiritual, connected to the earth, simplistic, and disappointing if not dressed in buckskin and

feathers; shocking if a city-dweller and even more shocking if an educator or other type of professional...To be Indian is to be thought of as primitive, alcoholic, ignorant...better off dead, unskilled, non-competitive, immoral, pagan or heathen, untrustworthy...and frightening. (p. 163)

Whether negatively or positively motivated, these vocabularies create stereotypes. They make Indians easily nameable and documentable for the purposes of reporting yet another "truth" about them.

Native presence, on the other hand, is not writeable in the literal sense; it defies a static, clear naming. There is no final vocabulary that one can specifically associate with Natives. Yet, though their identities are not writeable, Natives can be present in their narratives. Chrystos' poem states clearly what she is not, leaving the reader to read between the lines in order to understand who or what she is. Her presence is not written, although it is created in the spaces between the written words. The woman in the poem moves beyond her identity toward an unnamable and unwriteable presence. Words such as "teasing," "haunting," and "troubling" give some sense of that unnamable presence. These words imply a shadowy movement of the kind that one can see only out of the corner of the eye, a movement too subtle to catch in a frontal view. Stories—like Chrystos'—that eschew victimry and essentialist identity and take pleasure in the comedic and ironic manifestations of the human condition are stories of Native presence (Vizenor, 1998).

Gender politics

Maracle (Sto:lo/Métis) (1996) argues her belief in gendered Native societies by reasoning that if we accept that in ancient times those societies were human societies, then they were gendered: "We used to believe that men responded to women, naturally. We also believed that choice was sacred, and that women were sexually passionate beings. We had better get back to some of the traditions that kept us human" (p. 25). Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo) (1992) makes a definitive statement about the notion

of ancient Native societies as gynocracies. In her book *The Sacred Hoop*, she writes, “There is reason to believe that many American Indian tribes thought that the primary potency in the universe was female, and that understanding authorizes all tribal activities, religious or social” (p. 26). Kim Anderson (Métis) (2000), after conducting extensive interviews with contemporary North American Native women, concurs with Gunn Allen’s contention that although tribes see women variously, they do not question the power of femininity (p. 36).

In her poem, “Some Like Indians Endure” (1990), Gunn Allen refers to the absence of Native women in those same Native societies after contact, and hints at their unnamable presence that continues to survive in the form of an idea:

the place where we live now
 is idea
 because whiteman took
 all the rest
 because father
 took all the rest
 but the idea which
 once you have it
 you can’t be taken
 for somebody else
 and have nowhere to go
 like indians you can be
 stubborn (p. 299)

Native women live in the unnamable space of “idea,” which is simultaneously something and nothing: you can have it, but it’s never yours. And this positioning differentiates in some ways Native women as a collective from other women.

Contemporary Native women face dilemmas not always shared by non Native women. A Native women’s gender politics based on an enduring idea of a past that can speak to the present sets them apart from most mainstream movements that tend to imagine a future not inspired by the past. Maracle (1996) in her book *I am woman* writes

about the systematic absencing of Native women that goes beyond that experienced by non Native women: "The dictates of patriarchy demand that beneath the Native male comes the Native female. The dictates of racism are that Native men are beneath white women and Native females are not fit to be referred to as women" (pp. 17-18). Anderson (2000) reiterates that Native females have been subjected both to racist notions of the savage, and to sexist notions of a debased womanhood: "To be Native was uncivilized; to be female was inferior; but to be a combination of the two was particularly base" (p. 139). These statements highlight a fundamentally racist social structure that absented Native women, and still inhibits many of them from embracing wholeheartedly the ideologies of some current women's movements.

Maracle (1996) tells of a time when she internalized the racist claim that she was outside of the category of woman. She was absent and for a time she in turn engaged in writing that made other Native women absent (p. 18). She states that Native women's acceptance of the idea of gender is essential to combating patriarchy and racism: "First we must see ourselves as women: powerful, sensuous beings in need of compassion and tenderness" (p. 22). Native women's acceptance of the power of womanhood aligns them in one way with women's movements, although elements of racism within those movements continue to rub.

Annette Jaimes (Juaneño/Yaqui) claims that some Indian women hold white feminists in disdain, seeing them as constituting the white supremacy and colonialism that oppresses Indians (as cited in Mihesuah, 1998a, p. 40). According to Maracle (1996), white women "let us in the door as we prove ourselves civilized [human on their terms]. Such is the nature of racism. If we don't escape learning it, can we expect that they should?" (p. 137). Ironically, making her Nativeness absent was for Maracle the price of membership in the women's movement. She admits that although necessary for the eventual unity between oppressed women and men, the dialogue that must take place between an ex-racist and an ex-victim of racism "is not apt to be pretty" (p. 138). Emma

LaRocque (Métis) (1991) states as well that reconciliation between white people and Native people will never happen without pain and without grieving together (p. 199). Acrimonious commentaries by other Native women directed at women's movements—especially in the 1980s when women's movements in general came under attack from women of color—attest to that fact.

Beth Brant (Degonwadonti) (1988) explains the frustration that some Native women have: "We are angry at a so-called 'women's movement' that always seems to forget we exist. Except in romantic fantasies of earth mother, or equally romantic and dangerous fantasies about Indian-woman-as-victim" (p. 10). Chrystos (1988b), in her poem "Maybe we shouldn't meet if there are no Third World women here" speaks openly about some of the unaddressed or ill-addressed issues of racism associated with the women's movement—issues which make Native women absent, invisible.

All those workshops on racism won't help you open your eyes & see
 How you don't even see us
 How can we come to your meetings if we are invisible
 Don't look at me with guilt Don't apologize Don't struggle
 With the problem of racism like algebra
 Don't write a paper on it for me to read or hold a meeting in
 Which to discuss what to do to get us to come to your
 Time & place
 We're not your problems to understand and trivialize
 We don't line up in your filing cabinets under "R" for rights
 Don't make the racist assumption that issue of racism
 Between us
 Is yours at me
 Bitter boiling I can't see you (p. 13)

Chrystos talks of her invisibility as a Native woman at these meetings, even though her female body might be present. She refers to non Native women's attempts to "understand and trivialize" her Nativeness by holding meetings about her absence—meetings in which she continues to be absent—or by classifying (naming) and fixing her to a particular "Time & place," or by lining her up alphabetically under "R" for

rights. As well, because the white women assume that the issue of racism is a one-way (white-toward-Native) process, whiteness remains at the center, absenting Native women from the dialogue. In turn, says Chrystos to the women, "I can't see you."

Kate Shanley (Assiniboine/Irish) (1988) also remarks on and outlines two reasons for Native women's reluctance to join what she calls the "majority women's movement.":

(1) on the individual level, the Indian woman struggles to promote the survival of a social structure whose organizational principles represent notions of family different from those of the mainstream; and (2) on the societal level, the people seek sovereignty as a people in order to maintain a vital legal and spiritual connection to the land, in order to survive as a people. (p. 214)

Shanley sees these two points as critical to understanding the real-life positions of Native women in relation to the theories that attempt to address their needs.

In the 1960s, most Native women's groups underwent a transformation from clubs focusing on home economics to clubs involved in public affairs, tackling issues such as housing standards, living conditions, Aboriginal rights and women's rights. During that decade, other associations, chapters and locals regrouping Aboriginal women were established across Canada, on reserves, in rural communities and in urban centres (RCAP, 1996, sec. 6). Representatives of these organizations form part of the Native Women's Association of Canada (NwAC) (2002), an activist association intending to "help empower [Native] women by involving itself in developing and changing legislation which affects them, and by involving itself in the development and delivery of programs promoting equal opportunity for Aboriginal women" (par. 1). In 1974 the NwAC convened its first annual assembly. Now there are Native women's associations in every province and territory. Until the early 1980s, NwAC spoke on behalf of First Nations, Inuit and Métis women. In 1984, Inuit women created their own organization, and in 1992 the Métis National Council of Women was established.

The goals and objectives of each Aboriginal women's organization are similar: improving the quality of life for Aboriginal women and their children by achieving equal participation in the social, economic, cultural and political life not only of their communities but of Canadian society as a whole (RCAP, 1996, sec. 6). The list of issues that these organizations have been mandated to address shows obvious points of intersection with majority women's organizations in the areas of family violence, AIDS, health, and child welfare. There are other areas that address issues of Native women's presence and absence in their Native communities—the Indian Act, Aboriginal rights and the Constitution—political and cultural issues which likely discourage, restrict or prevent Native women's full participation in majority women's organizations. Native women probably have more in common with minority movements such as those organized by other women of color.

Dialoguing with other women of color

The word/idea of "gender" names the unnamable. It engenders obvious questions such as, "If there are women and men, what then is a woman? What is a man?"

A social regulator and a political potential for change, gender, in its own way, baffles definition. It escapes the "*diagnostic power*" [original italics] of a sex-oriented language/sex-identified logic and coincides thereby with *difference*, whose inseparable temporal and spatial dynamics produces the illusion of identity while undermining it relentlessly. (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 116)

In the case of Native women, continual pressure to foreground their solidarity with the collective of Native people in support of political issues of sovereignty has been at times an undermining factor in their presence as Native women. Gender-based, sectarian movements within the Native collective may threaten its ability to act in concert to gain political power and to negotiate on equal terms. On the other hand, majority women's

movements and support structures that focus on womanhood lack a full recognition of Nativeness.

To live is to language who we are, what we are doing, and how we feel. Yet naming (identifying) Natives and naming gender are risky activities that can rigidify identity, creating an essentialist image of Native women. One of the main ways we resist being falsely named by others is to use language to re-name ourselves. Trinh T. Minh-ha (1991) refers to this exercise as “the necessity of renaming so as to un-name...[where] the return to a denied heritage allows one to start again with different re-departures, different pauses, different arrivals” (p. 14). To re-name oneself is to return to the “old” in a “new” way—a different way—which will create different understandings and places within which to become. In this way, naming becomes more a point of departure than an end point in the struggle, allowing women to acknowledge the notion of gender identity in politicizing the personal, but without being limited by it (Minh-ha, 1992, p. 140).

For women of color, identity politics involve both gender and cultural identities, and these two political namings do not necessarily support each other. Women of color often perceive feminist politics as “white” politics, which at times puts them in a sort of conflict of interest with their cultural identity if they align themselves with feminist ideologies. The naming of gender and the naming of culture are unavoidably essentialist actions that potentially can prevent both the sufferer and the perceiver of oppression from gaining a clear understanding of the effects of the oppressive structures. Sherene Razack’s (1998) solution is to resurrect

the multiple narratives that script women’s lives...to see that women are socially constituted in different and unequal relation to one another...The material and ideological arrangements of patriarchy, class exploitation, and white supremacy combine in uneven ways to structure relations among women. (p. 158)

In viewing Native women as a multi-voiced collectivity, as Razack implies in her solution of multiple narratives, there is a much greater chance that contradictions and nuances

will appear, simultaneously breaking down essentialist identifiers that the women might routinely use to help make themselves present. Yet even multiple narratives can produce collective, essentialist expressions of identity.

Gayatri Spivak (1991) suggests that it is not possible to avoid completely essentialist identifiers, because in pretending to avoid them, one merely becomes slave to another grand narrative: anti-essentialism (p. 12). Minh-ha (1991) downplays the attitude that all essentialist stances pose serious problems: "Postures of exclusionism and of absolutism...unveil themselves to be at best no more than a form of reactive defense and at worst, an obsession with the self as holder of rights and property—or in other words, as owner of the world" (p. 3). Spivak (1996) claims that essentialist identity can become a liberatory rather than a dominating factor. This "strategic essentialism," suggests that the subaltern (in this case, women of color) can use a particular ideology (e.g. feminism) for liberatory purposes, while still recognizing that it is complicit with the forces of domination. She advocates for "a strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest" (p. 214). Minh-ha (1992) claims that the subaltern's use of essentialist terms such as "feminist," instead of closing the door on an imprisoned identity, can create a critical space for re-naming.

Naming yourself a feminist is not without problem, even among feminists. In a context of marginalization, at the same time as you feel the necessity to call yourself a feminist while fighting for the situation of women, you also have to keep a certain latitude and to refuse that label when feminism tends to become an occupied territory. Here, you refuse, not because you don't want to side with other feminists, but simply because it is crucial to keep open the space of naming in feminism. (p. 151)

Such an approach may be a more realistic way for women of color to come to terms with cultural and gender issues which can create multiple and contradictory influences and oppressions. It opens up feminist ideas to an expanded notion of womanhood, allowing, for example, Native women to essentialize or name themselves as Native women in order

to gain access to the dialogues that attempt to dictate their lives. At the same time, this approach demands that the naming—essentialist though it may be—be consciously context specific in time and space. As the context changes—which certainly it will—the borders of those strategic identities will become porous, allowing for and inviting border crossing and criss-crossing.

Spivak (1994) says that the silencing of women's voices in western history cannot be solved by an "essentialist" search for lost origins (p. 91). Minh-ha (1991) extends this idea by taking another perspective on the idea that essentialist identifiers close down dialogue. She suggests that although some forms of essentialist identity can function to simply wrap up an identity in order to facilitate mass consumption, there are other forms that do not. Rather they are doors that can and will eventually open onto "other closures and function...as ongoing passages to an elsewhere(-within-here)" (pp. 15-16). In a later book (1992), she says that a particular claim of identity is often a strategic rather than an essentialist one, which enables a person to question anew her or his condition. An accompanying strategy of displacement or movement differentiates the strategic identity claim from the essentialist one (p. 157).

A Native woman must name herself at certain strategic points in order to get the attention of her environment. That strategic naming makes possible politics and identity, which are an integral part of her everyday world, and an important strategy for survival and for identifying her place in social relations. However, danger is also present; to name herself "Native woman" is to risk becoming a simulation, to risk becoming absent because at a certain point she no longer fits—or maybe never did nor could fit the fixed criteria attached to that name.

At the same time she asserts her difference, she would have to call into question everything which, in the name of the group and the community, perniciously breaks the individual's links with other, while forcing her back on herself and restrictively tying her down to her own reclaimed identity. (Minh-ha, 1991, p. 18)

For groups of humans who have been made absent by dominant narratives, essentialist identity as a strategic practice rather than a theory, as chance rather than truth, can be an important element of presence, although an admittedly risky one.

The dialogic talking circle

The articulation of presence through language is at once a highly complex yet wonderfully simple process, lending itself without effort to both theory and practice. As practice, it is generally accessible and its forms and participants are countless. As theory, its interpretations are infinite as well as simultaneously communal and personal. It can name, yet it also has the potential to resist and undermine grand narratives or universalizing discourses. It can make Native women present through the dialogue inherent in their narratives.

Narrating the presence of Native women

Gerald Vizenor (Anishnaabe) (1998) claims that tribal narratives are the most enduring aspect of Native cultures; they hold the presence of Native peoples. Narratives always address an audience: they are social entities. Native stories arise from a “dialogic circle” of relations (p. 22). They speak to the moment the story is told, and they express a Native presence that will speak to the future as well. When these narratives arise from and remain in that dialogic circle, plural interpretations abound. Emma LaRocque (Métis) (1991) emphasizes, “There are just a thousand angles from which to see Native people” (p. 198). A thousand angles provide little chance of forming an unambiguous truth about Native women. Emmi Whitehorse (Navajo) (1995) talks of the necessity of an artist being ambiguous if she is interested in the presence of Native women: “I don’t want to be too literal in the work. I’m ambiguous. I’m interested in the presence of the woman” (p. 56). Those angles or interpretations also shift with the changing context, and indeed must change in order to preserve a Native presence. Once Native women’s narratives—whether oral or written—are made “unambiguous”, those women become

absent. Marie Annharte (Anishnaabe) (1998), in her poem “One way to keep track of who is talking,” suggests that outside of the circle of dialogue, Native people’s identities, like the bodies lying in the snow at Wounded Knee, are relegated to a place where

Frozen Indians and frozen conversations predominate.
We mourn the ones at Wounded Knee. Our traditions
buried in one grave. Our frozen circles of silence
do no honour to them. We talk to keep our
conversations from getting too dead. (p. 190)

In contrast, within the circle of dialogue, Native women’s narratives continue to make them present and collectively visible from a thousand angles.

Speaking dialogics

Dialogics—often associated with the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin—offer ways to consider and talk about the presence of Native women through their narratives. A theory of dialogics works from the simple premise that verbal interaction is the basic reality of language, and that it continually re-defines us. As beings who use language, we are never completely isolated, because verbal interaction involves a minimum of two voices. In oral interaction, at least two people converse; in written text, at least one author converses with at least one reader. The interaction can be external, where actual text is spoken or written; or it can be internal, in the sense of thought processes or “talking to oneself.” It can also be a combination of internal and external, where one person speaks to another either orally or in writing, while the other person responds internally without externalizing those thoughts. These permutations of verbal interaction simultaneously stem from and create social relations. Thus language is inextricably linked to social context, and meaning is socially generated.

Two interrelated and fundamental propositions emerge from the idea of language as a product of dialogue within a socially organized context. The first is that language, like the social context that produces and is produced by it, is actively creative. It is

always in action or motion, always adapting to circumstances. Language function and meaning naturally change over time and within different social contexts. The second proposition claims that language always expresses a point of view. It is never neutral, never just a grouping of words that have no particular intent. The uniform appearance of words can confuse us into thinking that language has some static quality and stable meaning, and we delude ourselves when we use the term "language" as if it refers to a homogeneous essence (Wertsch, 1991, pp. 105-106).

According to Bakhtin (1986), language is not an isolated event even at the moment a person speaks, because the person speaking cannot be isolated from the complex social context that forms the utterance⁵. Every utterance is a responsive link in the continuous chain of other utterances, none of which can be studied outside that chain (p. 136). This metaphor of a continuous chain of utterances imparts a particular point of view regarding notions of self and other, the individual and the community. If indeed language constitutes human consciousness, and the basic reality of language is in verbal interaction, then an individual using language cannot be outside of interaction, and can never be isolated from others. This is not to say that the individual becomes subsumed by verbal interaction. There remains a "betweenness" in which "discourse lives, as it were, on the boundary between its own context and another, alien context" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 284). Those borderzones of meaning are fluid and ever shifting, depending on the particular context of an utterance.

"Life is by its very nature dialogical" (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 293), and speech constantly generates new meanings. Every utterance is linked to other related communication events, some of which belong to a distant past, and some of which belong to an anticipated future. In verbal interaction, meaning does not emerge in a straightforward way: there is no guarantee that the speaker or writer's exact intent will

⁵ This word indicates all verbal communication, oral or written.

pass directly to the listener or reader. Both the speaker/writer and the listener/reader are influenced by their knowledge of past utterances, as well as by what they think will be the future utterances provoked by the current speech event in which they are participating. An utterance negotiates a vast terrain of meanings linked to past and future communication events, making a direct, unmediated transferal of meaning between human beings virtually impossible.

V. N. Voloshinov (1986) writes, "Meaning does not reside in the word or in the soul of the speaker or in the soul of the listener. Meaning is the *effect of interaction between speaker and listener* [original italics]" (pp. 102-103). Meaning resides not in the individual, but in the borderzones between self and other, where the endless chain of past and future speech events is present and active. In this way, an utterance cannot be monologic: it never contains one voice only. Although only one person may be verbalizing, the utterance has been formed in dialogue with what has already been said, as well as with the calculated response of others to the utterance.

Nor can an utterance be the property of an individual in isolation from the speech community or communities that she or he inhabits. To "say what we mean" and to "mean what we say" are acts inextricably enmeshed in ongoing dialogues between the past and the future. "Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated—overpopulated—with the intentions of others" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 294). The role of those for whom the utterance is intended has an extremely high significance; the utterance "is territory shared by both addresser and addressee, by the speaker and his interlocutor" (Voloshinov, 1986, p. 86).

Although a speech act theoretically involves a minimum of two people, in reality it involves many more. Each speaker and addressee brings to any utterance her or his personal history of dialogic activity, which increases exponentially the number of voices involved in making meaning. "The concrete utterance...is born, lives, and dies in the

process of social interaction between the participants of the utterance" (Voloshinov, 1976, p. 105). A speaker does not simply transfer the direct, unmediated meaning of an experience to another person or persons. The utterance merely enters a "dialogic circle," which will never produce the true meaning; it will always produce a multiplicity of true meanings within specific contexts.

Language arises between and among human beings who are organized in some way socially in order for them to communicate through the signs and ideologies that make up language. Each living ideological sign has in its extreme two faces: "Any current curse word can become a word of praise, any current truth must inevitably sound to many other people as the greatest lie" (Voloshinov, 1986, p. 23). It depends on the social context, which changes the evaluation of language over time. The word has that same two-sided quality: it is determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant. Thus, verbal communication can never be understood and explained outside of its connection with a concrete situation, and with the social organization between people.

This notion provides a particular understanding of community. If one uses language, one is part of a speech community; and depending on how one uses language, one may be a member of several speech communities. Language and its forms are the products of prolonged contact among members of a given community. Each speech community has its own typical conception of the addressee, and this defines it as a "speech genre." An individual's utterances belong to her or his social group, whose past communication events and future responses shape its particular speech genre. Because there can be multiple speech genres of the same language, a person can, and often does belong to more than one speech community. Depending on the social context, that person will choose words according to the way she or he understands the expectations, abilities and history of the addressee.

Bakhtin (1981) theorizes that people always choose words and give them a point of view, keeping three considerations in mind: 1) the theme of what they want to say, 2) the calculation of other people's response to the utterance, and 3) the utterance's relationship to previous utterances. In other words, what is it that I want to talk about? How will I say it in order to produce the response that I anticipate? How does what I will say fit into what I and other people already have said about this topic? The complexity involved in a person's choice of words, then, makes any utterance highly resistant to strict interpretation.

In addition, although the utterance has a certain point of view (evaluation) at the very moment of its expression, that evaluation can change drastically within a different context. A change in context can be historical (changes over time) or situational (differing contexts for different people within the same time frame). An example of both of these cases would be use of such words as "halfbreed," "queer," and "witch." Over time, these historically pejorative words have been appropriated and re-contextualized or re-evaluated by some members of marginalized groups, thus changing substantially their historically negative connotations. Yet, depending on the situation or the people involved in uttering these words, the meanings still change, depending on the situation. For example, currently in certain circles the word "halfbreed" may be received very positively; in other circles, it can still provoke a very negative response.

To view language as woven into myriad social, historical and political contexts is to see human beings in a ceaseless flow of becoming. As a system, language does not correspond to any real moment in that process of becoming. There is no originary moment when language was "pure." The notion of standard or conventionally accepted language—what Bakhtin calls a national language—is but an invented scale on which to register the deviations occurring at every real instant of time. This is not to say that commonly accepted language forms change instantaneously, allowing us to use words in a completely different way at any time. The result would be chaotic. A national

language is formed through habit, a particular characteristic of human beings as they organize themselves socially. Part and parcel of that habit, however, is the habit of dialogue, which virtually guarantees that national languages will change. It is through dialogue that habits change. In the case of oppressed peoples, it is through dialogue that they change certain racist and sexist habits of society.

The circle of habitual talk

A theory of dialogics "speaks to" the desire of marginalized or oppressed peoples to break the habit of their absence, and to make themselves present. That presence necessarily will manifest itself as a fluid identity continuously emerging from a dialogic circle always and simultaneously populated by the like-minded, the Other, the past, and the future. In a dialogic circle, these elements are not and cannot be isolated from one another, regardless of how continuously or how loudly they may vie for position in the ongoing dialogue. Each group or community seeks a voice, but in reality it can seek only voices, many of which belong to multiple other communities as well. Attempts at a singular voice (a fixed truth) are constantly drowned out by the plurality of voices that populate any utterance at any particular point in time and space.

The dialogic circle is not a model of democratic process. Increased numbers don't sway the vote. Plurality cannot be contained or measured; "plurality adds up to no total...[and] this non-totalness never fails either to baffle or to awaken profound intolerance and anxieties" (Minh-ha, 1991, p. 15). Presence has the same baffling characteristics: it cannot be measured or named, because it is created through the process of dialogue, not through the words and sentences that form those dialogues. At best, understanding that language and thus identity are contingent on context "leads to a recognition of the contingency of conscience, and how both recognitions lead to a picture of intellectual and moral progress as a history of increasingly useful metaphors rather than of increasing understanding of how things really are" (Rorty, 1989, p. 9).

Having some understanding of the context of a person's expression of identity is critical; a theory of dialogics holds this notion as fundamental. Yet, dialogically speaking, identity is always fluid and never quite complete because the utterance has no originary moment, nor any foreseeable end: "No one utterance can be either the first or the last" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 136). This situation creates an identity in constant play with changes in context. It is dynamic and always subject to carnivalesque reminders of its authoritative vulnerability.

Bakhtin (1984b) emphasizes the playful and carnival potential of language, which can produce laughter of a complex nature. It is a laughter that is of all the people. It is directed at all and everyone. It is at once joyous, triumphant, mocking, derisive, assertive, resistant, destructive, and revitalizing (pp. 11-12). For a time nothing is sacred, and no utterance retains its authority. Play abounds in Bakhtin's dialogic view of the "grotesque realism" of the carnival environment which

consecrates inventive freedom, to permit the combination of a variety of different elements and their rapprochement, to liberate from the prevailing point of view of the world, from conventions and established truths, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted. This carnival spirit offers the chance to have a new outlook on the world, to realize the relative nature of all that exists, and to enter a completely new order of things. (p. 34).

The carnivalesque offers a dialogical method whereby one can learn to play with the opposition between master narratives and people's everyday reality. Mockery and parody carnivalize the seriousness of "theories" that pass as scientific or logical fact, without closing off dialogue about them, and without excluding anyone from the circle.

Dialogue as liberatory practice

Dale Bauer (1988) states that Bakhtin's theory of the interplay of the social voices reveals the way a specific and cultural context fashions the self. The acts of listening and reading—primary forms of cultural contact—are modes by which we acquire our

gendered orientation to the world. In creating a feminist dialogics, Bauer adds that a cultural context operates in a similar way to fashion the self according to gender differences: "There is no zone which gender does not enter and dispute the territory" (p. 2). In terms of dialogue as liberatory practice there are, however, zones of dispute regarding the theoretical premises of dialogics and actual social conditions which may or may not promote it or allow for it to be liberatory.

Bauer claims that Bakhtin's theory of dialogics is at first seductive since it seems to offer a utopian ground for all voices to flourish (p. 5), but she, like Pam Morris (1994), cautions that one must not lose sight of the fact that dialogue is not always free exchange. It can also be coercive and threatening (p. 9), which, in the case of women can make them absent. Joy Harjo (Muskogee) (2001) creates an image of the silenced woman forced outside of the dialogic circle:

On the other side
of the place you live stands a dark woman.
She has been trying to talk to you for years.
You have called the same name in the middle of a
nightmare, from the center of miracles.
She is beautiful.
This is your hatred back. She loves you. (p. 476)

Bakhtin's notion of the dialogic circle or community presupposes that people who use language have a "voice" or a presence within the circle. According to Bauer (1988), however, "Bakhtin's blind spot is the battle. He does not work out the contradiction between the promise of utopia or community and the battle which is always waged for control" (p. 5); he assumes that all participants agree to the encounter (Bauer, 1991, p. 210). Gardiner (1992) also claims that Bakhtin tends to "undertheorize the complexity of the social and to overestimate the liberatory potential of popular culture" (p. 8). Along the same line of thinking, Burkitt (1998) contends that within the "Bakhtin Circle," heretical discourses and carnival are not enough on their own to bring about social

revolution. Critical discourses must be aligned with objective crises in order to make meaning and sense of the view of a new social order (p. 178).

Other thinkers who counter these concerns point to the idea that Bakhtin's theories indeed can apply to liberatory practice, although they may not overtly articulate that practice. Michael Bernard-Donals (1998) points out that Bakhtin's

notion of carnival and subversion—with its attention focused on the micro-politics of sanctioned and undermining cultural forms, licit and illicit language, spoken and unspoken (but performed) utterance—can contribute in productive ways to the...debate over whether or not the subaltern has a voice and what shape that voice may take. (p. 113)

Danow (1991) claims that while the exploration of violence or coercion in human interaction certainly expands the conceptual bounds of Bakhtin's dialogics, it does so without necessarily reducing or limiting its positive view regarding dialogue's liberatory potential (p. 134). Bauer (1991) herself suggests that dialogic theory's basic assumption that discourse cannot represent a singular truth and reality—that discourse is inherently unstable—supports a feminist (subaltern) stance. It opens up a space for women's voices to re-enter the dialogic circle in order to reconstruct the very process by which they were excluded (p. 673). The orchestration of many social languages becomes "cultural capital, a way to work within the dominant, prevailing values by subverting them consciously, by seeing through them and articulating that unveiling" (Bauer, 1988, p. 5). Rita Joe (Mi'kmaq) (1998) writes about the battle for control of language during her stay at residential school, and her subsequent use of both languages to subvert dominant values.

I lost my talk
The talk you took away.
When I was a little girl
At Shubenacadie School

You snatched it away
I speak like you
I think like you
I create like you

The scrambled ballad, about my word.

Two ways I talk
Both ways I say,
Your way is more powerful.

So gently I offer my hand and ask,
Let me find my talk
So I can teach you about me. (pp. 113-114)

In order to re-enter the circle, Bauer (1988) claims, "We must struggle to refashion inherited social discourses into words which rearticulate intentions...other than normative or disciplinary ones" (Bauer, 1988, p. 2). Certainly Bakhtin's theories support and articulate that very process.

Women are a proverbial other, and Bauer suggests that it is by highlighting that otherness—by strategically essentializing it—that women can do battle with patriarchal or racist codes. Bakhtin's (1984a) images of carnival describe an environment in which difference (otherness) becomes powerful. In carnival

participants live in it, they live by its laws as long as those laws are in effect...Because carnivalistic life is life drawn out of its usual rut, it is to some extent "life turned inside out," "the reverse side of the world"...Carnival is the place for working out, in a concretely sensuous, half-real and half-play-acted form, a new mode of interrelationships between individuals [original italics], counterpoised to the all-powerful socio-hierarchical relationships of noncarnival life. (pp. 122-123)

Bauer (1988) relates those images to the freedom that women's difference (otherness) can provide. Carnivalized discourse refuses to honor the authority of a dominant discourse that reduces the individual to an object of control. In this way, carnival reveals the individual as the subject of her or his own discourse rather than object of an official line or finalizing word (p.15).

Bakhtin's metaphor of the carnival is particularly useful in providing everyday images for the ways in which Native women in dialogic circles can resist metanarrative

dominances. The metaphor also respects the need for strategic essentialisms. The carnival is not meant to last—to become its own static monologue. Rather its intent is to question and re-organize social relations through narrative play. “Dialogism can give women access to both power and sexuality as oppositional forces to the univocality that assures the maintenance of the status quo” (Bauer, 1988, p. 54). Instead of being signs, women become manipulators—not owners—of signs. Through their stories, they become active participants (players) in the dialogic circle of their relationships.

Social and political restrictions present in “noncarnival life” have served to close off the dialogic circle to women, and especially to women of color. A focus on transforming those processes dialogically will lead to (1) women’s reconstruction of their own images (the deconstruction of patriarchal or oppressive images), and (2) the assurance that those reconstructed images will not simply usurp the power of the old sexist and racist images that were part of the previous discourse.

For, there is no space really untouched by the vicissitudes of history, and emancipatory projects never begin nor end properly [original italics]. They are constantly hampered in their activities by the closure-effect repeatedly brought about when a group within a movement becomes invested in the exercise of power, when it takes license to legislate what it means to “be a woman,” to ascertain the “truth” of the feminine, and to reject other women whose immediate agenda may differ from their own. (Minh-ha, 1991, p. 8)

For women, strategies of movement— of displacement—are critical ways to remain present. Diane Clancy (Cherokee) (1988) claims that in reality, nothing remains fixed: “You are looking at my ghost, / not the woman I am, / nor even was (p. 41). Minh-ha (1988) suggests that women will be better served by conceptualizing their difference as a tool of creativity with which to question the forms of repression and dominance (a dialogic activity) rather than as a tool of segregation with which to exert power on the basis of racial and sexual essences (a monologic activity) (par. 5). Dialogics resist the notion that identity is a clear dividing line “between I and not-I, he and she; between

depth and surface, or vertical and horizontal identity; between us here and them over there" (par. 1). Although women are real, there is no natural, definable, namable separation between a woman and her context.

A story to tell: the price of admission

Women's storytelling keeps people coming into being. The story of a people, of peoples, needs everyone to remember, understand and create what has been heard. These three languaged activities—remembering, understanding, and creating—bring story, history and literature together into one continuous chain of becoming. The writing of History⁶, says Minh-ha (1989) has deluded people into thinking that it is a recounting of the Past in its pure form, unaffected by the Present and Future (pp. 119-120). Annharte (1998) alludes to the power of language to shift history, to shift meaning, to shift memory: "If I change one word, I change history, What did I / say today?" (p. 191).

At some point, history pretended to move out of the dialogic circle and to differentiate itself from story and literature in order to indulge in what it thinks are facts alone, leaving fiction to story and literature. In that separation, story often means lies, and fact means truth (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 120). Imagination, a powerful tool of liberation and freedom, then becomes equated with falsification. "On the one hand, each society has its own politics of truth; on the other hand, being truthful is being in the in-between of all regimes of truth. Outside specific time, outside specialized space" (p. 121). Kimberly Blaeser (Anishnaabe) (2001) refers to this in-betweenness as "living history," a dialogic place that is beyond the present, but is neither future nor past.

"Jeez," he says, "you look just like your mom—
You must be Marlene's girl."
Pinches my arm, but I guess it's yours
he touches.

⁶ Minh-ha uses capital "H" History to indicate the discipline of History, and small "h" history to indicate the dialogic production of the story of a people or of all peoples.

Hell, he wasn't even looking at me.
 Wonder if I'm what they call living history? (p. 435)

Story is involved simultaneously with past present, and future. It never stops accumulating and changing. Minh-Ha (1989) echoes Blaeser's statement: "My story, no doubt, is me, but it is also, no doubt, older than me. Younger than me, older than the humanized [named]. Unmeasureable, uncontainable, so immense that it exceeds all attempts at humanizing (p. 123).

We need, according to Dorothy Smith (1999), to understand that talk expresses a social organization, and it is that reality that should direct an analysis of narrative: to look for the complexities and pluralities of structure or organization underlying the form of words the texts contain (p. 144). Jeannette Armstrong (Okanagan) (1998) talks about/in/around some of the unnamable elements of structure and organization:

When I speak
 I attempt to bring together
 with my hands
 gossamer thin threads of old memory
 thoughts from the underpinnings of understanding
 words steeped in age
 slim
 barely visible strands of harmony
 stretching across the chaos brought into this world
 through words
 shaped as sounds in air
 meaning made physical (pp. 231-232)

Conclusion

The authors mentioned herein are concerned with sensing some means of talking presence—how it looks, feels, tastes, sounds, plays, etc. They all appear to sense a certain imprecision in their attempts to dialogue about presence, and yet that very imprecision is an important source of their imagination about it. Coming into being through dialogue is by nature an imprecise activity as well as an open-ended one, yet our theorizing about it

demands that we attach various names to it, whether as theory or as individual identity. Dialogics provides us with some explanation of the reality and the beauty of the imprecision that plagues our attempts to name. Some postmodern ideas support that explanation and add a political perspective to the discussion by revealing negative social aspects arising from the power wielded by those who would deny the inherent instability of discourse. Stories provide us with the possibility of presence. Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm (Anishnaabe) (1998) suggests that by making herself present in the in-between spaces created by dialogue, a Native woman makes present the ancient ones, the Other, and the possibility of a world recreated. She exhorts us to remember that

words are heavy with meaning
 they are true survivors
 echoing into infinity when we have become bones cradled by the earth
 you say we belong to them and they belong to us
 i say to you
 words are my manitouwan my conjurors
 with their magic the spider can be set in her web
 the old people can live in the memory of generations
 people from every direction can be made kin
 the world can be recreated out of a fistful of clay

(p. 458)

CHAPTER THREE:

METHODOLOGY

Culture vulturing: The legacy of research on Aboriginal peoples

Discover an authentic Indian colonizer
 slaver inside you & check your tongue
 if still forked continue to discover
 other Indians do it to other Indians
 first who do it to them first

former Columbus clones I implore you
 you still got a chance, discover a first
 nation friend lover first nation first
 for keeps person

(from "Coyote Columbus Cafe" by Annharte, 1998, p. 195)

The legacy of research on Native peoples is contained in the word "on," which evokes an image of burden. Systemic racism, supported by research, has tended to perpetuate the always already frightening and exotic otherness of Aboriginal peoples (L. Smith, 1999; Vizenor 1998), considering them as objects for experimentation, for manipulation, and for eventual extinction (Deloria Jr., 1969, p. 81). Ambler (1997) suggests as well that disrespectful and biased research insidiously and systematically weakens Aboriginal communities' ability to self-determine and prosper on their own terms. In the wake of the type of research that has not benefited us as Native peoples, we now seek to become subjects of inquiry by using research to aid in our well being

and prosperity, making simple curiosity or fascination with us as Other less naturalized as a rationale for study.

The 19th and 20th centuries were rife with studies of Native peoples. There was (and still is) among some academics a belief that real Native cultures were (are) becoming extinct (Lomawaima, 2000; Deloria Jr., 1969;), and that the remaining authentic artifacts and histories of those cultures will be lost forever if researchers do not recuperate, analyze, curate and document them. Native communities in North America survive in spite of poverty and oppressive, racist policies imposed on them by federal, provincial and state governments; but they have been nonetheless vulnerable to academics and researchers whose intentions are not always laudable or practical.

Questionable research on Aboriginal peoples ranges from the naïve to the reprehensible and from the comical to the absurd; and although one might expect to find in early studies examples of suspect methodologies, recent examples show that there are still reasons for critique in this area. Derek Freeman (1983) presents compelling evidence that Margaret Mead's celebrated study of Samoan society (1928) is an example of naïve exoticizing of Polynesian sexual mores. He cites Native informants who now claim to have told her stories that they fabricated intentionally for her study. Other researchers create abstract theories about the "Indian problem," which lead to equally abstract and ineffective action. Cases in point include the many theories regarding Native students' lack of success in school. These theories have led to many books, articles and workshops—most often written/conducted by non Aboriginal people—about how to teach Native students. Yet the success rate of Native students in schools continues to be abysmal.

Some researchers have hidden agendas, for example, when they "enter communities armed with goodwill in their front pockets and patents in their back pockets, they bring medicine into villages and extract blood for genetic analysis" (L.

Smith, 1999, p. 24). In one recent case involving accusations of unethical genetic research among the Yanomami of Venezuela and Brazil, a two-year investigative panel of the American Anthropological Association concluded that the anthropologists involved with the Yanomami had in fact engaged in certain unethical practices. In addition, the same panel criticized flawed research practices by the accuser, some of whose accusations were based on equally suspect research (Glen, 2002). In still another example, anthropologist Carlos Castaneda's book *The teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui way of knowledge* (1968)—based on his doctoral research—enjoyed great success (and several sequels) until, eight years later, anthropologist Richard de Mille produced convincing evidence of fraud, indicating that Castaneda in fact had fabricated the narratives of a Yaqui shaman's life and teachings (Lindskoog, 1993, p. 180).

The above examples, although different in circumstance and motivation, raise important questions regarding the quality of relationships between researchers and Aboriginal peoples as objects of research. Academic research has not infrequently shown a blatant disregard for the well-being and the realities of the Aboriginal cultures under study; and viewing Native peoples through the lens of their own culture, researchers have often missed essential truths (Ambler, 1997, p. 9). In the wake of this reality, it is not surprising then that Aboriginal peoples might see research as an attempt to steal or misrepresent their material cultures and their stories, and use them in ways that do not benefit them. In many indigenous contexts, the mention of the term "research" "stirs up silence, it conjures up bad memories, it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful" (L. Smith, 1999, p. 1); and increasingly, those researchers who make short visits only for the purpose of gathering data, and then leave, are no longer welcome, especially when their research benefits only an individual agenda or an outside institutional agenda (Crazy Bull, 1997, p. 17).

The ethics of research, the ways in which indigenous communities can protect themselves and their knowledge, the effects of local, regional, national and global

legislation and agreements—these topics generate questions at important sites such as treaty tables, academic departments, and band councils. Issues of representation and ownership abound at these sites of discussion, mirroring the extent to which research in Native communities has become a vigorously contested terrain. And from these spaces, increasing numbers of researchers have begun to open their research activities to a consideration of broader issues important to Native peoples: self-determination, decolonization and social justice (Lomawaima, 2000; L. Smith, 1999; Crazy Bull, 1997; Haig-Brown, 1995). Native communities, activists and writers such as Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (1998), Jeannette Armstrong (Okanagan) (1998), Joy Asham Fedorick (Cree) (1993), and Emma LaRocque (Métis) (1975) now openly challenge the research community about racist practices and attitudes, ethnocentric assumptions and exploitive methods. This chapter describes my attempts, through the process of my work as a Native researcher doing research with Native women, to dialogue with such issues.

Ongoing questions about

what constitutes respectful research with Native peoples

Thomas Peacock (Anishnaabe) (1996) emphasizes that a researcher in Native communities needs to work toward mutually establishing an environment of humility, generosity, and respect before seeking to uncover some "truth" through her or his research (as cited in Ambler, 1997, p. 10). Linda Smith (Maori) (1999) adds that respectful research by Native insiders must also be as reflexive and critical as outsider research (p. 139). These comments encompass three broad levels of interaction. On one level, they encourage knowledge of, as well as acceptance and practice of certain protocols involving social and political activities within Native communities. On another level, they demand a concomitant acceptance and practice of certain protocols attached to academic research and academic institutions. Too, there is a commonsense level involving the everyday interactions among people, and which demands a serious

commitment to both communities. Without that commitment, there is no opportunity for the inevitable errors to become opportunities for understanding.

A humble, generous and respectful position is not one that is fixed or readily defined; it depends on the complex dynamics of a particular community at a particular time. While this statement can describe research in any community, it is especially relevant for projects involving Aboriginal peoples, because of their long history of encounters with disrespectful researchers. As well, an inside researcher like myself also faces often difficult questions arising in the space between her desire to encourage other Native people to initiate, monitor, and control research activities in their communities, and her wish to support other Native academics to create a place for themselves in academia.

Who/what defines a Native researcher researching Native people?

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) point out the inevitable presence of multiple “I’s” in narrative enquiry. In my case, the “I” can speak from many different, interrelated and intertwined positions—as Native woman, as instructor, as researcher, as research participant, as narrative critic and as theory builder—all of which are present within the events of the research project that form the basis of this paper. Yet Connelly and Clandinin insist that in the writing of the narrative, it becomes important that the researcher sort out whose voice is the dominant one when she writes “I”. She is “compelled to move beyond the telling of the lived story to tell the research story” (p. 10). When one engages in research as a relative insider, consciously “moving beyond”—to the outside—is not a straightforward event. The binary of insider/outsider does not accurately describe her situation. There is no clear boundary allowing her to distinguish clearly her location between the two positions at a given moment. Wherever she situates herself, questions abound, blurring the boundaries of inside/outside, and creating a constant discomfort.

For each of the ways that being an insider researcher enhances the depth and breadth of understanding a population that may not be accessible to a nonnative scientist, questions of objectivity, reflexivity, and authenticity of a research project are raised because perhaps one knows too much or is too close to the project and may be too similar to those being studied. (Kanuha, 2000, sec. 8, par. 5)

The insider researcher is faced with a sort of no-win situation in which she cannot be sure (or assured) of the limits of her situation and her decisions regarding her research. Patti Lather suggests that we should embrace problems of representation, and that we *should* be uncomfortable with the issues surrounding the telling of other people's stories, because that discomfort keeps us from pouncing too quickly in thinking we can understand the lives of those people well enough to tell their stories to others (Lather & Smithies, 1997, p. 9). This discomfort can be particularly intense for the Native researcher seeking to practice in ways that do not end up reifying the invented Indian or contributing to other oppressions visited on Native peoples. Ultimately, claims Bryan Brayboy (Lumbee-Cheraw) (2000), "there must be a way for Indigenous people to conduct rigorous research and maintain their Indigenous sense of self" (sec. 1, par. 1).

The insider/outsider, Indian/not Indian seesaw. As Native governments address issues of research in their communities, one of their main intents is to have Native people (insiders) conduct research for the benefit of their communities. Arising from this initiative is a difficult and frustrating question: "How do Native people identify other Native people as insiders?" The criteria for identification can be ambiguous and contradictory.

What makes one a "real Indian" is never clear cut and, like culture, it is dynamic, contextual, and situational. That is, one can know the rules in one context but not in another. In the face of changing situations and contexts, how does he or she "get it right" all the time? How does it make sense that in some situations one is certainly "Indian enough," while in others, one stands no chance of being "Indian enough?" (Brayboy, 2000, sec. 2, par. 8)

Gerald Vizenor (Anishnaabe) (1998), in his explanation of what he terms the "eight native theatres," shows the complexity of insider/outsider criteria for indianness. He outlines these ironic theatres in which one can become an Indian "act": by countenance (Native by appearance, facial features, the walk, talk, manners, and other characteristics), by concession (Indian by choice), by creation (Indian through artistic creation or imagination), by genealogy (Indian by consanguinity and other traces of Native ancestors), by documentation (Indian by noted name, number or picture), by situation (Indian by marriage, service, economic virtues, and other circumstances), by trickster stories (Indian by a tease of creation, a ruse of connections in Trickster stories), and by victimry (Indian by representation of vanishment) (pp. 88-91). Vizenor's listing shows the contingency and fluidity of contemporary Native identity, a fluidity which may be the only way for the Native researcher "to get it right," at least some of the time.

I am a Native woman (insider). I am of mixed heritage (SheBelNa/Welsh) and was raised off-reserve (outsider). I have inside knowledge of and connections with certain Aboriginal communities (insider). I am an academic working in a western educational institution (outsider). I work daily with Native people (insider). I do not live and work among my own people, the SheBelNa (outsider). I have a vested interest in the well being of Native communities, and in my status within them (insider). I have a vested interest in the well-being of certain western educational institutions, and in my status within them (outsider). I have great respect for the work of Aboriginal women within and for their communities, and I have a vested interest in addressing concerns particular to Aboriginal women doing that work (insider/outsider).

I am at once an insider and an outsider. Even when it may appear that I am on the inside, in many ways I am still an outsider. Although in some cases members of the bands with whom I work have taught me a great deal about their history and protocol, there are many things that as an outsider I will never know or practice. I teach in Native Studies, working with students representing many First Nations. I know and have

learned a great deal about this field, and my cultural background provides a basis for my work; yet most of my formal academic qualifications remain outside of it. Thus, insider/outsider status has certain advantages/disadvantages. Each advantage is also a disadvantage. I have the advantage of inside knowledge and connections, yet to some people I am suspect because of my outside connections. This struggle is as much internal as external. Sometimes I even suspect myself.

Like all researchers I necessarily reflect on my relationship to the research project reported in this document. However, I am also grounded implicitly and situated continually in the dual and mutual status of the subject-object; I am both the subject of my study and the participant object being studied (Kanuha, 2000, sec. 5, par. 3). Choosing one side or another is not an option for me personally, and I am left to straddle this line/not line as best I can, never forgetting that the women with whom I engage in this research are asked to do the same, and never forgetting that “positionality weighs heavily in what knowledge comes to count as legitimate in historically specific times and places” (Lather, 1991, p. 116). Certainly, the constant need for reflexivity remains critical.

Who authorizes and owns research with Native people?

There are important yet complicated and sometimes unclear issues of authority and jurisdiction involved in doing research with Native people, and these issues arise from both the legacy of previous disrespectful research and the very current issue of First Nations’ struggles for sovereignty (Lomawaima, 2000, p. 1). In the case of this project, there is sometimes an unclear space created by what Linda Smith (1999) refers to as the “two distinct pathways” of an Indigenous research agenda: 1) community action projects, local initiative and nation or tribal research based around land questions, and 2) research that emerges from the work of Indigenous people within institutions (e.g. Indigenous research and studies programs) (p. 125). Although Smith claims that the two

pathways are not at odds with each other and that they intersect and inform each other at a number of levels, it is not always clear where jurisdiction lies, especially in a project such as this one which involves Native women who form a community within academia, yet who belong individually to many different First Nations communities that eventually may formulate quite different research policies.

Both Malaspina University College (MUC) and Simon Fraser University (SFU) have well articulated guidelines for research, and have organized committees to oversee their implementation. After consulting with a number of Native and non Native women students and faculty in the First Nations Studies and Women's Studies departments at MUC during the planning phase, I made an application to the MUC and SFU research ethics committees, and my plans were accepted (see Appendix A). The SFU ethics committee informally reminded me that a few First Nations now have formal policies regarding research, and asked me to make sure that I did not infringe upon them.

A subsequent enquiry conducted among the participants revealed that their bands had as yet no formal policies. As well, those bands that have research policies address in particular issues of research done in on-reserve communities, and have yet to address the much broader issue of research conducted with Native people living or working outside of that context. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), in the spring of 2003, initiated an on-line discussion among interested Native and non Native researchers regarding questions of ethics, ownership and academic rigor in research with Aboriginal peoples. In the first three months of discussion, there was only one comment regarding research outside of the confines of on-reserve communities; and that comment merely pointed out that the discussion did not address off-reserve or urban settings. So at this time, research projects such as this one—emerging from a multi-tribal community of First Nations people within an academic institution situated off-reserve—remains variously subject to 1) the official regulatory policies of the academic institutions involved, 2) the unofficial regulatory

discourse of particular disciplines within academia, and 3) the anticipated regulatory discourse and policies of First Nations currently negotiating and developing research guidelines. The last category remains at this point largely unarticulated, yet in my attempt to conduct respectful research, I must remain aware of issues that confront First Nations in terms of formulating policies.

Control and ownership of research at the nation or band level can at this time in history involve issues of differing protocols, of disputed ownership of stories and songs, of contested taboos about the sharing of sacred knowledge, and of tensions between elected band governments and hereditary systems of governance. As well, western protocols around control and ownership of research may not translate well to the context of Native communities. Two of the women participating in this project spoke on this topic.

Eagle: There is this thing coming up. When you go into communities, it's getting really, really hard to talk to people because even if I go, they're trying to get us to go to the chief and council and get permission to interview, say...Nettle [a participant in the project]. And I say, "No! No, that's not the way you do it!" But that's what they're really pushing for in universities now. Oh! I shouldn't talk about all of them [universities], because I don't know. But I know in the master's program I'm in they [the professors] were pushing to have us get permission *collectively* so we could go in and *selectively* (laughter) interview someone. And then that person [the researcher] hasn't even ownership of her own words! Like I wouldn't have been the owner. I'm not the owner of my own words according to this agreement, right? Even though those experiences were mine. But they were done in a collective atmosphere. So I don't know what's going to happen to our people. And this is university stuff that's

going on...they're brainwashing us into believing this stuff. It's not our own people. Do you think, Herring? It's even in the treaty.

Herring: Our own people are believing it.

Eagle: Yeah, that's what I mean. So they're taking it out to our communities.

Hey, I couldn't even get into my First Nation records, because they had to have an elder agree that I could use them. And I'm going, "Just a minute! Those are all public records you have there. They come from the archives in Victoria, Vancouver...all over the place." But they were saying, "You need the elders' permission." And I go, "Look...at my age, I'm almost an elder myself, in a way, with my knowledge and that. What elder do I have to have? They're all my relatives in this band, anyhow." But, yeah, that's something that I don't know what's going to happen. It's not good. It's not good.

Eagle's comments point to important issues of ownership, authority and jurisdiction. In reaction to the previous use of disrespectful methods, there is a general understanding that Native people must play a larger role in controlling research in their communities. However, outsiders, defined generally as non Native people, have conducted most of the previous research. Yet as Native people begin to conduct their own research, defining "outsider" and "insider" becomes more complex. Aboriginal communities may be unified in their intent to stop those whom they consider outsiders from abusing research privileges, while finding it difficult to reach a consensus about the research practices of insiders who may have opposing views of ways that research can benefit their community. For example, three of the participants responded that even if there had been a band research policy restricting their participation, they felt that it should be their personal choice. Two of these women said they felt compelled to participate because the women in their communities have been silenced; and they seek

an outlet for their voices, and a connection with other Native women in order to help their communities. The other woman expressed her lack of confidence in the current band council and in treaty negotiations, which she felt were not benefiting her community. These statements point to upcoming challenges for bands attempting to articulate policies around research involving members of their communities who are also members of outside communities such as the university. There are delicate issues involving communal and individual rights, power relations among clans and families, and gender relations.

I admit my reluctance to address too directly this currently ambiguous and contradictory issue, given the number of different First Nations represented in the project and the status of their formal research policies. My obligation to make sure there were no band policies that restricted this type of project was relatively easily fulfilled; yet in substantive, ethical, and epistemological terms I must rest uncomfortably in this current gray area. Aspects of this project may evoke some of the difficult questions about band oversight of extra-territorial (off-reserve) research, and will hopefully demonstrate attempts to answer them, even if only partially at this point. I can only hope that any of my mistakes in this area will be useful in opening up discussion for those who will make more progress than I have.

Statement regarding ownership of this research. Because of the abovementioned issues, it is important that I explain my orientation to questions of ownership. The thesis emerging from this project will appear in my name only, as required by the protocol of doctoral studies. I do not, however, consider myself the owner of the data contained therein, but rather, as the “majority shareholder,” prepared to justify decisions and give participants a public forum for critique (Lather, 1991, p. 58). In a dialogic world, even *my* written words do not belong to me in any permanent sense. They emerge not from me, but from the in-between space created by my dialogue with the participants’ dialogues, from dialogue with my thesis supervisors’ dialogues, and

from numerous other internal and external dialogues that constitute my life. This claim does not exonerate me from criticism of and responsibility for my writing; it attempts rather to broaden legal, bureaucratic and material definitions of ownership in connection with this work.

Ownership tends to have a finalizing quality when expressed in writing, yet this thesis is not meant to represent finality or completion. It is more akin to a pause in the ongoing activity surrounding the ideas and practices expressed herein. In some senses I own the pause, but that pause—afforded me in part through my relationship to the participants—also owns me. It signals a public commitment to the women in the project, and also to the larger Native community, a commitment to remain steadfastly in active relation with that community. This thesis, then, is contained within a larger, open-ended plan for activity, decided and “owned” at different times by various groupings of the participants (including the research assistant and myself). Participation is open to all women in the project—and possibly later, to others—depending on their desire and availability to continue the work, and contingent on their willingness to claim ownership of and be owned by future activities.

Description of the project

I initiated this research as part of my doctoral work at SFU, the topic of which was motivated mainly by my work as a Native instructor in the First Nations Studies and Women’s Studies departments at MUC. Although I did not adopt wholly a “grounded theory” approach, I found some of its guidelines helpful, mainly in the initial approach to the topic and in the preliminary coding of the data. I found in grounded theory literature a connection to my initial motivation for this research: my “irritation” regarding events for which I had no adequate explanation. Glaser (1992), in his explanation of grounded theory, talks about the researcher beginning with an area of interest within which there is no obvious problem, but which generates “an abstract

wonderment of what is going on” (p. 22). In my case, that wonderment involved the experiences of a group of Native women in the context of academic women’s studies courses. During the months preceding the formal implementation of the research, I read broadly in the areas of qualitative methodologies, theory and Native literature, trying to maintain “a delicate balance between possessing a grounding in the discipline and pushing it further” (Charmaz, 1994, p. 76). This practice helped me to resist formulating pre-emptive or preconceived concepts which might later, during coding and analyzing of the data as it was collected, limit my freedom to generate concepts that fit and would be relevant (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Glaser, 1992).

Identifying, contacting and engaging the participants

Through a study of student records between September, 1996, and May, 2002—covering the first 6 years of Native women’s studies (NWS) courses at MUC—I identified 37 Native women as potential participants for this project, 36 of whom had been at one time students in one or more of my classes. They had taken at least three women’s studies courses, either at MUC or at some other postsecondary institution. Because they had taken at least one course beyond the two introductory courses in women’s studies, these women had a range of experiences from which they could draw in order to articulate their understandings of those courses.

Initially, I planned to include only those Native women who had taken at least three *Native* women’s courses (rather than mainstream women’s studies courses) at MUC. However, several Native women interested in the project approached me, asking that I consider including Native women who had taken any combination of three women’s studies courses. They reminded me that because NWS courses have been virtually non-existent in other institutions, many of the Native women active in women’s studies had not had the opportunity to take that many women’s studies

courses focusing on Native women. Because of the logic of their argument and the fact that the number of possible participants would increase substantially, I agreed.

I hired Keri Blacker, a Cree woman, as research assistant. She had taken only one women's studies course, and was therefore not eligible to be a participant. However, her cultural background, her academic excellence, and her keen interest in Native women's issues made her a very good choice as research assistant.

Keri and I contacted each woman by phone or in person to talk very briefly about the project, and to ask permission to send her a letter of explanation. All but one woman agreed to receive the letter. We then sent an explanatory letter (see Appendix B) to each woman, explaining briefly the project and asking her to indicate by return mail if she was interested in participating; and we would then contact her by phone or in person to set up an interview. Thirty-two women responded positively to the letter. Later, two of them were unable to participate, and we proceeded with 30 participants.

All participants were self-identified Native women. We did not ask for documentation or proof of status. Student records do not always give an indication that a student is Native, but because I had been active in the Women's Studies and Native Studies Departments for the previous seven years, I knew almost all the Native students who had taken women's studies courses at MUC. In the few instances where I was unsure, I made discreet enquiries of certain instructors, elders and students, asking only if the woman in question identified herself to them as Native. I identified one more potential participant in this way. Of the 30 women who consented to participate, sixteen (53%) descend from the various First Nations of Vancouver Island, eight (27%) descend from other mainland and island nations within British Columbia, and six (20%) descend from nations in the Yukon, the Prairies or the Maritimes.

Individual interviews

With the help of my primary supervisor and Keri, I formulated the initial schedule of questions for a loosely structured and open-ended interview (see Appendix C). I hoped the questions would facilitate a personal tone to the interviews, resembling what Haig-Brown (1995) calls "research as conversation." Keri or I interviewed each woman individually, seeking to gather information on her demographics, her general experience of women's studies courses, and her perception of the relationship of those courses to her cultural background or positioning. Keri conducted five of the interviews (3 face-to-face and 2 over the telephone). We purposely chose five women whom she knew and with whom she felt comfortable, trying to create as much as possible an interview environment that would not be "strange" or threatening. We knew, however, that it was not possible to control fully the environment or predict how the interviewee would react (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, 1995).

The interview situations varied, depending on each participant's availability, her geographic location, and her personal wishes regarding the format of her responses. We conducted 22 face-to-face interviews at various sites, including two of MUC's campuses, some of the participants' homes, Keri's apartment, and outdoors. We audiotaped the interviews, each lasting 30 minutes to 1½ hours. We interviewed by phone and audiotaped five participants living away from the central Vancouver Island region. Three participants—two out-of-town and one local—chose to submit their responses in writing.

Group interviews

Keri and I formulated a follow-up schedule of questions for group interviews after identifying broad themes emerging from a study of the transcripts and notes from individual interviews (see Appendix D). Interview groups varied in size from 3-5 participants, and involved a total of 19 of the 23 local women, all of whom had been

interviewed individually prior to the group meetings. Each of the 19 women attended one of the group sessions. Group composition was unplanned, depending only on a participant's availability to attend a meeting. Five group interviews were held on five different days. Keri and I attended all of them. Keri monitored the recording equipment and took notes on the process, while I facilitated the discussion. Keri and I debriefed for about an hour after each session.

We held group meetings in various places: on two of MUC's campuses, and in my home. Each one lasted 2 ½ to 3 ½ hours. The settings were informal with a good deal of laughter, banter and "catching up" on each other's lives. Food, coffee and tea were served. People were seated on couches or in easy chairs. The questions were fairly broad, testing the notion that group interviews are "one of the few forms of research where you can learn a great deal without really knowing what questions you want to ask!" (Morgan, 1998, p. 12). As well, in a group interview I predicted a greater likelihood of participants expressing contradictory ideas, which could then serve as prompts for discussions addressing issues in greater depth. Such prompts would more likely produce information framed by the participants' categories and understandings rather than mine (Montell, 1999, p. 49).

For some of the women, the group situation may have been less "strange" than an individual interview (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 121), thus encouraging them to speak more and in greater depth. In addition, an opportunity for participants to take part in a group interview could potentially reduce some of the hierarchical tone of a one-on-one interview where the interviewer asks the questions and the interviewee answers them.

Regardless of how open-ended the questions are, [a one-on-one] interview is an interaction between two people who have different and unequal roles in the exchange...A shift in focus from individual knowers to the perspectives of groups or communities...begins to move us out of the impasse around personal experience. (Montell, 1999, p. 50)

Group interviews are not, however, a straightforward solution to issues of power within a research project (Montell, 1999; Wilkinson, 1998; Janesick, 1998; Lather, 1991; Morgan, 1988). Lessening the influence of the researcher does not mean eliminating it; and because each of the women had been a former student of mine, I could not ignore the potential for power issues. I made a concerted effort to conduct myself mostly as listener rather than speaker, but I was aware that even my physical presence would set a particular (perhaps hierarchical) tone within the group. As well, because most of the women knew or knew of each other, there were bound to be issues of power within and/or outside of the interview situation; and these dynamics are often complex and not readily observable. The possibility remains that for some of the women, the individual interview may have been preferable.

The purpose of the two types of interviews was not to do a comparison of them. Rather I wished 1) to provide some variety of situations in which the participants could voice their ideas and opinions, and 2) to avoid having the research findings for the project dependent on a single method (i.e. individual interviews only). Although we invited all the women to attend, I had anticipated that not all of them would be able to come or would want to speak in a group setting. We could not assume, because of the unnaturalness of the discursive situation, that we would automatically obtain well “grounded” data. In response, we made each woman’s participation in the project contingent on giving at least an individual interview or written submission, but her commitment did not require that she attend a group session.

One of the questions we asked during group interviews involved the participants representing their responses using oil pastels and white paper, again with the intention of providing an alternative way to respond and another way of looking at and interpreting the interview process (Janesick, 1998). Weber and Mitchell (1995), who also have used this strategy, state that

much of what we have seen or known, thought or imagined, remembered or repressed, slips unbidden into our drawings, revealing unexplored ambiguities, contradictions, and connections. That which we have forgotten, that which we might censor from our speech and writing, often escapes into our drawings. (p. 34)

We asked the women to draw responses to two questions: What might you say to a Native woman to encourage her to take a NWS course? What might you say as a caution to her? After, we displayed the pieces of paper, and asked each woman if she would talk about her drawings/colorings. This strategy created a generally active and relaxed atmosphere at the group meetings, and proved to be an effective way of eliciting stories and interesting connections from some of the women (see examples in Appendix E).

To the 7 out-of-town participants who did not have the opportunity to attend group interviews, we offered the option of doing a second phone interview or written submission, using the same questions from the group interviews. Three women consented to follow-up phone interviews, all of which I conducted.

Transcription

Keri and I transcribed all interviews in their entirety. At the beginning of the project, I had not intended to do any transcribing myself. I had, however, seriously miscalculated the amount of transcription to be done; and in the end I undertook about half of it. As it turned out, this change of plans was fortuitous, because it allowed me to become immersed in the data in a way that would not have been possible otherwise; and it helped me to address two important issues that arose: transcript accuracy and editing.

Accuracy. The transference of another's words to a tape recorder, and then to paper is an action mediated by countless voices and intentions. Bakhtin (1981) contends that

the speech of another, once enclosed in a context, is—no matter how accurately transmitted—always subject to certain semantic changes. The context embracing another's word is responsible for its dialogizing background, whose influence can be very great. Given the appropriate methods for framing, one may bring about fundamental changes even in another's utterance accurately quoted. (p. 340)

Once primary (simple) speech genres, formed in unmediated speech communion, are absorbed by secondary speech genres such as reports, novels, essays, commentaries, dramas, etc.—which are usually written—they become altered and assume a special character (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 62). They become a work of verbal art rather than an unmediated representation, thus blurring the distinction between fact and fiction.

This seemingly inevitable phenomenon has several implications. Perhaps the most obvious is the portrayal of the researcher—or other author—as incapable of objective representation of the words of others, even through careful transcription. Ochs (1979) reiterates that transcription is a “selective” process responsive to cultural biases, and itself biases readings and inferences (p. 51). Yet transcripts still provide a wide range of possibility for describing something of value. If one can somehow move away from the notion of texts existing as meaning, and see them instead as organizing, through time, relations between people (D. Smith, 1999, p. 53), one can then see written text especially as open-ended. Its worth cannot be finalized; it is contingent on the contexts within which it is read and taken up.

This contingency is not necessarily in direct conflict with scientific values. A look at the history of scientific works shows that there are few if any “discoveries” that have not, over time or within different contexts, come to be refuted or altered by other scientists. The difference appears to be more in the degree of willingness 1) to accept

that there will always be the necessity of contingent circumstances, and 2) to resist the notion that language will eventually describe once and for all the world in which we live (Rorty, 1989, p. 22).

This situation does not free the researcher to approach transcription in a haphazard way. The admission of inability to make a direct transference of meaning from oral to the written should not detract from the contingent value of the relatively accurate, transcribed text. Rather than viewing the written as hopelessly inaccurate, it is more fruitful to view it as Bakhtin does: as having ongoing and potential value (and opportunity) through dialogic interaction with the reader. Rather than eliminating the very possibility of truth being told, it is precisely the multiplicity of experience and perspective among people that is a necessary condition of truth. This view destabilizes the unitary and fixed notion of truth, and equates it with knowledge that, in dialogic terms, is socially constructed (D. Smith, 1999, pp. 128-130).

Editing. Initially, Keri and I transcribed interviews word-for-word, including interjections, repetitions, and variations in pronunciation and diction. For example, several of the participants drop the final "g" in words ending in "-ing," e.g. "makin'" instead of "making." Some speak English as a second language, and at times structure sentences in unconventional ways. Others, in the company of people they know and trust, feel free to speak using a particular language register—or "genre" as Bakhtin calls it—which they deem appropriate for informal talk among themselves, but which they would not necessarily use in a more formal, academic context. Some frequently insert repetitive words or phrases such as "you know," "o.k.," "like." Still others maintain a rather formal or academic English register throughout their interview.

Bakhtin (1986) explains that speech genres are created by particular groupings of people, and that each distinct grouping identifies itself through its speech genre. Following this notion, the most "natural" way of representing the participants' talk

would be to transcribe what was heard, and to present it without editing. This is easier said than done, however, because the production of transcripts and their interpretation is not merely a technical exercise. It is cultural as well (Baker, 1997, p. 111). Writing the spoken word is not a straightforward transference of meaning and intention, and in the case of the participants, there were several considerations, some of which provided no clear or unequivocal answer to support a decision.

From extensive research conducted in the areas of language, we know that there are many variations in spoken language; thus, there was nothing inherently wrong with attempting to provide an exact transcription of the way the women spoke during interviews. Indeed, Native researchers such as Beverly Hungry Wolf (Blood) (1982) and Greg Sarris (Pomo/Miwok) (1994), who work with Native people's oral histories, pride themselves in doing so. However, they and other researchers in this area—e.g. Wendy Wickwire (Robinson & Wickwire, 1989), and Julie Cruikshank (1990)—most often work with Native adults and elders outside of the context of academia. In such cases, there might even be an expectation or easy acceptance of transcriptions containing speech genres not generally associated with academic pursuit.

In the context of this project, however, one cannot forget that an important element of the participants' representation is academic. All of the women in the project are presently studying or have studied at the postsecondary level. Most of them have a bachelor's degree, and some of them are working on a master's degree. They are an important part of the growing presence of Native people at MUC. And because they share a history—personal, familial or tribal—involving failure within systems of western education, not only is their success at university important, but also a certain *appearance* of success. An important aspect of that appearance is related to language. These women, who seek to help break the legacy of their people's failure within a western system of education, cannot assume that a reader will be aware that they too have several English language registers from which to choose. Will the reader think that they

simply have a poor command of the language? Will the reader question whether in fact they have succeeded in becoming educated? Will their language reinforce preconceived or stereotypical notions of Native people in the education system?

From the various ethical and technical considerations involved in the interview transcripts, complex issues and difficult decisions arose. Most of the women who responded left it up to me to make editorial decisions. Several women, however, responded either negatively or positively to the “need” to edit for unconventional language use. Some of their responses describe the issues involved.

Raven~*~Magic: I do not think we appear as “unintelligent” in any sense by the words we used ~ it makes us real ~ that’s my opinion. (personal email communication)

Ruby: I think it is called “appropriation” when the western world feels or thinks this is what the Native person is thinking ... THAT IS THE WAY I “TALK” OR RESPOND. (personal email communication)

Eagle: You’re really going to have to clean up some of what we say. Otherwise we’re going to look stupid. (personal phone communication)

Indigo: I know we speak with a different accent, dialect, and I know that you respect us for who we are...I am so proud to be part of this project. (personal email communication)

Anne: I think if the majority of the women would like to keep their words intact, then the words should remain. These are my reasons why. First, who is your target audience? Is it Native audience or non-native audience? I feel when the writing is too academic it is not accessible to First Nations people...Anyways, that’s my take. (personal email communication)

Abalone: I think that you could probably write academically the way in which we gave you the information and still maintain the originality of the information collected. (personal email communication)

Quail: The only thing that I would change is probably some of the double words...I think that each passage would still have the full intent of what is being spoken without having things repeated too much. (personal email communication)

The process of transcription is itself a literacy practice. Transcribers turn the spoken into the written in a way that is readable by their targeted audiences—in this case, the research community and the general community—while attempting to preserve something of the aural and visual quality of the spoken event (Baker, 1997, p. 113). Keeping this in mind, I did eliminate many of the repetitive words and phrases in the transcripts. Most participants supported this decision, and I could further justify it by claiming that excessive detail would be distracting (Gee, 1999; Ochs, 1979). I also filled in the dropped final consonants. I did not, however, change sentence structure or syntax. I indicate with brackets any words that I added (mostly to clarify pronoun referents). I am aware that these editorial decisions affect, even if only in small measure, an accurate representation of the content, context, and rhythm of the speaker's talk. I have tried to choose a middle ground, knowing full well that none really exists in this ethically and politically-charged minefield.

Analysis

Coding. In order to help out Keri with editing, I reviewed all the recordings at least once (and usually twice) in minute detail while reading the transcript. By the time I was ready to begin more formal coding and analysis, I could literally hear each woman's unique voice in my head whenever I read parts of her transcript. I had listened to and read carefully each incident in order to begin figuring out what the

research was truly a study of, and the eventual emergence from this data of what Glaser (1978) calls a “core variable” became almost a physical as well as intellectual process.

For coding and storage of interview data, I used QSR N5 (2000), a computer software program that facilitates ethnographic analysis. It allowed me to store all the transcripts for easy retrieval and study. Using the program, I did the recommended line-by-line coding in the beginning (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Glaser, 1978). Because of my previous work with transcription and editing of transcripts, by the time I started formal analysis I had already made preliminary notes (open coding) of concepts that I thought might prove fruitful. I proceeded to: 1) work on verifying those concepts and others to see if they produced viable categories, 2) code parts of the transcripts that related to them, and 3) “saturate” (fill, support, and provide repeated evidence for) the emerging categories. In the process of continual comparison of the transcripts, and of systematic reduction of the number of categories by clustering or linking them, three general categories emerged: academia, feminism, and community. I also identified general properties—positive and negative experiences, environmental influences, and historical context—and then organized them into subcategories of the three core categories.

The computer software was invaluable for creating a certain order out of the mass of data, and in developing and coding categories and properties. The program also claims to be useful as well in building theory from the categories and properties; but the continued “mechanical” approach to organizing and coding began to constrain my ability to remain sensitive to the data, and to maintain a creative approach through such activities as mind mapping, drawing, dreaming, and doodling. The initial movement toward a conceptual relationship among the categories did, however, “happen” during the coding process at the computer.

Emergent theory. Bigus, Hadden, and Glaser (1994) write that a generic theoretical construct which they call "basic social process" will emerge from grounded theory and will be able to account for the organization of social behavior as it occurs over time (p. 38). As I coded, compared and developed categories and properties from the narrative data, I continually "heard" in my head the voices of the participants. After a time, I found I was in constant dialogue with them. As well, each time I read a participant's comments on a certain topic, I heard in my mind parts of other participants' interviews that responded to her, although in fact the women may not have been at the same interview. I also noticed that some individual women externalized and performed various dialogues they remembered or imagined. Noting that the participants and I created and expressed our understandings through dialogue, I then began to account for that phenomenon by relating it to broader concepts, to my own experiences, and to comparable phenomena and ideas from within a variety of disciplines and fields such as philosophy, educational theory, narrative inquiry, discourse analysis and literature.

Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogics provided some useful ideas to begin articulating the emergent conceptual relationships. Dialogue is an important way in which the women in this study organize their lives, and it was the way in which I began to organize my understanding of their narratives. I perceived the participants as continuously identifying and situating themselves in particular ways through dialogue (both actual and imagined) with 1) their cultural histories; 2) with their perceived futures 3) with their Others. The process of identifying categories and properties included my own dialogic interaction with both the recorded and the transcribed narratives. Through dialogue the participants (and I) explored, individually and in groups, experiences relating to the core categories (academia, community, feminism) that emerged from their narratives. The analysis became then a construction and portrayal of dialogue, which one must remember is also the product of dialogue, as well

as an ongoing potential for dialogue within other contexts. The analysis is multileveled, multi-temporal and multivoiced.

Organizing and reporting a dialogic analysis. A survey of books and articles in the social sciences over the last 15 years shows that by far the most pervasive model of writing up narrative analysis involves using selected excerpts from narratives to support the analysis written by the researcher. The researcher supports her or his conclusions with examples (excerpts, in the case of interviews) from the field data that have "earned" their way into the theory because of their relevance to the empirical world (Stern, 1994, p. 125). This rather straightforward style of reporting, although widely used, is not, however, without criticism.

Tedlock (1995) writes that in the prevailing, current practice of ethnographic reporting, ethnographers put out front only dialogue in which the natives speak briefly, on cue, and in support of the views of the ethnographer. This process reverses the original order of how the author arrived at her or his conclusions. It reduces the informant's original role to one of merely confirming opinions already held by someone else (pp. 253-254), and it subdues and regulates the dialogue of the "real world" (D. Smith, 1998, p. 66). Thus, an utterance, produced in a particular time and place, becomes re-contextualized during the process of the researcher's dialogue with it and representation of it. Sheila Te Hennepe (1993) comments about her unsuccessful attempt to avoid this pitfall of representation in telling "the researcher's story" of her conversations with First Nations students.

I constructed a text that has something to do with the difficulties of constructing a text and something to do with what I learned about First Nations students' experience...I remind myself that it is an ethnographic fiction, an experiment in expansive discourse. (p. 222)

On the one hand, re-contextualization (or fictionalization) is, in dialogic terms, unavoidable because of the inherent inability of language to mean exactly the same

thing to both the speaker and the listener. On the other hand, a productive study of dialogue presupposes an investigation of the "imperfect" forms used in reported speech (Voloshinov, 1986, p. 117), thus making the study as a whole dialogic in nature.

Viewing the construction of ethnographic text as fictional and experimental puts the academic researcher in a somewhat hypocritical position of pretending to represent what she knows is essentially unrepresentable. What is left to me in this project is a "within/against" position where the researcher is both "doing it" and "troubling it" (Lather, 2001, p. 204), refusing to be paralyzed by fear and loathing, and equally refusing to deny their validity. It is my intent to reduce—I do not think it possible to eliminate—what I perceive as the fragmenting and monologizing of narrative when breaking it down into static excerpts that are textually and even visually isolated in the report (e. g. through use of quotation marks, indentation, italicization, and smaller font).

There is a catch-22 in this endeavor. The very nature of analysis demands that the researcher "break down" the data into categories or components to be summarized and excerpted for a readable text. Certainly there is an element of fragmentation in the process of analysis, as well as an element of decontextualization when one excerpts a narrative for the purpose of forming categories. The term "reported speech"—which implies a direct transference of oral utterances to written form—then no longer clearly defines what in fact happens. Instead of reporting (or transcribing) speech, the researcher provides constructed dialogue, which is constructed "just as surely as the dialogue in drama or fiction" (Tannen, 1995, p. 202). Following this idea, I have extended the notion of tacitly constructed dialogue in reported speech, by overtly arranging into dialogues excerpts from the narrative data collected from the project. This approach has both an experiential and a theoretical basis. My experiences of a particular type of dialogue among Native students provides a framework for seeing/hearing the dialogues as more than decontextualized excerpts, and dialogic

theory provides a basis for considering and representing the data in the form of dialogue.

Experiential reasonings. Te Hennepe (1992) constructed a dialogue from excerpts of interviews with First Nations students, representing it as an account of a First Nations gathering, asking readers to witness the discussion that took place (p. 25). At formal gatherings, First Nations elders regularly designate people to witness the proceedings, to remember what transpires, and to be prepared, if called upon, to recount the event. The role of witness requires a respectful stance, integrity and the willingness to hear and remember the various voices at the event as voices of authority in their own right. Dialogue among First Nations students in the First Nations Studies program and in NWS courses have often revealed to me these same characteristics.

In courses that I have taught where there is a majority of First Nations students, dialogue often takes a form different from the usual repartee of a classroom discussion. First Nations students tend to take on the role of witness in regard to others' utterances. During discussion, one after the other, people speak their mind. Both convergent and conflicting opinions may arise, but they are very often not presented as—and may thus not be perceived as—direct agreements or disagreements between people. Students will often give testimonials without direct reference or address to what another student has said. Their utterances remain separate or isolated in a sense, standing as voices of authority from which the listener must draw her or his own conclusions.

This social language can be problematic for a participant or observer whose idea of external or observable dialogue assumes that interactions will be delineated within a back-and-forth or in-your-face context. It may appear to someone who expects dialogue to center on speakers directly addressing each other's utterances, that in fact no real, external dialogue is taking place. However, as discussion continues, one might hear a modification or change in a person's testimony; but again, that change will not

necessarily manifest itself as a reaction to what someone else has said. Authority in this case is located in each individual voice, which precludes the necessity of defending directly one's position against others or of aligning it with others. Yet the voices, viewed within the context of the discussion as a whole, are not doctrinaire or static. As the testimonials continue, it is obvious that speakers are exploring, developing and negotiating their points of view.

I have witnessed various reactions, including confusion and frustration, from students unfamiliar with this type of "discussion," in which the tacit rules are not the ones that one might consider to be standard in an academic setting. The usual way of connecting with other speakers and ideas, such as expecting a direct answer or rebuttal to a particular utterance, becomes ineffective, and may even be considered at times rude. For some, these unfamiliar constraints may appear unsuited to academic pursuit, yet they indeed produce a functional, persuasive and externally dialogic discourse, albeit from a different point of view.

These observations emerge from my experiences among First Nations students at MUC, and are neither generalizable as a typically Indian behavior nor as a uniform behavior among the First Nations students at that institution. In my role as instructor I have witnessed this type of dialogue in which it is not the sentence in closest proximity, but something structurally deeper that forms the connections among the utterances within a dialogue. I attempt, through the constructed dialogues, to illustrate to some extent a dialogic environment particular to my experience in the classroom. My familiarity with this social language influenced my decision and my ability to work with constructed dialogues, and the participants' unanimous and positive critique of them reinforced that decision.

According to dialogic theory, utterances form a chain of interactions linking the past, present and future. While useful for looking at the broad notion of the

connectedness that all utterances have, the metaphor of a chain, in the microcosm of an external dialogue among certain First Nations students, can create expectations for listening that will adversely affect the listener's ability to make meaning. This situation likely will be exacerbated when the dialogue is written, and the listener-now-become-reader further loses the benefit of sound and gesture as aids in understanding. In written form especially, the connection among the voices in the constructed dialogues may appear sometimes disjointed, yet they are not unlike dialogues that the participants and I have witnessed. In common adult models of interaction, sequences tend to be visualized as utterance pairs: invitation/acceptance-decline, question-answer, greeting-greeting, offer/acceptance-rejection, etc. (Ochs, 1979, pp. 54-55). The dialogues in this document demand a type of reading that puts aside some assumptions about "good" adult dialogue containing clear signals of interaction and transition—in other words, clear links as in a chain. The reader is invited, along with the other participants in the dialogue, to become a witness, and then, when the time is right, to speak.

This type of externalized dialogue is more akin to a spider's web where utterances (past, present and future) are connected or linked, but not in the same uniform and linear manner. Rather they form a sort of truncated circular pattern that precludes the type of linear sequencing often associated with dialogue, where speakers tacitly agree to address each other's utterances in turn and to create appropriate transitions between utterances. In a spider's web, one is less constrained by these rules. A speaker is quite free to circle around, move across, or weave a new "line" of speech. Yet within the intricate web of this particular social language, such movement is not chaotic, random or destructive. Utterances remain engaged with the other parts of the web, but will not necessarily converge along one particular strand.

Reiterating Te Hennepe's (1992) interpretation of what she did in her research with constructed dialogues, one can say that the constructed dialogues in this report are both reductions of the reality experienced in the actual interviews, and expansions of

that reality in the new form of a wider circle of dialogue. The rules of engagement that I witness in the classroom, which allow for each voice to stand on its own within the circle, have facilitated my attempt to widen that circle through constructed dialogues.

Theoretical reasonings. Although Bakhtin's metaphor of chain links does not adequately describe the abovementioned type of social language, his book *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1984a) does provide a theoretical basis for constructed dialogues. It is important to note that Bakhtin in no way proposes that an author of sociological text construct dialogues in the way that a novelist such as Dostoevsky does. I suggest, however, that by arranging into dialogues utterances—which are by nature ideologically charged—the researcher can produce an embodied discourse which will be less fractured and monologic than some of the current texts reporting on narrative analysis. Such dialogues can provide a way to reduce the reifying effects of sociological text, and allow for a more genuine, polyvocal representation of the words of others.

A dialogic world presents itself as a world of simultaneous events in which the past, present and future continually interact, and where one can only “*guess at their interrelationships in the cross-section of a single moment* [original italics] (p. 28). Bakhtin thus describes a process parallel to that of analysis using grounded theory: in order to gain a sense of the interrelationships revealed in the data, the researcher views the data as simultaneous and tries to get a feel for the emerging connections. That apprehension, which momentarily suspends temporal and sequential constraints, is already a constructed dialogue.

In order to get a feel for the interrelationships of the participants' utterances, I treated them as simultaneous; and in my presentation of that analysis, I have attempted to portray as simultaneous, the periods of time over and across which emerged certain themes and concepts. The dialogues that I constructed of excerpts from the participants' interviews portray “not the life of an idea in an isolated consciousness, and not the

interrelationship of ideas, but the interaction of consciousnesses in the sphere of ideas” (p. 32)—albeit a particular sphere in this case: that of a single researcher. An individual participant’s consciousness is internally dialogic, never concentrating solely on its own object; it is accompanied by a continual sideways glance at another person (literally or virtually), even if that person is not present during the actual utterance. My placement of the participants’ utterances within a constructed dialogue presents their ideas pertaining to a particular topic *alongside* other discourses, thematically related if not temporally sequential.

These constructed dialogues create a place where many voices speak alongside each other. It is a place of relative equality among voices, an equality that is less apparent within many sociological texts where the author’s interruptive voice remains the dominant one, and where the participant’s voices are excerpted in small amounts, indented, and surrounded by the author’s words. While I acknowledge that the constructedness of the dialogues renders the participants’ voices, in one important sense, this researcher’s utterance, I intend paradoxically by this device to *reduce* the tendency to treat a participant’s discourse as merely an object of my understanding rather than from the point of view of its own referential intention.

The utterances within these constructed dialogues remain independent and unmerged, but not unrelated. They do not express a participant’s character (typicality) or her position under a given, real-life context. Here, the dialogical phenomena are distinct from both action and behavior. According to Voloshinov (1976), “any human verbal utterance is an ideological construct in the small” (p. 88), and thus an utterance in constructed dialogue expresses a strand of the speaker’s ideological position in the world. Each “small,” ideological construct is a participant’s momentarily finite, yet unfinalized view of herself and her world. Each utterance has a finiteness that simultaneously remains unfinalized within the dialogue. It exists within a polyvocal context that discourages a reading of its ideological positioning as fixed, or as a merging

of the speaker within a monologic system that would impose upon her a fixed identity. "The reader, instead of being left with the suspicion that there might be another interpretation, can begin to make that interpretation (Mannheim & Tedlock, 1995, p. 3).

In the process of construction, I have worked with the participants' points of view; and in so doing, I cannot deny that a "shadow of objectification," as Bakhtin calls it, falls over the process. Yet, both in the process of coming gradually to see the constructed dialogue as "their discourse," as well as in the act of re-organizing the discussions, I listen to and I speak *with* the women, as well as speak about them. By this process, they are not exclusively objects of authorial discourse, but are also (re)presented as subjects of their own directly signifying discourse (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 7). While admittedly the participants serve to a certain extent as a mouthpiece for my voice, still their words about themselves and their world are just as fully weighted as mine usually are.

So although I have created the dialogues, I have not invented them. Indeed if my approach here has merit, I might even suggest that I have "dis-covered" them. Because my construction of the dialogues is determined by the women's words and by the structure of their utterances, the process is not arbitrary. I only reveal, as Bakhtin notes, what is already present in the object itself (p. 65). I attempt to act as both organizer and participant in the dialogue. In my analysis, I juxtapose the orientations expressed by the participants, and amid them construct my own orientation. Each participant and I become one orientation among many.

Reminders for reading. I have organized the utterances into dialogues around themes that emerged during analysis, and I have tried to include all voices and/or excerpts that addressed that theme. In several cases I use the same excerpts in more than one discussion in order to destabilize the idea of a strict categorization of an utterance under a single theme. This reinforces Bakhtin's notion that utterances will eventually

recur in different contexts, because the dialogue is never finished. These constructed dialogues are intended to be read as an “unclosed whole” (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 63): they do not begin with a clear idea of what will transpire, and they do not end with any resolution. For Bakhtin, “the whole” is not a finished entity; it is always a *relationship*. Participants’ words appear within the context of the constructed discussion, yet their utterances within this polyvocal context escape a singular interpretation. The goal of the constructed dialogues is to distance (but not absent) myself from a direct portrayal of how a participant appears in my world, and to provide at least a partial view of how the world appears to her and how she appears to herself. Within the constructed dialogues, the participants’ utterances remain in a particular dialogic circle; they are my discourse about their discourse.

Reporting format. I have placed a constructed dialogue within the introductory chapter as opening statements and questionings in order to orient the reader to the general approach of the document. Most of the dialogues, however, serve as the focus of the following chapters, each highlighting a particular topic or theme, the analysis of which focuses on participants’ creation and situation of themselves through ongoing dialogue with their histories, with their futures, and with their Others.

I have attempted to lessen—or at least to make more clearly discernable—my direct influence on the reader by situating the dialogues at the forefront as much as possible. In this type of reporting, another’s discourse remains outside the authorial discourse but is still the object of what Bakhtin refers to as a “hidden polemic” inflecting the authorial voice. Overt polemic directs itself to another’s discourse and refutes it. In hidden polemic, “discourse is directed toward an ordinary referential object, naming it, portraying, expressing, and only indirectly striking a blow at the other’s discourse, clashing with it, as it were, within the object itself” (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 196). In this case, the other’s discourse has moved from a passive to an active relationship with authorial speech, exerting a shaping force upon the author’s speech (Morris, 1994, p. 103). The

participants' discourse remains outside the limits of my speech, yet I still take it into account and refer to it.

In order to emphasize continually the foregrounding of the constructed dialogues, I have used several different formats for presenting the dialogues and analyses. Doing so has facilitated my exploration of a range of dialogic interpretations of narrative, and has aided me in keeping an open-ended approach to the process of analysis. As well, my intention is also that neither I nor the reader be lulled into a standardized approach. It is not my intention to experiment with various forms of representation in order to obscure, but rather to experiment with ways of keeping the context of diversity illuminated as a background, while foregrounding specifics of the participants' stories within a dialogic frame. I have attempted to keep myself and the reader aware of taken-for-granted, directional influences, and of the possibility of shifting those frames of reference.

I was surprised to discover how difficult it can be to shift one's frame of reference, especially in the context of reporting on the same data. The intellectual shifting of frames of reference was much easier than the psychological and emotional shifting. At times my analysis felt forced because of the constraints of a certain format, or it felt inauthentic because it didn't feel like my "style." By maintaining my commitment to the experiment, however, I gained further insight to the influence of my insider point of view on the data, and to ways of facilitating a loosening of its grip in order to consider other points of view.

Communication and collaboration with/among participants

During the months of work on transcription and analysis, Keri and I composed regular newsletters approximately every 6-8 weeks (see samples in Appendix F), updating the participants on the progress of analysis and writing. Also during this time,

one of the participants (Eagle) created a logo for the project (see logo and accompanying poem in first newsletter, Appendix F).

I sent drafts of the chapters to the participants, asking for their feedback and encouraging the women to participate in the larger dialogue involved in negotiating the meaning of the data. Some participants provided ongoing feedback, and some added to their initial comments as the project progressed. Many of the participants remained in contact through e-mail. Others communicated by phone or by letter, or through chance meetings at various community gatherings. Approximately 40% of the women remained in active contact with me, and another 25% contacted me from time to time with address changes or just general chit-chat. However, Keri and I continued to contact all of the participants on an intermittent basis (about once every two months) through newsletters, emails and telephone calls in order to make sure they were receiving material, and to see if they had any feedback. About a third of the women told us plainly that they did not feel the need to critique the document, and that they trusted the final outcome. However, Keri and I persisted in “checking in” with them. We knew many of them were very busy with their lives, and could not devote any more time than they had already; but we wanted to remain in contact just in case they wished at some point to participate further.

As the analysis neared completion, we attempted to hold a general meeting of local participants in order to provide a forum for them to discuss and critique the emerging document, but only four participants were able to attend. The majority of those unable to attend, however, submitted their comments in writing, by phone, or in person; and about one-quarter of the women expressed clearly their intention to continue with the project after the document was completed.

Dissemination of the results

From the beginning, participants were encouraged to prepare for active participation in the research process and in the eventual dissemination of the research. First, all participants will receive a printed copy of the document, which, although an important step, is not nearly enough to qualify as a serious attempt to disseminate the report to those who might benefit from it. In terms of that long-term commitment, 1) five of the participants and I are now collaborating on an article to be submitted for possible publication; (2) several participants and I made a presentation to the BC Women's History Network in the spring of 2003, and future presentations are being considered; (3) six of the participants participated in a panel discussion for a women's studies class, and further talks are being planned; 4) the newsletter will also continue, although at longer intervals than during the main part of the project. These activities are based on the premise that in order for this research to be considered respectful and meaningful, the results must somehow be incorporated into women's knowledge base at the community or movement level (Archibald & Crnkovich, 1995, p. 121).

Reflections on confidentiality

Eagle: I've wondered too about the First Nation women and why we don't support each other more. Like when I was up in...I don't know if you want to tape this or not...

Interviewer: Well, if you'd like me to turn the recorder off, I will.

Eagle: It doesn't matter. They all know it. I say what I say. People know who I am. You can just drop my tapes around! *(peals of laughter)*

In some research situations, maintaining the confidentiality of participants can be a rather straightforward task involving the use of aliases, the storage of tapes and documents under lock and key, and a commitment to confidentiality by those involved

in the project. These strategies work relatively well when the participants are spread over a large geographic area or are not members of a close-knit group, neither of which is the case for this project. As Wolf (1992) notes,

More and more often now our informants are also of the community for whom we write. Then what? And what of conflicting interests among our informants? These are not new problems, but they have become more complex problems because we can no longer assume that our analyses will not be read by our informants (or their enemies). (p. 137)

In the case of small tribal communities—such as those to whom many of the participants in this project belong—there are high rates of kinship affiliation and intermarriage, making complete anonymity as a research subject practically impossible to guarantee (Lomawaima, 2000, p. 9). More than half of the women in the project come from Vancouver Island First Nations; and although there are many different bands that belong to the Island, a First Nations person will often know and/or be related to people from several of those bands. As well, many of the women who do not originate from the Island have been here long enough to know and be known by many First Nations people from the Island.

During an interview with Eagle, she begins to talk about a personal experience belonging to a category of experiences among First Nations women that she describes as “not very nice some of it.” She stops in mid-sentence, concerned about whether her story will be appropriate to what the interviewer wants. On the other hand, she seems resigned personally to the fact that “they all know it.” In this case, “they” are the various peoples involved with First Nations programs and courses at the university college, as well as all the people who belong to or are associated with her band and her family. In short, she knows that her anonymity in the context that matters to her is not possible.

Eagle has lived close to her people all her life. She knows that the documentation of this project will be available in the library at the university college where she took her

undergraduate degree. Succeeding generations will be able to read details of her experiences, and at least some readers will remain able—because of the close-knit nature of the community—to identify her and thus her extended family (whose permission would not normally be requested by the researcher). In such intimate communities, time does not fade easily the memory of people and incidents. The fact that Eagle personally is undaunted by the possibility of being identified does not remove the very real problem of maintaining confidentiality within a project such as this, where many of the women live in close-knit communities on the Island. Nor does it remove the dual responsibility of the researcher to take care in protecting the confidentiality of the participants while, at the same time, maintaining the richness of their narratives.

Interviewer: The first question I want to ask is where you presently reside.

Mackerel: Don't we have to say who's talking?

Interviewer: No, we don't want your name.

Mackerel: Oh, ok...You don't want my name? That's rude! (*peals of laughter*)

The richness of the narratives portrayed in this document resides in these women's heritages, an important part of which is carried in their names, and a fact that is particularly problematic in a project such as this. Although Mackerel's comments about the rudeness of not inviting her to give her name appear to be in jest, they point to a sensitive issue connected to naming. As in any culture, names are an essential component to personal, familial and group identity. First Nations people have not forgotten the hated colonial practice of re-naming their children—and thus effacing an integral part of their identities—for the purpose of assimilation and cultural annihilation. These women in some senses now find themselves in a double bind.

On the one hand, although historical documents tended to erase Native women, or at least stereotype them to the extent that they could not gain a voice to say who they were, now some Native women are beginning to speak out and to reclaim their place in

history, in politics, and in their cultures. For some, the power of Indian names helps them assert their individual place at the communal roots of their people.

Indigo: Well, when they would call me in the longhouse, they'd say, "____", which means "the wife of [husband's name]". And when I got my [Indian] name, I stood up and I called to my cousin. We're not supposed to do this, but I did it. I just gave him 50 cents to speak for me. And I said, "Could you please tell them my name is [Indigo's Indian name]?" I'm not [wife of ____]. I'm his wife, but that's not my name... You really have to stand up for your name when they do give you one. Because some people will still call you "the wife of" or "Mrs. ____," using my husband's name. *(laughter, joking)*

Indigo's insistence on being addressed by her Indian name should not be interpreted as equivalent to the western notion of a liberated woman individuating herself by refusing to be addressed by her husband's name. An Indian name is inherited from the ancestors, and carefully passed down to a chosen person capable of honoring the name's history and responsibilities. It carries the spiritual power of the all who have held the name previously; and although singular in its presentation, the name represents a deep and eternal connection and obligation to the people. Indigo is equally owner of and owned by her Indian name, which remains lodged in a communal context: "In a single name we see woven ascription, acceptance, being, narrative, force, and constraint—the logic of operations that gives [Indian] names their extraordinary salience in life and memory" (Brooks, 2002, p. 181).

The other part of the double bind is that at this time in history, in order to speak out in certain contexts, it may be too risky for some women to use one of their main identifiers: their name. This issue may not be as poignant for people belonging to a group that has not experienced the oppressive silencing that some groups endure, but

for First Nations women it connects quite directly and sometimes painfully to the past and the present of their people. The fact that some of them may at this time feel they need to use aliases does not diminish the power of their words, but it does make a further unspoken statement about their history and the world in which they presently live.

These issues are further complicated by the fact that I have a previous relationship with each of the participants. The advantage of this might be that the participants will share more information and be more candid with me; the disadvantage might be that some issues of confidentiality will be even more critical. This situation became more obvious as the project evolved, and I began to analyze the hundreds of pages of interview transcripts. I realized that even though the promise of confidentiality as presented in the initial letter of consent was sincere and met the legal requirements of the institution, it was in fact an inadequate description of the reality of doing this kind of research with Native women. What to do?

Several months into the project, I wrote to the participants in a newsletter, explaining the problem, and providing them with a short piece of draft writing so they could see more concretely how the situation was evolving. I asked for feedback and reminded them that in the end, they would have a say in the final draft of their words. None of the women expressed a desire to withdraw or to make drastic changes to the text. I then continued with my analysis and writing, realizing that most of them knew that they were taking at least some risk when they entered the project, and they, like me, had already made up their minds.

Conclusion

Because of the open-endedness and contingency of a dialogic approach to research, there will be no answers that are right all of the time. A theory of dialogics invites one to celebrate research in the borderzones of social forces that are always and

already centripetal (moving toward sameness) and centrifugal (dispersing into difference). Flax (1990) then asks

How is it possible to write? What meanings can writing have when every proposition and theory seems questionable, one's own identity is uncertain, and the status of the intellectual is conceived alternately as hopelessly enmeshed in oppressive knowledge/power relations or utterly irrelevant to the workings of the technical-rational bureaucratic state? (p. 5)

Several researchers provide some workable approaches. Francis (1999) claims that while we all behave in multiple and contradictory ways—a fact we should recognize in our work—we should avoid full acceptance of post-structuralism's deconstruction of all "principled positions" (ethical evaluations), because they can cause political and ethical paralysis: "We still free ourselves to have agency, moral obligation, and preferences for different kinds of discourse...Creating narratives to structure, or describe our lives, is part of being a human subject" (sec. 3, par. 7). Wolf (1992) responds to the dilemma with a "get real, people" attitude, saying that a researcher

listens to as many voices as she can and then chooses among them when she passes their opinions on to members of another culture. The choice is not arbitrary, but then neither is the testimony. However, no matter what format the anthropologist/reporter/ writer uses, she eventually takes the responsibility for putting down the words, for converting their possibly fleeting opinions into a text. I see no way to avoid this exercise of power. (p. 11).

Lather (1991), like many researchers (e. g. D. Smith, 1999; L. Smith, 1999; Archibald & Crnkovich 1995; Gibson-Graham, 1994; Wolf, 1992; Flax, 1990) seeks a reflexive, ethical and rigorous approach to research grounded in people's everyday lives; yet she also realizes that "in an era of rampant reflexivity, just getting on with it may be the most radical action one can make" (p. 20). The following chapters attest to my intention "to get on with it," as a result of and in spite of the continual need for reflexivity. It is not possible to write without questioning my relationship to the material that defines me and

my work; and “in writing close to the other of the other, I can only choose to maintain a self-reflexively critical relation” (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 76).

CHAPTER FOUR: MEETING THE PARTICIPANTS

...PARTIALLY

Adding “body” to our words

Initially, I did not plan a formal introduction of the participants, because putting their age, general place of residence, and tribal affiliation together with their alias would no doubt identify them to local readers who could then easily follow what they said throughout the document. Leaving out at least some sort of individual introduction made me feel quite uncomfortable, however. It would be an erasure of them as individuals belonging to tribes of which they are proud members albeit sometimes critical ones. Therefore, I asked them if I could present each of them individually with neither their real name nor their alias, thus making them more present as real bodies rather than as only disembodied words in a transcript.

Because I find beautiful, powerful and unique the ways in which these women express themselves, I have attempted in this document to provide narrative segments that retain some of the richness of their language and expression. Even the ways in which they introduce themselves—their name(s), where they come from, their age, etc.—tell a story. However, in order to maintain confidentiality as much as possible, the initial introduction of the individual participants will of necessity be partial and mostly unstoried. Following are partial and individual descriptions the women offer of themselves.

Introductions

I am **Tsimshian** from the Kitselas band. I just turned 40. I have a B.A. in First Nations Studies, and I'm working toward my B.Ed. I have lived in Nanaimo since 1989. Before that I lived in Terrace.

I was born in and presently reside in Powell River. I moved away for ten years and then I came back in '77. I am **Sliammon**, known now as Tla-Minh. I'm 42 years old. I am working toward my B. A. in social work.

I have lived all my life in the Chemainus area. I am a **Chemainus First Nation Band member**. I have a B.A. in First Nations Studies and almost a minor in Women's Studies, and I am currently finishing my Masters Degree in Indigenous Governance. I'm 57 years old.

I belong to the **Sto:lo Nation**, Seabird Island Band. I've lived in Cowichan Territory for 2 years, and before that I lived in Sto:lo territory. I'm 26 years old and working toward a B.A. in First Nations with a double minor in Women's Studies and English.

I've lived in Dawson Creek, BC, about three months. Before that I lived in Nanaimo. I am **Mi'kmaq**, from the Pictou reserve outside of Halifax. I have a B. A. in First Nations Studies. I'm 54 years old.

I have been living in Cowichan Bay since 1994, and before that I lived in Port Renfrew. I'm a 46 year-old to-be grandmother. I belong to the **Red River Métis**—Cree and French mix. I earned my B. A. in First Nations Studies, and a diploma in First Nations Child and Youth Care.

I am 54 years old and I reside on Kuper Island—“Penelakut” in my Hul'qumi'num language. I have lived here since I was seven. I was born and raised on Galiano Island. I belong to the **Penelakut band**. I have a B. A. in First Nations Studies.

I presently reside in Nanaimo. I was born here and have lived here periodically throughout my whole life. I am 29 years old. My Aboriginal ancestry is registered by the Louis Riel Society, and **I can trace my Métis ancestry to Manitoba**. I am seeking a B. A. in Psychology.

I've lived in Qualicum Beach for almost ten years. Before that I lived in northwestern Ontario, and before that I was born and lived in Manitoba. I'm 65 years of age. **I am a crossbreed Lakota Assiniboine with relationship to Oneida, but more Red River Métis**. I have a B. A. in First Nations Studies.

I have lived in Port Hardy, BC, for 21 years. Before that I lived in Europe. I am 43 years old. **I am Chippewan** from the Fond du Lac Band. My major will be First Nations Studies and my minor will be Women's Studies.

I presently reside in Klemtu, BC, and I have lived here all my life except for the time that I have been away at college. I have previously lived in Nanaimo, BC, while I attended college. I am 29 years old. **I belong to the Xaixais nation** and I am registered with the Kitsoo Band. I am seeking my BA in First Nations Studies.

I just moved to Vancouver, BC. Before that I lived in Nanaimo for seven and a half years. I'm 34 years old. **I belong to Squamish Nation and Hesquiaht First Nation**. I've actually finished my BA in First Nations Studies, and I stayed a bit longer to do a minor in Business Admin.

I've lived in Nanaimo for six years, and before that in Victoria where basically I grew up. I just turned 30. **Through my mother, I belong to the Tla-oqui-aht, which is under Nuuchahnulth Nation, and to Checlesaht through my Grandfather**. So it's the Nuuchahnulth First Nation, and under it I belong to Tla-oqui-aht. I have a B.A. in First Nations Studies.

I live in Qualicum Beach. I've lived here twelve years, and before that I lived in North Delta. I'm 39 years old. **I am Tsimshian**, and my band is Lax Kw'alaams. I have a B.A. in First Nations Studies.

I live in Pemberton, BC. I have lived here off and on for about 15 years. I'm 32 years old. **I am a Tahltan, from the Gwich'in**, and we're from the Yukon. We belong to the Vuntut band. When I get back to school, I'm thinking of taking a course on languages.

I've lived in Vancouver, BC, for the last three months. Previous to that I lived in Victoria. I am 27 years old. **I am from the Nuuchahnulth nation**, and the Mowachaht band. I have a B.A. in First Nations Studies.

I presently reside in Port Alberni, British Columbia (off reserve), and I have lived there for three years. I was born in Chemainus, BC, in 1962, and I grew up on Galiano Island. **I belong to the Coast Salish Hulqu'minum speaking First Nation group**. The band name is Stz'uminus (Chemainus). My Bachelor of Arts is a major in First Nations Studies and a minor in Women's Studies.

I belong to the Cowichan Tribes; I'm Coast Salish. I have lived in the Malahat area for three years, and before that I lived my whole life in Duncan. I'm 23 years old. I have a B.A. in First Nations Studies.

I come from the community of Ahousat and the Nuuchahnulth Nation. I have lived in Nanaimo for six years, and in Port Alberni before that. I'm 30 years old with 2 years experience. I've got a B. A. with a major in First Nations Studies, and a minor in Women's Studies.

I belong to the Kitimat Band, Haisla; but my mom is Penelakut from Kuper Island. I'm registered on Kitimat, though. I was born in Duncan and have lived in this area pretty much the whole time. I just turned 32, and I have a B. A. in Anthropology.

I belong to the Chemainus First Nation, but I was raised in Brentwood, so I feel very much tied to the Tsartlip too. I've lived in Duncan for about 15 years, and I lived in Brentwood before that. But most of my relations are in the Duncan area, where I live now, and I'm very proud of being from the Chemainus. I'm 25 years old, and I have a B. A. in Social Work.

I am from the Chemainus First Nation. I have lived in the area of Chemainus all my life, and I've lived on reserve here for about six years. I'm 42 years old. I will be getting my B. A. in First Nations Studies and my minor will be in Women's Studies.

I belong to the Cowichan band, and my ancestors came from Quamichan. I've moved around, but I always come back to Duncan in the Cowichan Valley. I've lived here all my life. I'm 49 years old, and I will be getting my B. A. in First Nations Studies.

I'm from the Carrier nation, Nak'avdli band. I'm Beaver Clan by my grandmother. I have lived in Nanaimo for the last 7 years, and before that I lived on Gabriola Island. I'm 41 years old. I have a First Nations Bachelor of Arts.

The place I live in is called in our language "Hwtuffie," between Crofton and Chemainus. I was born and raised here. I left for some years, and it's only been probably seven or eight years since I've been back here. I'm 55 years old. **We're Coast Salish and the tribe we belong to is Penelakut.** I'm still working on my B. A. in First Nations Studies.

I've lived in my own house on reserve in Port Alberni for about eight years. Before that I lived with my sister on reserve. I'll be 51 this year. **I belong to the Nuuchah Nulth Nation and I'm Tseshaht.** The Tseshaht band is up the river from Hupashishet. I got my B. A. First Nations with a minor in Women's Studies.

I've lived in Port Alberni for seven years, and before that I lived in Nanaimo where I lived my whole life up until I moved. I'm 27, but I feel like I'm older. I

originate from Tla-o-qui-aht, and I've transferred into Tsheshaht of the Nuuchah-Nulth nation. I am seeking a B. A. in English.

I have lived in Duncan my whole life. I'm 43 years old. **I belong to the Cowichan Tribes.** I have my B. A. in First Nations Studies.

In addition...

I offer the following information that may help the reader to imagine the complexity, the beauty and the challenges of the individual lives of these women. Most of these women are of mixed heritage. Almost one third of them were "adopted out" or lived in foster care as children. Over eighty-five percent of them have children, and about half of them have grandchildren. A third of them have partners who are non Native. Almost half of them live on reserve. Twenty-three of them have finished a bachelor's degree. Five of them are now working on their Masters degree. Three of them are finishing work towards a professional teaching certificate. Two-thirds of them presently work with First Nations peoples: in schools and other education facilities, in various positions at the band level, in counseling and addictions centers, in health care. One is critically ill. One took her life before this report was finished.

CHAPTER FIVE: COMMUNITY: "...TO BRING BALANCE BACK TO THE STORY"

Introduction

For many First Nations peoples, the word "community" evokes notions of balance, of harmony, and of sovereignty. It is a powerful and frequently stated word. It is a word that, within the lives of contemporary Native women, expresses an integral part of their identity, of their dreams, and of the work that lay ahead of them. Although often stated in the singular, the reality of Native women's lives is that the word is multivoiced, sometimes conflicted, and highly complex. This condition is further amplified for the Native women in this project who seek a postsecondary education, and whose experiences in women's studies both challenge and support their intentions to create and maintain community. The following dialogue attests to that reality.

This chapter contains 1) the participants' dialogue around notions and experiences of community, and 2) my discussion of the same topic. The participants' dialogue runs uninterrupted along the top two-thirds of each page, and my discussion runs along the bottom third of each⁷. I have four reasons for this format, the first two of which I have already elucidated and expanded upon in Chapter Three. First, I wish to foreground as much as possible the words of the participants. Second, in foregrounding the thematic discussion, I hope to give readers at least a somewhat more direct experience of the participants, and a better chance to form their own impressions and

opinions of what the women say. Third, I hope to provide the reader with a wider range of ways to approach or to play with the reading of the chapter than is usually provided in documents such as this. One might read the thematic discussion or the analysis in its entirety, or one can move back and forth between them. I attempt in my analysis to follow somewhat the general flow of the dialogue, but the analysis at the bottom of a particular page does not necessarily match what is being talked about on the top part of that page. Fourth, I find the format represents more concretely a dialogic approach to this type of work. I am in dialogue with the words of the participants. And that dialogue is itself an expression of community.

⁷ This format was inspired by Lather and Smithie's book *Troubling the angels: Women living with HIV/AIDS*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997.

Talk about community

Grouse: My mom used to get mad because I didn't know who my relations were. "Oh, there's your cousin right there!" [she would say]. And I'd be looking, going, "Who's that?" I used to say to her, "So I'm supposed to go up to every brown person and say, 'Excuse me, are we related?'" Somebody has to tell me these things! (*laughter*) She used to always get mad at me because I didn't know who my relations were. I tried my best to figure out who everybody was, but I don't know very many of them, which is sad.

Alder: My band is what they call _____, which is the situation, [and] _____ is the origin story. First there was ten people who fell from the sky. You have to know your origin. That's what I believe in, because we have our stories and our own history which teaches us where we come from. We're not just sent and come from the swamp.

Dragonfly: When I was first enrolled in the Native women's studies, I thought it was really important for me to know what other Native women's views



Thinking and writing about talk: Community as dialogue

The spiritual foundations of community

In a time remembered from stories, Native communities were created when the ancestors first touched the earth. Many creation stories tell of the peoples' fall from the sky—which was a place of infinite space where there were no markers or boundaries with which to mark community—to the earth, where boundaries and markers helped the people to organize themselves and to prosper. The Haida tell of

were...and to learn from each other in a way. We can learn from each other's stories. There's a real tradition in my family, and I like to share my family's point of view and sharing their stories with what I say. It's important in our family traditionally to acknowledge our grandmothers and great-grandmothers, because they are the ones who gave us the stories. That's how we share.

Frog: I have a belief that it isn't just about women. It's about people, it's about community, it's about families, it's about our connections with everyone. That's what [was] brought forth in that [NWS] class...just showing us how important the Grandmothers were, [and] the role that women played.

Geraldine: Yeah! We're all people...we're all human beings. I don't care if we're brown skinned or what...we're still people and you can't ever take that away from us!

Grouse: The way I look at it is that you know your ancestors will always be with you, no matter what. But there's no connection. You feel like there's no way we can connect. Everything is so different from when they [the ancestors] were here,



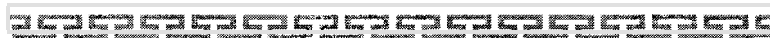
Raven who dropped the people from the sky in a clamshell. The Upper Skagit tell of First Woman who fell from the sky, pregnant with the sun and the moon. The Cowichan tribes of Vancouver Island tell of the first ten people who fell to earth and formed their original community.

The first peoples touched the earth in specific places, and those places form the basis for their understandings about community. Even when they are not physically present at that place on the earth, the women in this project dialogue with and about it

and what we're going through right now. I pray to my ancestors all the time now...in going through school, and going through treatment, and learning about my spirituality.

Mackerel: A lot of the women I spoke to were in the same place as I was, in that we need to heal together as a community...both men and women. I'm not saying we're going to go out and grab people and say, "You gotta heal." It's got to be in your own time.

Frog: It's about our connections with everyone, and, just showing us how important the Grandmothers were, [and] the role that [Native] women played in [for example] the fur trade. I found it really interesting that these women who [supposedly] were beasts of burden, who had no voice in their communities, who could do nothing, could marry these fur traders and be women-in-between, communicating back and forth and have this power. They all of a sudden were no longer these insecure women, but suddenly met white men and could have the rule of thumb over them...? And then go back into the communities and have this prestige? I just have a hard time wrapping my



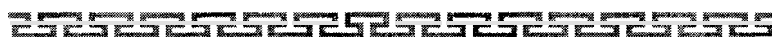
in order to remain in or to re-enter the circle of community. The land "places us... it validates our human being...what we're made of" (Alder). Eva Jacobs

(Kwa'kwa'a) (1992) says of the peoples of the Northwest coast,

In the beginning of time, the Creator placed our people on the land on the northwest part of this continent. Our ancestors, up to the present generation, have lived here. We breathe the same air as the plants and animals that share this land. Upon our deaths, our bodies become part of the plants and animals of this land, just as they give of themselves to us; they become part of us, and so the cycle of life continues. The plants and

mind around that. (*laughter*) I'm saying if they didn't have [prestige] to begin with, they wouldn't have had it when they came back. They already had to have had it before they even left...to be able to go out and deal with people and do the work and the communications that they did. You needed to have all this knowledge and all these abilities to carry out that position. Some people believe that the Grandmothers who married these white men really sold us out, like they betrayed us and stuff. That isn't what they were doing. They—not just the Grandmothers, but the Grandfathers too—had this knowledge that no matter what, these [white] people were coming and that we needed to form these alliances with these people so that we could continue on, which is a whole different perspective of looking at [Native women in the fur trade].

Dragonfly: My great-grandmother said that when she was very small, women were taught to look after the family and the community, and make sure that was going. She was the one that looked after me when mom would be working and dad would be working, so she'd always have us children there. She used to make bannock with me and then she'd start with her stories...traditional stories of how she grew up. Then she'd say, "Well, I'm going to teach you galette."



animals are one with us. The very earth we walk on contains the bones and the dust of our ancestors. Thus the spirit of our ancestors is forever present. There is no place else where we could belong. (p. v)

First Nations creation stories tell people they are of the land, that they are related to all things. One can sometimes hear or read closing remarks in which Native people say, "All my relations." This statement means much more than the conventional idea of blood relations or relations through marriage. When one is of the land, one is related to all that lives on the land: people, plants, animals, fish, insects...

Galette is bannock. She'd go over and she'd start talking [her language], and also she'd sing and she'd have this flour going like this. Her hands were so old and she was like this...[moves hands as if mixing in a bowl]. She says to me, "Dragonfly, you're not making the bread right. You're making it too tough. Like this!" she goes. She takes my hands—and I got little hands—and she's got my little hands in there and going, really kneading it, and we got flour all over and we don't care. We're having a blast. And she'd make doughnuts out of it. She'd make doughnuts and fry it, and she'd put sugar and then she'd make her Labrador Tea. Then she'd say, "Now I'm going to show you how to bead." And it was on animal skins...tanned animal skins she had a long time ago. I remember her sitting with me...and [I was] looking at her feet, and she had the same moccasins that she made when she was a girl. I used to sit on her Pemberton blanket that she had, and here what I would be doing was the beadwork. These are things that [Native] women's Studies brought back to me, was what I learned from a long time. My grandmother would teach me her language and she would talk to me. She would say jokes to me and we used to do things together, and laugh and joke. These are things that I remember.



everything. The original notion of community is greater than words like "family," "group," "tribe" or "clan" can possibly describe. Because community ultimately relates to the land and all of its relations, the term always has a concrete referent that resists abstraction and categorization. Those relationships were established at the time of creation, and continue through prayer, songs, dances and stories.

The Grandmothers are very present for many of the participants through memories recuperated "from a long time" and played back through the rememberer's

Fox: I'm writing a book about my grandfather's life, and it's kind of unusual because I'm a younger woman [and] this is my Grandpa. I think one of the reasons why I'm supposed to do my Grandpa's book is to bring some balance back to the story. My grandfather knows. He'll always tell me, "You go ask your Auntie or your Grandma about this," because there was traditional knowledge kept and they connected at certain points, but they were kept women's knowledge and men's. But now because of colonization and because of some religion and things, it's become imbalanced. I'm bringing back that voice, and so I hope by the end of the book that it will be a good balance of the male and the female voice in there. Yeah.

Kelp: I think [First Nations courses] brought me back to my culture because a lot of the things were not only taught, but practiced in the course. A lot of our people are off the reserve and it's away from our roots and everything.

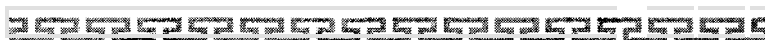
Indigo: I'm from on reserve and off reserve...I've lived on and off. I'd move onto reserve for a while, but I was always close to my community. I would go and live on reserve with my grandmother, and then go back off reserve with my



voice in the form of a dialogue that she externalizes in her talk. This process relates to the Bakhtinian notion of ventriloquation, a notion of speech pre-supposing "that a voice is never solely responsible for creating any utterance or its meaning. In this view, the very act of speaking precludes any claims about the individual's being 'metaphysically independent of society'" (Wertsch 1991: 70). Women talking to the Grandmothers in this way is an important sign of their presence in the circle of community. And like the process of passing down (uttering) Indian names, the women's utterances form a link in a complex web of utterances connecting their

mother. I went back and forth. There were just certain things that we accepted the way they were and what was expected of us. My mom would say, "You don't have to go to school if you don't want to. You're just gonna get married and have kids." That was your role in life. Meanwhile I'd be going to school. That was the off-reserve life. Back on reserve was my grandmother teaching me to preserve the food, do the laundry, and things like that. Back off reserve, my mom would say, "Well, you don't have to go to school if you don't want to, but if you want to you can get up and go to school." I'd get up and go to school on my own. She never forced me to go to school, but she was always opening the door, like, "Fly away! Go! Go If you want to." So there's just certain things they accepted that way.

Eagle: When I did my Masters program I wanted to do it in Art. I'm making a mask, and I have composed a song in the traditional way. [It] is going to be given back to all the _____ communities, because over the years we have lost a lot of our communities' songs. If you go to sing a song, I'd say 99% of the time it belongs to a different family. You have to ask permission; you're not free to sing songs. The song that I have composed will be given to all the communities.



present and future to past utterances.

When one has been absent from the dialogic circle of original community — as is the case for many of these Native women — those voices can become faint, confusing or even frightening. Who are all my relations? Where are they? How will I recognize them? How can I make them present? How do I respond to them? What do they expect of me in this world in which I live? Women's prayers call to the ancestors, pleading for dialogue so that their presence can be felt. Women speak of and *as* their

They'll be able sing it anytime they want, at any gathering they want, and what it will be is an identification of who they are as ____ people. [The chief] was really excited about it, and he was really excited about the mask, too, because he feels our people need those things, but nobody's willing to step out and say, here it is! Yeah, that would be great because it all ties in and it goes back to the community.

Buffalo: My family appreciates if I sing for them. And then [they say], "You're the greatest, you're the greatest! We'll love you, but don't do all that thinking-out-loud stuff." (*laughter*) One of my aunties, she always wants to hear my poetry. She is willing to let me write her life story. There's a place, but [my family] has to ask me for it. I can't just go in and say, "Rah! Rah! Sis boom bah! Yeah, university!" Let's all get academic!" (*laughter*) [They would say,] "Yeah, just shut up and stuff the jars!" (*laughter*)

Oolichan: I'd go and tell them [family and community]. I'd go talk about my classes and tell them, "Hey, this is what I learnt here." I never used to really go anywhere. I'd stay home. [But] then I liked my courses because it brought



grandparents, imagining them present and actively speaking to them, even if, like Chrystos (1994), they admit, "I'm making you up."

...I stand next to you pass wool absently
 You lay aside the wrong colors without comment
 I'm simply Grandchild
 Babbling your sympathy warm & comforting as dust
 I sit in your lap your loom pushed aside
 you feed me fry bread with too much maple syrup
 I pull your braids you cradle me deeper in
 your legs folded to make a basket for me

things for me to talk about that interested me. Just to spread it around and tell the other people, "Well, look what I learnt today, and it's not all the same all over the place." And they'd share with me what they've learnt. So we just kept going back and forth. I got to experience and share, and then they'd come back with what they'd experienced, and then they'd come tell me.

Urchin: [Native women's studies] had a positive influence on my relationship with my family, because I find myself reflecting more on what I have learned from other women, my mother, my grandmother, and my friends. It has influenced me to become more involved in the community, to become more vocal and it also helped me strive to make my community a better place to live, because that is what my grandmother would have wanted. It gives me a strong sense of community.

Fox: What keeps me going is a lot of old ladies saying, "Yeah well, that's the way it is." I was telling [a Native friend]] about it, and she starts laughing, "Careful girl!" she says, "You're just like me when I was your age."

Dragonfly: One of the issues that all the women have now is that women's



Grandma who died long before I was born
 Come Back
 Come Back (p. 203)

Some women express that link by frequently telling stories of and "quoting" the Grandmothers at length, thus re-creating themselves through dialogue with original community.

Whether the women are connected with their community of origin in a concrete sense or not, the words and teachings of the Grandmothers emerge from a remembered

organizations...they're starting to really full force saying that we now have a voice... we're part of that community. We have issues as much as the community has. And there's very strong voices right now on what issues they have about their families, their children's issues, about how to deal with the youth and the children now in the family...that single women don't have to be alone, that they can go somewhere and talk to somebody...to make sure that the families in our community are still strongly connected to their tradition and their customs, and also to their heritage and to their language.

Anenome: I have three older brothers and they were all adopted by three different white homes before me and my two younger sisters were born. And we lucked out. The three of us stayed together. It's very rare for families to be kept together. If I ever did my genealogy in front of you, you would see how many people.... I'm amongst the first generation to raise our own children. There's still a part of me that hungers for that information about culture that gets quenched. It's really nurturing to learn how resilient communities have been. *(laughter)* Somehow the [NWS] classes fill a void. I remember asking about ceremony and culture in my family, and we were told that it was private, which



or learned history and an imagined future. Bakhtin contends that the contexts of dialogue are without limit; and although there are always great masses of forgotten meanings in any dialogue, "these will be recalled again at a given moment in the dialogue's later course when it will be given new life. For nothing is absolutely dead; every meaning will someday have its homecoming festival" (as cited in Holquist, 1990, p. 39). Some women sing that homecoming festival, either as old songs remembered or as new songs that reciprocate the gifts of the old ones. Some celebrate it through dance. Some seek to share or learn their Native languages in order to give those

didn't tell me anything.

Herring: [In] our community here, we have a little church. I remember people going by that church and making the sign of the cross as they were going by. You never pass that church without making the sign of the cross. Now when I think back on it, I think, "Oh my god! I wonder if anyone saw us doing that!" *(laughter)* What I found is how much the people here were influenced by the church. We did nothing in this community without a priest being here, and the priest came one or two days out of the week. When he came to visit us in each home, everybody would kneel down when the priest came, to be blessed. And the priest told us when we were supposed to clean up our yards. *(laughter)* He usually came with the Indian agent.

Phoenix Rising: When you look at the different bands, the different communities, it's about how much growth... how much value systems have permeated the true community. There are communities that are making up rituals because they don't have the memory of how it really worked. They're doing the best they can to bring it back into community, because that's a value to them. Then there are



meanings new life.

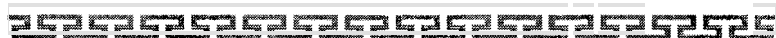
Historical realities of community

Stories passed down from the ancestors not only talk to people about creation; they recount as well that Native peoples knew of the coming of white people. These prophecies emerged from a dialogue between how things were in relation to how things were to become. They spoke to the past the present and the future; they were "a way of making intellectually consistent sense of disruptive changes—some past, some

other communities that know how it's done, and they do it. But that doesn't mean that they have more value than the other community. It's just that they have different ways of meeting the needs of that value.

Anemone: I went to a conference recently. The title in English translated "Take Back Your Identity." They had keynote speakers talk about how identity was taken away. That's what these classes were telling us too. [They] just put the facts on the table so that we could see that it wasn't our doing. I remember one of the elders got up and spoke and said, "If you don't have a name, don't blame yourself. If you don't have an Indian name, don't blame yourself. It's not your fault. It's our fault as parents and as grandparents for not giving it to you. It's not your responsibility." I suppose it's sort of like being baptized. It's not the child's responsibility to get baptized; it's the parents' responsibility to go through that ritual. Because generations of our ability to do rituals was stunted, he was affirming for us that it wasn't our fault. So it took a layer of shame off.

Fox: I've been very involved in my community and what's happening politically. Native women's studies has helped me regain a voice that has been lost. I am



contemporary, some anticipated in the future" (Cruikshank, 1998, p. 129). Native prophecies vary in their messages about the impact of that coming, yet they all foretell of great change to tribal communities, including events that would leave women silenced and absent, and feeling unrelated to those in the circle. Maracle (1993) writes about the dis-ease (literal and metaphorical) that entered the Native community on the arrival of the white men; and the women who had previously had a central role in the economies and celebrations of their communities, began to feel a disconnection.

able to go to my community and articulate some of my thoughts and my feelings. Culturally what that means is that I'm not fighting to get a certain right and positioning within my culture back...I'm taking it. I'm taking that responsibility and living up to that responsibility that I've been taught to by certain individuals in my family...traditional teachers that have said, "You've got to get up there and say something," or "This is your positioning, as a woman in your family. This is your responsibility". It's also given me tools.

Anenome: There's a lot of blanks—cultural blanks—filled in [from First Nations courses]. There were questions that I didn't even have that were brought up. I think what was really important was learning the bigger picture. Learning stuff in mainstream studies creates a bigger picture. But culturally, coming into the Native women's studies smoothed the rough edges...took the guesswork out of where the oppression came from and how it perpetuates, and the importance of sort of different ways of approaching resistance culturally, and experiencing a lot of role models who offer a sense of resistance and affirming that we're still here.



Approaching the village from the sea was a tall ship, sails billowing in the wind...There were no women on the ship...The men [of the village] scurried about, dragged out their largest feast bowls...Young women were sent aboard the ship...[Later] the women were returned to the village. They became the first untouchable victims of disease. A new moral sensibility was required and the old culture died just a little after that. (p. 10)

Elder Kitty Smith (Tutchone) tells the story of a young man in her tribe who announces, "One day, this ground going to be full of K'och'èn [whiteman]. / You're going to be K'och'èn, you people." Kitty reflects that although "nobody knows 'going

Abalone: The [Native] women's studies especially helped me out this past year just to find my little niche in that community and what was expected of me...and trying to teach my non Native husband my expectations as well. Just going back [to my territory] and having both my children participate...we actually got our Indian names when we went back. What an awesome celebration! Just incredible! It was just finding that little crack in the circle, just where I would fit in. It helped a lot just to see. I keep thinking about what I learned throughout the year in the First Nations studies [courses]. Hey, this is where I'm beginning to figure out what my role is.

Turtle: I went home a couple summers ago, back to see my people and to see my land. Oooh! It was wonderful! We got beautiful land, just beautiful. We went to a potlatch. They had a big potlatch. I'm the last one [of the fostered children] to go home, so they made me say a speech in front of all these people...cousins, people left and right that belong to our family. It was really neat, because I never had family before.

Phoenix Rising: As the processes of going through the college was happening, in the



to turn [into] whiteman," present realities show the prophecy held some truth: "How many whiteman grandchild have I got now? / That time, look! / I talk whiteman way, too, now" (as cited in Cruikshank, 1998, p. 126). Native women were greatly affected by "K'och'èn." Early on, during the fur trade, many white trappers and traders married Native women, who then helped their husbands survive and prosper in the fur trade, and who bore the children that Kitty calls "whiteman grandchild."

The lives of Native women who remained in their communities also changed;

[Native] women's studies, especially with the women, it was almost like I was adopted into the [local Native] culture and accepted. There was no formal adoption ceremony or anything going on, but because I live in Nuu Chah Nulth territory and because this house that we sit in is _____, that means that we respect these people who allow us to be here. I am a visitor here, even though I've been here for these many years. I am a visitor, and I respect the culture of these people here. A lot of the learning that I acquired was related to the land here. And I don't think it should be any other way. I didn't have any resentments about that fact. There were times that I wished that I had more knowledge given about my part of the world, but think that I have tools and the skills now to be able to do that for myself. I developed a family here with these people.

Ruby: I haven't quite figured out...I mean I know myself personally how I could transform that [my education] onto the First Nations population. But how you could work as a team in the western society and the First Nations population...? I know in the urban areas it seems to be a little bit easier, but in rural areas where there are certain mindsets of individuals, that's sometimes hard to do.



they began to lose their respected positions through the influence of white traders and missionaries. Later, when Canada became a nation, the Indian Act decreed that Indianness would be determined through the male lines of family, that women (until 1951) could not vote in band elections, that women had no rights to property within their communities, and that Native women (until 1985) who married white men became legally "K'och'èn," with no more legal rights as Indians. These oppressive measures thus distanced Native women not only geographically, but spiritually from those communities where they and their children could hear and tell the stories

I'm a guest here, I feel like I can't [always] pursue that.

Buffalo: It's a big struggle, but I think it is a struggle because I had to leave my community. I came to another community that I feel a cousin to. This is a cousin community to me. I feel like this is my home right now. For some reason, I was drawn here by my spirit. This is home right now, and there are all these issues, but this is a good place to work on them. It's difficult.

Anenome: Getting a chance to see how many of us [Native students] are on campus... that's been really inspiring. I miss that sense of community ever since [I graduated]. There are a lot of people on the planet, but that physical contact and the hug or, the pat on the back, "How's your family?" ...There's a real, genuine how-the-heck are-ya kind of feeling that I miss a lot.

Petite Kokum: All of these courses has been like having a family. It was like going home was something I did to wash my clothes, and eat and rest, but coming back to First Nations women's studies and First Nations [studies] was like coming home. It was sort of the reverse.



connecting them to all their relations.

Also through the Indian Act, Native girls and boys were routinely removed from their communities and placed in the foreign environments of residential schools. Returning to their communities from those schools, it was obvious that they had missed years of dialoguing with the stories of their creation, with their ancestors, and with their grandmothers: "For many victims of the residential school system, not only were cultural values lost, but the experience of normal family relationships and the

Anenome: Yeah, and I think the other things that come out in the classes that don't come out in non-Native classes is the laughter or moments of people being real and being moved and touched to tears. And the whole room...it's just like a domino. Kleenex starts out over here and ends up over there from somebody's purse...*(laughter)* without a word. "Excuse me, I need to hand out a Kleenex!" Or if people had losses. In all the classes we were still able to be human. Or if relationships were breaking down or if kids were sick or kids had to come to class, everyone felt welcome. Also the occasion of a bit of food that we would bring or share with each other...that was a cultural touch that you wouldn't get. I get a real big sense of camaraderie. We had a forum to be ourselves in these Native Studies classes because we had a chance to feel less isolated with witnessing others' testimony. I can't stay stuck in a "poor me!" state of mind, because I'm not alone anymore, and that affirms for me that I'm not alone. I can start feeling less sorry for myself...not comparing apples and oranges with other people's testimony, but just that sense of hey, they made it too! And I've made it! I knew I would always make it, and I'm glad other people didn't get sucked into the myth that we're not supposed to be here.



natural process of parenting were lost as well" (Jacobs, 1992, p. 15).

No body he can understand dat
 unless he happen to him. Dem peoples dat go away to dem schools
 an come back you know dey really suffer.
 No matter how many stories we tell
 we'll never be able to tell
 what dem schools dey done to dah peoples
 an all dere relations. (Campbell, 1998, p. 131).

In the 1950s and 60s when the residential schools were closing down, provincial

Lark: It was a comfort to have all these First Nations people around.

Petite Kokum: Some of us First Nation students talked about that afterwards, and many of us cried all through the course. It was so moving to think that these [Native] women had cared enough—or even by accident—to leave journals behind. It was like stepping back in time. They spoke with the same voices that we speak with. It was just like a time warp sort of thing...realizing the things that they suffered...to know they did that. Some of them were at risk when they wrote those pages and papers, and could very well have been harmed by some of the things that they wrote. But to have that record, to have that documentation that [Native] women are not very much different today. They're just modern and have more tools to work with. We're very quickly reminded that we had a responsibility to take notice, to remember, and to work with them for ourselves and for the future generations.

Elk: [Native women's studies] makes me understand where my mom's coming from when we're speaking and my grandmother, and even my daughter. She [my daughter] is the next generation and you always want better for your next



laws replaced federal jurisdiction in the area of child protection, and in fact took over the federal government's previous role of removing Native children from their communities. By this time, Native communities were falling into increasing disarray due to the effects of grinding poverty, violence and substance abuse, making it easy for child protection services to imagine that Native children were in need of protection from their own communities. They took children away and fostered or adopted them out to white families. In British Columbia in 1955, 1% of the children in care of the superintendent of child protection in that province were Aboriginal children. Five

generation so that's the same way I am with her.

Wolf: [Native women's studies] made me more aware. I felt very disconnected [from my community] before, because I didn't grow up there. But I'm still culturally tied in with families, and in many ways I'm still connected. I learned that through courses I took. I guess it made it more understandable to where my mom was coming from, because it was the same for her, and it was hard for her to teach me what she couldn't. [Because she was raised away from her community] it was kind of more difficult for her to pass information on to me, but she did the best that she could.

Quail: I have to say up until recently, I didn't really have a cultural background. I wasn't raised traditionally. I didn't know a lot of anybody, about my immediate family. The only time when I was a kid that we saw our family was when we went to _____. Yeah. So that was the only time I was ever exposed to dancing and singing, and that kind of thing. So I had to learn how to dance. Yeah, I ended up learning how to Native dance! (*laughter*)

Alder: I completed my academia to learn how to work with people. Now when they



years later, 40% of the children in care were Aboriginal. Among them were about 30% of the women in this project. In some communities, virtually every child was, at one point in her or his life, apprehended (Jacobs, 1992, p. 15). These children became absent—some even permanently—from their communities of origin. Important voices were missing in community dialogue. There were too few children—too little future—to speak to, and the effects of that reality have been devastating to Native communities' ability to bring balance back to the stories of the land and their creation.

[the people in my community] call me out, they know that I have the two different things going together and I'm not going to change. They know me and now that I've done my degree, I've completed it, and I still believe in my teachings. I have had to try and work where like a parent losing children, and I had to go there and speak to them using the institution's way of dealing with a bad thing...losing their children. I went there to speak, and then they knew that I was speaking of the two worlds put together. So they believe in me. Yes, this is the way I live. I felt that this morning, too, like I kind of don't belong, but the whole community knows that I do. The whole community accepts me for who I am. Yeah. That's how I looked at it. That's the most important, is how the community believes in me. That's what it's done for me. Yeah, [this morning] that's what I was really thinking: "I'm very uncomfortable, Creator. What do I learn from this bad experience?" Then I thought very clear. No, I don't have to be uncomfortable because three hundred people believes in me.

Ruby: I felt like taking the First Nations Studies has taught me to be more respectful in different people's culture, and why. It's my stuff that I see everyday, but it's coming. I have to humble myself and know that I take care of myself, that you

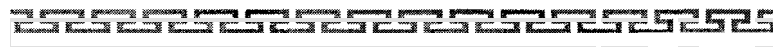


The imposition of Indian Act, residential schools, and child protection laws on “all dere relations” left Native women especially outside of the dialogic circle in their own communities and under the thumb of a male dominated system, a legacy that continues to rankle, and has motivated them to create gender-based communities in order to amass enough power to re-enter the dialogic circle where the fates of their communities are decided too often by men alone. Gail Sparrow (Musqueam), a member of the board of the National Aboriginal Women’s Association, says, “We’ve decided, this is enough. We have to get our women out there to deal with their own

can't pursue that on other people [who are on a] different journey of their life.

Raven~*~Magic: I got a good lesson on humility this summer. I'm doing a research project and I'm doing it on a potlatch chief, a very high-ranking potlatch chief. He was telling me that women do not talk in the Big House. There's always a speaker for them. And in the old days, the women would even actually have a piece of wood over their mouth...that was [for] very high ranking. And I'm going, "I'm having such a hard time with this. I can't handle this!" He looks at me, [and] he says, "That's because you're becoming more educated." And I thought, "Oh my god!" But I just remembered [that] when you visit people, you do what's in that area. You are what they are, right? And so when I go back to the traditional people, I'm someone else and I have a place, but it's a very humble place. And that's really hard sometimes. Yeah, I didn't feel oppressed; I felt really like I had to humble myself...and shut up!

Eagle: At the time that I took the [Native women's studies] course I was taking it mainly because it was other First Nation women getting together and speaking and sharing. I really benefit from that. I think as First Nation women, it's good



issues. We have to give them a vehicle to speak and be represented without being under the arm of the chiefs" (as cited in Yaffe, 2002, p. A22). In addition to political organizations, these Native women have opened up dialogue within academic institutions where they have been able in some cases to create a community, a dialogic circle where they can talk with each other, with the ancestors and with the Other.

Talking with and as the Grandmothers

Reconnecting with the Grandmothers has been difficult for many of these

to get together and share, so that we can maybe close old wounds and educate ourselves. It helped me to be able to share with them...at least support each other through the rough times. A lot of times when you're speaking with First Nation women, you're speaking with wounded people, and I found that we supported each other through...with... after... and coffee breaks and when we'd walk out in the hall for a few minutes. We sort of chatted and gave each other a hug and whatever...even to just reach out like this when someone's having a hard time. I think the support of each other was really good and it became stronger as our course progressed, so that we felt we could confide in each other. Yeah, I thought it was good.

Buffalo: I found it really good for me that way. I guess my expectation for taking the course would be to be with other First Nation women. Yeah.

Herring: Well, I was interested in First Nations women's issues because I have gone through a lot of healing, coming out of an abusive relationship and alcoholism and a really very violent kind of a life. [I] was just beginning to do my own search for something that I wanted to be. I had become the stereotype, and I



Native women. There is sadness and anger at the full realization of the great losses that Native people have suffered, but there is also a determination to make that connection. Sometimes only praying keeps at bay the feeling of helplessness. Other times, there are other people from the Native community who can help. Many tribes and individual Native families have worked hard to recuperate their children who were stolen into foster care or adoption—to bring them back to hear the stories of the land from which they were created. The very presence of these children in their communities of origin is a story of survival. Their presence dialogues with the stories of their creation,

didn't want to be that. So I was looking for the communication with other First Nations women.

Ruby: In the [Native] Women's Studies, one of the things that I liked about it, even though it was a structured program, [was that] we could still sort of talk from our heart. It didn't matter what you said or what you talked about, you weren't judged. Well maybe there might've been a couple of issues with some of the classes, but it wasn't our class. So, you just sort of felt safe in your environment and to be able to share how you felt as a First Nations person.

Petite Kokum: Each topic that we took [in women's studies] was significant because it was validating women, and it was validating the women who once had power and that they could have that power again if we're willing to stand together as women in the community, and if we're willing to value and share our spirituality in such a way that it would make a powerful place to stand. I've met so many women of quality and of history in those courses that I wouldn't have found anywhere else. Oh, [Native] Women's Studies is just a web of community, of learning and research and educational, spiritual...and all these



widening the dialogic circle by bringing in stories that variously complement, question and confirm the original stories of creation.

The Grandparents have power to assuage the guilt over not knowing or being with one's community, or not having a name that identifies one with that community. The Grandparents' acknowledgement, for example, of their responsibility in not providing Indian names for some of the children, acknowledges the presence of those children. The Grandparents move beyond naming to re-establish the presence of their

things brought together.

Dragonfly: What I found too was that with the [Native] Women's Studies, it seemed like we created a bond with each other, with the women, with different cultures. It was like a unique little family. We were strengthened by numbers in our class.

Kelp: It was mostly women in there [the First Nations women's course], [and] that's where I felt the most comfortable.

Eagle: When I went into the First Nations Women's Studies, it's almost like you're going into a family unit, and there's all this other levels of feelings going on. Now, part of that was my stuff, right? But most of the readings we read were written by First Nation women and aboriginal women. So, you're dealing with a lot of emotions within the self, right? In [the mainstream women's studies] class, I just kind of walked in, did my lesson..."Oh, gee, all those things happened. Isn't that terrible!"...[and] walked out. Why that different attitude? The only thing I can say is it's like the First Nations is almost like a bigger family, an extended family. And you're always sort of on guard, and you're



people. They have the power to teach the women who re-enter the circle, and to demand respect for the old ways. Yet these women also bring to the circle voices of other communities (such as Native women's organizations and academic studies) ... communities which have helped them to re-enter the circle, and which will in a dialogic sense re-enter that circle with them. The women will remember or learn how to speak, sing, dance and recognize their relatives; and they will also stand up at meetings and question old ways, or in some cases new ways said to be old. They can remember, learn and decide when to "shut up," but for them it must be by conscious

always, I guess, protecting and...I don't even want to say these things!
(laughter) It's not that it [non Native women's studies] is nothing, but it didn't bring up all these issues of being an Indian. It's just an educational course that I took, [and] I learned that if I'd been in a position to stand up for those women and that, I will. Yet, when you study a First Nation course, it's a whole different thing because you're running on emotion... you're running on a whole different issue. That's weird, eh? I know that [Native women's studies] was like walking into a really extended family. But the other one, you just go in, do your stuff and walk out. There was no emotional feelings...well, except for what we read, of course. [But] there was no deeper feelings there. There were no feelings of... family. That's weird! Mmm...something to think about.

Ruby: It [NWS]] sort of opened my eyes. [In the course] I did my mom's autobiography and it sort of opened my eyes up to what my mom did when we were younger. [She] always looked at things positively. There were some things in my life that I wasn't too happy about, but my mom never really said otherwise. So it just has me have a look at another aspect in the aboriginal community about non Natives marrying Native people. And like Bill C-31,



choice, not by coercion or threat.

When everyone in the circle is present, silence—shutting up—regains its rightful place as a meaningful part of dialogue within communities. Silence no longer has to mean absence; nor does it have to be categorized as the appropriate response of women or as a sign of women's submission to patriarchal authority. It can now be a sign of preparation and waiting for the right moment to speak, and it can be a signal to others of the potential utterances to come. Silence becomes anticipation, an assurance

where the compare and contrast comes to me about how people were maybe years ago and how they are today. That made me have a better look about before and after and tomorrow. Yeah.

Elk: [During Maria Campbell's visit] I was looking how strong she is... just everything that she'd been through in it, and then she's just such a strong lady. There is a lot of similarities [to my life] with the difficulties and that kind of stuff...and my mother and my grandmother... what they've been through. It helps me to understand how their life was and what they've had to come through. It makes you think a lot about the stories, and then how it relates to your life. A lot of things do come out.

Anne: The First Nations women's studies courses allowed me to place myself in the context of Canada's history. For example, when I lived in a segregated community as I did on the reserve I was not enlightened about First Nations women's history. When you are not enlightened about your history you feel a sense of hopelessness without knowing the reason for the feeling. The community or reserve itself is in a constant crisis state of flux because of



that the final word has never been spoken.

Consensus decision making, a notion greatly valued by many Native peoples as an old and proven way of defining their communities, is a commitment to dialogue rather than a process whereby one can carry all the votes and have an issue become finalized. Consensus is not a monologic product: there is no moment where the dialogue is closed for good. Any decision can be re-opened at any time. People can feel safe that not only their voice has been heard, but that it will continue to be heard.

government policy, alcoholism, drugs, and violence. So when you live in this type of environment you are not aware of the reasons why you are doing such things as drinking alcohol and being violent towards someone you love.

Eagle: If she [a Native woman] is living on the reserve...you don't have much protection from people on the reserve. There's still a lot of violence and drug and alcohol and, if they want you, they'll get you. That's the fact...that's a fact. There's no nice things about it. That's it. If they want you, they'll get you. You see it happen over and over again. If it's not through violence, it's through words. The words gradually wear you down till you don't want to live anymore and it's hopeless. You see that over and over again with our people, too. It's really sad because instead of encouraging their young women and their wives to grow, they want them to stay where they are so there's the control, and things can carry on, and they're not threatened in that way. Yeah. I think [in] a true [Native] women's studies, we could probably have someone who's been through the class, who's a little bit older. You don't want some young person in there [who] doesn't have the background to deal with it...or the backbone. And I think someone should give them [the students] some sort of a phone number



A dialogic world is one in which I can never have my own way completely, and therefore I find myself plunged into constant interaction with others—and with myself. In sum, dialogism is based on the primacy of the social, and the assumption that all meaning is achieved by struggle. It is thus a stern philosophy. (Holquist, 1990, p. 39)

Defined dialogically, community is a site of struggle, and the presence of voices that are at times unfamiliar or dissenting is necessary for its survival.

or something where they can phone and say, "My husband beat me up tonight because I said this," or "...took my books and threw them in the fire." That does happen. I think if we're going to start opening up a lot of these things for the First Nation women, I think we should have some kind of a phone system or something where they can go. Or even if they can meet after class or something. They should have some help lying there for them. Yeah, it's not very nice sometimes.

Fox: I think money corrupts a lot of people—men or women, Native or non Native. I think the media has a heyday when Indian people are corrupt, or supposedly. It's no surprise. We're not immune to corruption...like anybody. That's what we're facing today. We've come from being a really financially poor nation... not having a lot of power in this country. Then the treaty sort of holds this carrot of money and independence, and there are certain [Native] individuals who are willing to give up a lot for that. There are others, like myself, who are not willing to give up nearly as much. I know [it] is going to take time for that stuff to change. I believe that it will change.



Inter- and intra-community dialogues

The stories of community remain as living gifts from the ancestors, from the Grandmothers. They are the voices that talk with—not at—the current generations, reminding them of their original community, and providing the spiritual foundation upon which they enter into dialogue with other communities, a process which has long been a regular part of life.

While our people lived in stable Nations within our territories since the

Petite Kokum: I view my community where I live with a great deal of skepticism right now. They're living sort of a Walt Disney world lifestyle, and I know better. I get into some very wide and deep discussions about things going on. There are little things that bug me, and I may never see the changes, but they're going to know that I care about it. There are young gals out there who, like myself, do agree that there are things that need to be changed. I really believe that by involving First Nations women, and involving them in a way with family, community and with their men...in this way, you change a lot of things faster. We go to the women's studies courses here and then we go home, but there's confrontation at home. So then they come back into the women's studies for protection and it's a safe place to talk about the things you need to talk about.

Rabbit: [Before taking Native women's studies] I didn't know what the relationship was like between women and the community, so I didn't know if men were bossy and powerful. I didn't know if women were the way we were described. I don't know if women were put down and abused and stuff like that. I don't see that [in my community]...I see that everyone is able to speak their mind at a certain time. I'm not saying men just do it all the time, whenever they feel like



beginning of time, this does not mean that we were imprisoned by those national boundaries. Trade and travel between various Nations was extensive. Our people had detailed knowledge of the entire continents on our side of the world. In all of our languages there are names for this continent now known as North America. (Jacobs, 1992, p. 5).

This statement reveals an important aspect of Native cultures that confirms their original dialogic existence. The first peoples were created at particular places on the earth, places that marked their original communities. Yet, unlike the reserves later established by the Indian Act, where Native peoples became virtually imprisoned by legal and racial

it, because they do it at a certain time as well.

Mackerel: What surprised me was after I'd been to school, I started interacting with people again, [and] I'm finding some women on the reserve here who are sort of going into the male bashing mode. That's bothered me, and I've told them, "You know, we need to work together. I tell them [that] it's our community and that's the strength of our people is in community, and in families working together. If we push away a whole bunch of our family members, we're not going to be as strong.

Anne: The First Nations women's studies courses have sensitized me towards stresses and issues the community faces, especially for women. I see this sensitivity as a positive. I think I have changed and the community members see this. Some perceive it as positive; others perceive [it] as negative. Overall, I think my relationship with my First Nation community is at a distance because of the fact that I do not live in my First Nations community. I like the fact that I can still go back to the community and feel a sense of belonging. On a political level, I think this relationship is a bit more stressed, because of my previous work



boundaries, the original territories were porous, inviting trade and travel, and most of all dialogue with a larger circle of relations.

The desire to dialogue is strong, and Native women whose opportunities to dialogue within their home communities have been restricted or closed off, have formed and belong to various other communities that allow and help them to be present as Native women. One of those areas is postsecondary education, an area which in some ways follows naturally from First Nations traditions, because women

experience with the band. The work experience included speaking out about issues on education. I think this has given me a reputation of being a troublemaker, [and] the reputation continues. Now that I have received education, I think some perceive me as a threat. The women's studies courses helped me as a woman to be more confident in my knowledge and abilities. I think this knowledge includes knowledge that the band does not share with community.

Eagle: It's really funny because I went to my people that were in the [First Nations] course and I asked if they would drum for me to dance [my] mask in, and they said no. I said, "Well, why?" [It's because] there's politics involved. There's funds that they could be cut off, right? They didn't want to put that in jeopardy... that they wouldn't be funded for the rest of their school term. They didn't want to be caught up in that limelight. They didn't want to stand up there as a woman and do that, right? My people wouldn't drum for me. There was people who shunned me after. I knew that would happen. It's o.k. if that's the way they want to be. There was talk brought up after, that women don't dance masks, which is sheer ridiculous. Our women danced [masks] at one time.



were and are the first teachers (Fiske, 1995); and grandmothers played a major role in educating children about their cultural rights, privileges, names, songs and dances. The role of Native women as educators is critical in the development of culture and ensuring that it will continue onto the next generations (Absolon, et al., 1996, pp. 33-34). These women carry the words of their Grandmothers by whom they were educated either in actuality or through imagination; and they bring those words to the dialogic circle of their communities.

When I said that, everybody just about went crazy.

Fox: In my community, there's mixed things with the treaty negotiations going on. I get a very volatile reaction to who I am and it's from a certain group of men, and I'm sad to say that there's certain women who are behind them. I need to say that I don't like to throw away our people. I don't like to throw them in the garbage, but there is a certain truth and a reality that is one of the most important reasons why Native Women's Studies needs to be around...because [of] the reality of going home and speaking about a range of issues...from home issues, socioeconomic issues, like somebody getting beaten, somebody's getting abused, somebody's getting abused financially. It's still very difficult for women to speak up and I'm not as strong as some women. My forte is more towards the land issues, and that is a place where the women don't play. They're not supposed to play the game. I've been through being yelled at, and really trying to force me out of a situation where our people are supposed to be free to speak at meetings and stuff in the community. It's part of the reality, [but] I'm my grandfather's granddaughter, because he says, "I can't sleep at night if I don't say what's on my mind" and that's the same for me. I'm the same way. I believe that



At Malaspina University College, these women belong both to the community formed by the general Native studies programs, and to the particular community created within Native women's studies (NWS) courses. In NWS they dialogue with the stories of the ancestors and with western history. They talk back to western history, imparting not only to non-Natives, but to Native men and to other Native women new understandings of their roles in their communities before and after contact. They bring those dialogues back to their communities, where they can talk with their people of what they have

it [the current reality] will change.

Eagle: [One] thing that's really bothering me is "collectivity" stuff that's going on. Everything is *collective!* I was talking to ____ [university professor] about this. They're putting our people out there so strongly as a collective *group*...that as an individual, we don't have any more rights. But we had our hunting grounds that was, [for example], Joe's. We had different areas that we *called* our own, but we shared.

Herring: Yeah. Go hunting on someone else's area, and you'll find out whose it is!

Eagle: Yeah! We didn't say, "We *own* this," but everybody knew! But now when they go to treaties and that, and in our school system—even up at Malaspina—they're teaching about us as a bunch...a group of people that all stay together...stick together. We're a collectivity now. This is the sad part...that *our* people are really starting to believe it. So when we go into treaties, we're going, "Oh, yes. Oh, yes." And it's really going to damage.

Herring: I actually did a research project where I did a land-use issue, but I had to look



learned, and in turn learn things from their community that they had either forgotten or never knew. They renew their belief in community, and remember all the "peoples that believes in them."

These women find also that not all dialogue is appreciated within their home communities. But their education has provided critical information on some of the reasons why that has come to be, and it makes them resilient in a way that defies tactics for silencing them. They have become a community within a community, a place where

back through historical documents and then see what kind of resources were there, then come all the way back to see who used those resources. The site which was completely destroyed by development was a woman's site. It was for harvesting food and things for their baskets and all of that. It was a teaching place where the women took their children to teach them how to survive. Looking at the timeline from contact to today, the beginning of the destruction of that land was also the beginning of the destruction of the families, because at the same time that land was expropriated by the government, the children were taken away to residential school. But nobody has written about what happened to those women. What was the impact to those women?...maybe their deaths. Oh, this whole mass of this traditional use was all women's stuff. (*laughter*)

Phoenix Rising: I see that the same [way] for community...the healing. One person might have the healing and the knowledge and the wisdom, [and] all it would take is one other person to take a piece of that...ask for it. Then they give it freely... "Here you go." Nothing attached. And then the next person, and before you know it there's lots of light. It's not just one little light. But it's all passed on without anything attached to it, like "That's mine!" That's how I feel.



as Native women they can rage, cry, reflect, study, question, resist and invoke the ancestors to help them figure out what their future roles will be in bringing to their home communities the active dialogue they have developed within the circle of other women. They seem to take for granted that they "really have to as First Nation women...stand up and have a voice and be heard." They are committed to community, to constant dialogue.

Mackerel: Our ancestors...there was a respect for each other. They lived with each other and they respected each other and the place every person had. That's how our communities worked, was together. With colonization we had the split, and being in that class showed me that we can get back to that place. It gives me a lot of hope that we can get our communities back. I'm not saying that it's going to happen soon or anything, but we're going to be able to get there.

Eagle: [First Nations women's studies] helps us to help out in our communities. I think that's really good, because we really have to as First Nation women, I think, stand up and have a voice and be heard.



CHAPTER SIX: ACADEMIA: THE STRUGGLES FOR REASON(S)

Introduction

Since "time immemorial" many Native peoples believe that the ancestors walk with them and talk to them from "the other side," helping to guide their speech and their actions. As well, Native elders encourage us to anticipate the voices of future generations so that we will say and do the right things today in order to make the world good for those who will come after us. Thus, ancient cultural understandings affirm claims in dialogic theory that external speech flows from an inner world populated by innumerable voices from the past and the future.

Bakhtin's view of discourse sees dialogue as demonstration of "a necessary *multiplicity* [original italics] in human perception" (Holquist, 1990, p. 22).

Our practical everyday speech is full of other people's words: with some of them we completely merge our own voice, forgetting whose they are; others, which we take as authoritative, we use to reinforce our own words; still others, finally, we populate with our own aspirations, alien or hostile to them. (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 195)

Holquist (1990) goes on to state that in this dialogic world, all meaning is achieved by struggle (p. 39); and that struggle is inherent in the multiplicity of voices involved in a speech act.

Every experience, every thought of a character is internally dialogic, adorned with polemic, filled with struggle, or is on the contrary open to inspiration from outside itself, but it is not in any case concentrated simply on its own object; it is accompanied by a continual sideways glance at another person. (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 32)

Struggle is certainly a word that can characterize much of the history of Native peoples in relation to systems of western education, and the Native women's dialogue presented in this chapter demonstrates that that same word continues to apply. The women are engaged in a multi-voiced struggle to make meaning of the relationship between their Native cultures and their academic experiences. There are various ways to describe the site of this dialogic struggle. Bobiwash (Anishnaabe) (1999) says of his experiences with Native students at university, "Despite the variation of their backgrounds one thing Native students have in common when they come to campus is that they come to inhabit the 'middle ground'" (par. 3). This description indicates that the students are faced with two or more contending forces/cultures/ discourses. Similarly, Bakhtin (1981) describes the place from which humans speak as one in which "centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear" (p. 272). Eagle, one of the women participating in the dialogue that follows, notes a similar site of struggle when she says that in order for a Native woman to succeed in academia, she must be willing "to make that trade-off in order to walk both roads."

The women's talk refers continually to two imagined roads that they must walk—variously described as Native and non Native, Indian and white, literacy and orality, academic and traditional—and each woman has her various points of view regarding them. The dialogue also reveals that although "any individual within a culture is going to have his or her own personal interpretation of the collective cultural code...the individual's worldview has its roots in the culture—that is in the society's shared philosophy, values, and customs" (Little Bear, 2000, p. 77). The two roads, therefore, are broad and rather

loosely, and even contradictorily, defined. Such a dialogic orientation works to confound an easy binary perception of an academic life/road versus a Native life/road. Rather it creates in dialogue a dynamic space in-between where the women continually struggle with the multiple voices in, between and among worlds in order to maintain a presence that is *of* all, but not wholly *in* any one. This site honors "the equal viability of the forces of synthesis and dispersion, unity and fragmentation, or the centripetal and centrifugal forces which produce the dynamic tensions of selfhood" (de Peuter, 1998, p. 31).

Holquist (1990) claims that dialogue can be reduced to no less than three elements: an utterance, a reply, and the relation between the two, the relation being the most important element, because without it the other two would have no meaning. He reminds us that "the most primary of Bakhtinian a prioris is that nothing is anything in itself" (p. 38). A person's utterance and reply have meaning only within the complex and shifting relationships of the many voices that populate them. That place of relation is a place of struggle. It is the place of many voices, where meaning is continually made new. It is also the place where consciousness of self exists: where one "is." That consciousness of self spans two worlds: "the outer, determined by its relevant temporal and spatial coordinates—its place in the world, in other words—and the inner, where it attempts to find its 'place' within its self" (Danow, 1991, p. 66).

The next section of this chapter provides a written account of the women's externalized dialogue about their experiences in academia. Their outer speech outlines sites of struggle for meaning. The analysis, however, directs attention more to their inner speech, highlighting the notion that the "outwardly actualized utterance is an island rising from the boundless sea of inner speech" (Voloshinov, 1986, p. 96). I attempt, through the use of margin notes, to signal places within the dialogue where one can perceive the shadowy presence of

voices other than those physically present. I hope to illuminate in this way some of the less overt manifestations of the women's struggle to make meaning among the diverse voices that constitute their academic lives and their Native identity.

The following pages are divided into two unequal columns. The left-hand column is wider, and contains in 11-point font the women's dialogue about their experiences in academia. Within the text I have *highlighted and italicized* the sentences or phrases about which I make comments. The right-hand column is narrower and contains my comments in the form of margin notes. The reader can read each column independently, or read in criss-cross fashion, pausing at intervals to read the margin notes.

Using margin notes allows me to draw attention to very specific utterances without taking them out of the flow of the external dialogue. Admittedly, this analysis can never be more than partial.

Within the arena of almost every utterance an intense interaction and struggle between one's own and another's word is being waged, a process in which they oppose or dialogically interanimate each other. The utterance so conceived is a considerably more complex and dynamic organism than it appears when construed simply as a thing that articulates the intention of the person uttering it, which is to see the utterance as a direct, single-voiced vehicle for expression. (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 354-355)

I do not pretend to uncover all the internal voices that populate the histories and futures of the women in the following dialogue. Nor do I pretend that the margin notes are without a myriad of my own unanalyzed internal voices seeking to make sense of the dialogue. The analysis hopes to create a sort of running, secondary dialogue which signals some of the many internal voices contained within the women's dialogue, and which maps some of the terrain of dialogic struggle for meaning and for presence.

Dialoguing about academia

Herring: I think the biggest thing that I was trying to overcome was this institution. *They call it "higher education."* It seems something *unattainable* or *foreign* to our cultures, because *we have higher education in our culture [too]*, and that's what I was trying to familiarize my children...kids in our bands [with]. It's not all what we think it is, you know. *When you get there it's not any different than when you first started school. It's just at another level.*

Eagle: *Don't ever doubt it. There's two separate things there.* Yeah. There's two separate...I wouldn't say layers of education, [but] two separate cultures—our culture, and then you have the culture of the institution. *They can work together if you're willing to make that trade-off in order to walk both roads.*

Alder: I really took it for granted that *my tradition was just an everyday belief for me inside myself. But at the end, I really had to quest for it, because it comes from inside my heart. I had to really question it and search for the answer inside myself. It was quite*

Margin notes

"In real life people talk most of all about what others talk about—they transmit, recall, weigh and pass judgment on other people's words, opinions, assertions, information; people are upset by others' words, or agree with them, contest them, refer to them and so forth" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 338). Herring dialogues with the Other ("they") about "higher education," a discourse foreign to her cultural context, and which represents an unattainable position of authority. She makes sense of the concept through dialogue with her First Nations culture, where she finds a parallel. She then speaks to the children and grandchildren, and places the notion of "higher education" within a local context, thus bringing it into the dialogic circle where its authority can be addressed in a more egalitarian environment—"It's just another level."

Eagle speaks directly and authoritatively to those who are listening, and to any who think that Native culture and the culture of the institution can be fused together. Eagle indicates the potential for the two cultures to come close enough together to permit a shared understanding of their separateness. She describes the future as two distinct paths that, like individual utterances, will remain unmerged and independent, connecting only through their relationship to each other. Her metaphor implies a "besideness," which will allow her to "walk both roads."

For Alder, the language of the institution (the language of the Other) enters into dialogue with tradition, interrupting what was previously a clear, singular (monologic), inner voice of her traditional teachings. The inner dialogue ("from inside my heart") that the interruption generates is difficult and

the painful thing to really look at the two [cultures]. *This is the tradition, [and] this is what academia world is all about, and how they put them together. They don't quite go together but you need to have them both to go beyond.* The traditions give you your strength, and even though I was taught since a little girl, I thought, *"Oh, I'll be just fine, I'll be just strong."* But at the crisis times during my courses, I needed help, and when you look for that help, *you need somebody to talk to that's not affected by mainstream society [and] how they live.* They live where everything there is accepted. In our traditions, not everything is accepted. *You have to live your traditions. And the mainstream society just lives so open. So you do have to be careful how you put them together. They do work together, but you just have to make yourself so aware, so that you don't cause any hurtful thing to academia world and traditional.*

Eagle: *When you go into the women's studies, you go in with your eyes wide open, thinking, "This is really great!" (laughter) And then you kind of go, "O.k. I think I should use a bit of caution. I think I should*

painful. Campbell (Métis) (1991) writes that where we live, "the past is always there. The voices, even if they are 5,000 years old, a million years old, are there. But when you leave that place, and you come to another place, then it must be harder to be able to hear those voices" (p. 63).

Alder organizes and monitors dialogue between "tradition" and "academia world." She says that they don't quite go together, describing the inevitable gap in language where "two speakers must not, and never do, completely understand each other (Emerson, 1984, p. xxxii). She refers also to the necessity of the two voices in order to create the space "beyond," which is the dialogic space where meaning is made (Holquist, 1990).

Alder talks to the ancient ones whose words give her strength to deal with the pressures that "academia world"—mainstream society—puts on her traditional teachings. The old people are internally present as she tells them that she'll be "just fine" and "just strong."

Alder describes the site of centrifugal and centripetal forces where she struggles to utter words that will get her beyond the clash of worlds. Her strategy of making herself "so aware" relates to Bakhtin's notion of internal polemical discourse, speech that "repudiates itself in advance, speech with a thousand reservations, concessions, loopholes and the like. Such speech literally cringes in the presence or the anticipation of someone else's word, reply, objection" (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 196).

Eagle struggles with an inner dialogue between two conflicting voices regarding women's studies: one voice says that the courses offer her the opportunity to speak out; another voice says that she will be subject to the displeasure of some professors and elders. "Imagine two rejoinders of the most intense dialogue—a

watch what I do in there." I felt I had to be really cautious with what I was saying. It really angered me too, because I thought that's what I was here for, was to share and to learn, but it's not like that. *So I have one eye wide open and one eye half closed, so I have to be cautious as a First Nation woman...what you share in a western academic institution.* I'm saying [this] because there is professors, there is also elders-in-residence who don't appreciate sometimes what we share.

Alder: When they teach me something, I have to live it. So what I was taught [at home] about the woman, I guess that was important to me was to love them and respect them for who they are. *I was having conflict inside myself. Who am I? Should I talk? Or should I not talk? I got told to just be careful what I say. So before I'd say something, I'd have to think it out so that it wouldn't hurt either way.* It wouldn't hurt a non Native or a Native person. So big thoughts have to go towards what I'm saying if I said anything in there.

Indigo: *My son says I'm always analyzing. He says, "You're always studying us. You're*

discourse and a counter-discourse—which, instead of following one after the other and being uttered by two different mouths, are superimposed one on the other and merge into a *single* utterance issuing from a *single* [original italics] mouth. These two rejoinders move in opposite directions and clash with one another; therefore their overlapping and merging into a single utterance results in a most intense mutual interruption" (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 209).

Eagle places herself in between the two rejoinders so that she can watch for possible negative or dangerous reactions to what she might share in class. She cannot wholly accept the openness (eyes wide open) offered her in women's studies, because for her "it's not like that." She keeps one eye wide open "to share and to learn," but the other eye must remain half-closed, wary, critical, watching for signs of lack of appreciation for what a First Nations woman shares in a western academic institution.

Alder externalizes part of her inner dialogue with the elders. She asks questions and "gets told" how to proceed. She struggles with the continual and disruptive dialogue between the different cultural perspectives. Like Eagle, Alder is constrained by the need to be cautious and careful. The elders have made her very aware of the power of her words to close off dialogue, and she takes great care to make sure that she doesn't "hurt either way."

Indigo ventriloquates her son's voice as she replays a dialogue between her and her children *about* the dialogic

always looking at us and listening to what we have to say." He said he felt cautious...

"Mom's got her ears wide open

again!" (laughter) They were saying I was always playing mind games with them in my home. I would question, "Well why did you say that? Explain it to me." They didn't like that. They liked the mom who yelled at them and told them, "You shouldn't talk that way!" My son [said], "Don't yell at me. Just talk to me." I started to change my way of dealing with it. I did begin to talk to him, but then he didn't like the way I was making him think.

(laughter)

Buffalo: *It's difficult [being in academia]. It does come in the way in my relationship--my personal relationship. I asked my partner to move out on account of I am an ambitious, driven academic. That's what I am right now. I'm a mother, I'm a lover, but right now my focus is on getting this degree and taking care of my girls. And that doesn't mean taking care of a man. I'm sorry, it just doesn't. And if that means I'm single, that's what that means for me. And that doesn't mean that I'm not an Indian woman.*

Turtle: *You think going to university was easy? I*

environment she attempts to create in her home. Perhaps in the safer context of her family, Indigo feels free to have her eyes and ears wide open, listening and looking at (studying) her children, and questioning them about their utterances. Interestingly, her son—in a reaction similar to that of Alder and Eagle in the classroom—now feels cautious about what he might say.

Indigo "talks back" to her history as a "Monologic Mom" by uttering questions and comments that counter her previous interactions with her children. Her changed way of dealing with her son indicates that he is uncomfortable being made to think—uncomfortable with listening to and attempting to make sense of inner voices activated by his mother's new way of talking to him.

Buffalo speaks to someone in addition to the listener who is physically present. Her explanation of her current roles and her intentions for the near future reflect what Bakhtin (1984a) calls the phenomenon of hidden dialogicity: "We sense that this is a conversation, although only one person is speaking, and it is a conversation of the most intense kind, for each present, uttered word responds and reacts with its every fiber to the invisible speaker, points to something outside itself, beyond its own limits, to the unspoken words of another person" (p. 197). Buffalo speaks forcefully to an Other who is not physically present, yet whom she anticipates would tell her that her studies make her less of an Indian woman because they take her away from her role of taking care of husband and family.

did many courses the first year. I got an award! Who ever thought I could go to university? I never did. My mom brought me up thinking I was stupid, and all my life I thought I was stupid until I started going out and living in the world and then realizing I'm not stupid. I try really hard. I stand up, and no one can push me around. Some way, somehow I'm going to get through this. I did the first year [and] look at it...I got an award. Then something happened and I had to change, so...I sat down and thought about it, phoned the husband [to] take care of the kids. "I've brought them up this long. I need time off. Look after them."

Anemone: Watching each other grow...what a gift, you know? *Starting off, "Whose idea was it to take this class?" to panicking together while you're studying. And you're reading over each other's papers... starting off with a C paper and ending up with an A paper. I mean there's real growth.* I think because the forum [in Native Studies courses] is safe, there's a confidence that you get to witness grow on people too, because *they're not being called down for being Indian.* For some, it might be the first time in their life.

Like Buffalo, Turtle speaks not only to those present, but she dialogues with monologic utterances from the past that told her she was stupid and incapable of succeeding. Bakhtin (1984a) describes this as internally polemical discourse in which the speaker's words are imbued with "a sideward glance at someone else's hostile word" (p. 196).

Although dialogue is ultimately inescapable, we often try to escape it, and with some success" (Bell, 1998, p. 54). Turtle had to change, and part of that change involved her husband. Although she contacted him—he was present as she spoke—she portrays the interaction as monologic; her husband's voice is absent. Her decision is firm, with no space for dialogue.

Anemone questions someone from the past—possibly herself—whose words led her to enter university. Dialoguing with a time prior to her studies provides her with a context for measuring in a sense her "growth" and that of her classmates.

Anemone describes an in-between space of dialogue in Native Studies courses where Native identity is complex and multiple, mocking the stereotypical, negative image of the Indian as intellectually inferior. In this environment, it is possible to have "in

It's an environment where it's cool to be smart and Indian in the same breath, because that was not affirmed for a lot of us growing up.

the same breath" two discursively conflicting, monologic identities: "smart" (read not Indian) and Indian (read not smart).

Salmon: Native women's studies facilitates the discussion of topics which I cannot always find support in dealing with.

Ruby: I think that because there's sort of a *wide variety of age groups* that takes the Native women's studies program, that everybody in the class is on a *different healing journey or different journey of their life*. Even their life experiences—whether they're just young or they're old—they add to the class in a *different way*. I feel it was really good because you heard a lot of *different [First Nations] perspectives*, whether people were urban Natives or whether they were band, [or] non-status. *Different people had different perspectives* of where they were in their own journey.

Ruby speaks repeatedly of "difference" in relation to the other students she met in NWS: wide variety of ages, different healing journey, different life journey, different life experiences, different perspectives, different living situations, different status. Her listing creates a picture of a dialogic place where "otherness cannot be mastered and overcome in the search for self; the voices of others are equal partners in self dialogues" (de Peuter, 1998, p. 39).

Kelp: I think more First Nations women should be encouraged to go back [to school]. A lot of them have excuses like getting too old, but I didn't care. I went back anyways, and it helped a lot. Yeah. They [older women] have a lot to bring to the class.

Dolphin: *Native women's studies helped me bridge understanding from the past to the present. Where we had come from and where we are going, and what we're seeking towards for the future. I felt I needed to understand what happened, or how the transitions took place. Some of it I was familiar with already, and other areas I got more insight to them. Now when I'm talking to Elders...to hear what they're saying, and understand more better, I think.*

Dolphin uses the metaphor of a bridge to describe how dialogue with “where we had come...what happened...how the transitions took place” has helped her fill in the gaps and be better prepared for “where we are going...what we’re seeking towards for the future.” She talks about how the bridge created by her studies now affects her everyday dialogue. The bridge facilitates her hearing of the words of the Elders—the words of the past—and helps her make sense of them.

Herring: What I've always wanted to do is learn how to write. I wanted to write some stories about my experiences. But then on the other hand, it was very difficult too, and that was mainly with the methodology and in doing the research. *I found it kind of difficult to work in collaboration with other people because I've done all of that work myself in the past. But it was really good for me to stretch and come out of that shell. Writing is always difficult for me, so that part of the course... you know how stressed I got when it came to literary terms. I kept trying to remember...[to fit] myself into the academic part of the course. That was difficult for me. I realized I knew it, but I just panicked.*

Herring describes her inner monologue of “I’ve done all of that work myself in the past” as a shell from which she emerges by stretching. Coming out of the shell was good for her, yet difficult and panic-ridden. She stretches out of her monologic shell, yet paradoxically she perceives the academic environment as but a larger or different shell (monologue) into which she must fit. She struggles, trying to remember the language of academia, to write, and to fit “into the academic part of the course.”

Eagle: Lots of times *I was stopped because of the grading system*. It's like all A, B, C, D, E, F. I took the course and I knew I had to reach the academic level, and *I knew I had to reach a good level if I wanted to go further on in my education. That prevents a lot of us really from actually sharing any of our legends, or anything that as Natives who we are. How can you share something that other people don't know, but in a depth that we know ourselves?* And then get marked on it, and fail because it's not part of what we're supposed to put on the paper. It's unfortunate, but that held me back many times, that A, B, C. *And then I go, "Oh, my god!" And then the F! It's the big one, right? If you fail the bloody course, look at what you've done! You've wasted your money, your time...* [raucous laughter]

Grouse: *How can you fail First Nations Studies when you're an Indian, for god's sakes?!*
(laughter)

Herring: That's the whole thing. I mean, *you're an Indian and you fail an Indian course?* It's true! (laughter)

Eagle: We're up in university where we have

For Eagle, the grading system of academia is a barrier preventing her from externalizing elements of her Native identity within the classroom. She has "to reach a good level" if she wants to have options for the future, so she must walk the road toward attaining good grades. She worries that the gap between her particular understanding of her people's stories and the Other's understanding will put her academic success in jeopardy. This is a place where walking both roads sets up a difficult choice for her. Her stories are an important part of her identity, and to have them misunderstood makes her vulnerable within the context of academia. A certain gap in cross-cultural understandings is understandable and even acceptable in a dialogic world where understanding can never be perfect. However, as Eagle suspects, an institutional mandate of cultural inclusion in the classroom can backfire, "all too often transforming purportedly progressive initiatives [e.g. the sharing of cultural details] into just another species of backlash for...students living 'out of bounds' of institutionally sanctioned identity borders" (de Castell & Bryson, 1997, p. 4).

Eagle externalizes her inner dialogue with her fear of failure. She and Grouse ventriloquate the utterances of an Other who would deride them for their failure. The women repeat the statement of the Other, "investing it with new value and accenting it in [their] own way—with expressions of doubt, indignation, irony, mockery, ridicule, and the like" (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 194).

Eagle, Grouse, and Herring's mockery of the idea of grading Indianness recalls Bakhtin's notion of carnival language. In this case, the women uncover and laugh at the irony of a purportedly multicultural institution

people who are sometimes 90 years old going to school, and *we're still saying pass or fail.*

What about their whole life? The life that they've lived...all their experiences? Yeah, I know that has really held me back from sharing a lot of times in the class. And writing essays on things because you have to regurgitate what your professors say, or you don't get your marks.

Anemone: [In mainstream classes] it's a more competitive environment—*"I know the jargon and you don't."* *There isn't that place you can meet and say, "So what does that mean for you?" You've sort of got to know what it means.* Yeah. I speak up in class. I sit at the front of almost every class so the instructor would hear my question if I had anything. It's so fast-paced, you know...twelve weeks, thirteen weeks, fifteen weeks flies by and..."*Ok. Let's just backtrack a second here. I really don't understand what you meant by that, or how does that relate to the reading, or...?" And as shy... more doubtful than shy that I would feel in a mainstream class, I would question it, try and get that clarity. I figure I'm here [and] I might as well make them work...not just suck it up like a sponge,*

On the one hand Eagle includes herself on the road of academia: "we're still saying pass or fail." At the same time, from the other road, she questions university policies which she says do not respect or validate individual experiences, especially those of older people. She sees course writing assignments as monologic exercises in which an Other's voice must prevail, "or you don't get your marks."

Anemone utters words of an authoritative discourse which attempts to exclude her from dialogue: "I know the jargon and you don't." This type of discourse "demands our allegiance and is embodied in the 'word of the father, parent, or teacher'" (Britzman 1997, p. 32). The demand of allegiance leaves no place for speakers from different roads to meet and ask questions of each other.

Although she might feel doubtful and shy, Anemone counters authoritative discourse. Her internally persuasive discourse—in this case, her questioning—is "tentative, suggesting something about...[her] own subjectivity and something about the subjectivities and conditions...[she] confronts (Britzman, 1997, p. 32)

Anemone suggests that questioning has been an effective way to provide a "place to meet" and a place to work on clarifying understandings.

and not question it. Because *the questions are what helped me understand it more.*

Mackerel: *I think the biggest thing I got was that we should ask questions. We should say "Hey, just a minute..."* It was our right to do that, and our class picked up on that pretty well. *(laughter)* I think that's really a skill I will take through my life.

Fox: Definitely it's given me the confidence.

Being educated and being in Women's Studies definitely has given me an advantage, because *when I do go to things, I have paper. I have documentation in front of me and I know how to talk culturally as well.* I know how to have paper in front of me and talk to the people too, and my daughter is learning how to do it too.

Anemone: *I've learned there's lots of ways to present your information in a Native way, using laughter or feeding your participants... shut them right up while you do your presentation.* They're just so grateful...and shocked. *(laughter)* It's great. *I learned a lot of social facts that back up my ability to confront people* when they're making huge cultural assumptions, or even small cultural assumptions. Having the social facts there

Mackerel also sees questioning as a skill useful in interrupting monologic utterances blocking her access to dialogue. "Dialogue, and indeed the fullness of language itself, belong to an irreducibly social world where people ask questions" (Mannheim & Tedlock, 1995, p. 20). Mackerel ventriloquates a common lead-in to questioning—"Hey, just a minute..."—and which, in accordance with Bakhtin's notion of the ideological content of utterances, also "tastes" of a challenge to authority and authoritative discourse.

Fox delineates orality and literacy as two separate yet mutually beneficial avenues for gaining influence. Given the overpowering influence of literacy in western societies, Fox knows that having paper (documentation) gives her an advantage, but it can also be a disadvantage. She must know *how* to "have paper" in front of her. Without her ability to "talk to the people," to "talk culturally," her papers will block her attempts to speak with authority.

"The word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language...but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word and make it one's own" (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 293-294). Anemone makes the word her own through laughter—a carnival approach—and through feeding people, which has the somewhat monologic effect of "shutting people up" so that she can enter the dialogic circle as a Native person. This is an area that dialogic theory does not clearly address: How does Anemone, who has been excluded from the circle, "take the word and make it her own?" Can she assume that there will be automatically the good will or "permission" for her to do so? Or must she employ initially some strategies that are monologic—shutting people up—in order to gain entry?

that you know, *and whether it's the witnessing the instructor and the way they model...the delivery of information and seeing their confidence... being able to call people on their assumptions, or see people being challenged in class.* You see how people approach conflict and how they deliver information. I think that once I've been able to see how other people are able to attack... stand up to cultural assumptions, *the social facts really give weight to our ability to shut people up, or wake 'em up, or a combination of both.* It brings the bigger picture into their world. [It's] always been important...learning those tools. It might not be overt. *You might not be arriving in a class and announcing to your students, "Ok, this is how we talk to bigots." (laughter)* But you might have case studies or a scenario in a story that people dissect and talk about their own experience and how they approach it. *You get to witness what doesn't work for people and how it escalates things, or how people are able to defuse the situation and be able to approach it differently.* That's probably the main point there...getting the chance to have the social facts. *Just being able to learn to think critically in a Native context gave me a*

Anemone has gained important monologic information—social facts about the histories and cultures of Native peoples—from First Nations courses. Now she uses that information as a tool for entering into effective dialogue with the Other. She actively seeks to be an active participant in dialogue, and academia provides her with certain monologic information that has increased the number of her inner voices, giving her confidence to contest or

Anemone describes her struggle between monologic and dialogic interactions within an academic environment. "It is the dialogical relation—between authoritative and internally persuasive discourse—that allows each discourse its fluidity, constraints, and possibilities. The struggle for voice begins with this dialogic relation..." (Britzman, 1997, p. 32).

Anemone refers to the importance of the tools for resistance that she obtained in her academic work. Although recognizing the usefulness of carnival language as one of those tools, she notes that certain overt resistance language, like the carnival itself, has a time and a place. Other times, rather than overtly, one's inner voice utters, "This is how we talk to bigots."

Although she relies a good deal on her command of "social facts" to facilitate her effective participation in external dialogue with the Other, Anemone also notes the power of witnessing, where her participation in the dialogue is more internal than external.

Anemone refers to critical thinking skills in a Native context that have helped her to incorporate familiar aspects of her life into academic writing

chance to take those tools into a non Native world, and instead of writing a paper about something that I don't want to write about, write about something that is familiar, which is split social relationships and specifically how race, gender and class have attached themselves...to explaining how those split social relationships evolve and grow and sort of perpetuate themselves because of language. In a way, non-Native classes and Native classes spoke to each other, and it was able to give a Native voice in a non-Native context.

Yeah.

Petite Kokum: When I started bringing up topics and presenting facts and things like that, I have become very unpopular with certain people in my family. But that's the way life is. There's night and day, and there's storm and there's sunshine, and so I've looked at it this way.

Ruby: *I know personally how I could transform that [education] onto the First Nations population. But how you could work as a team in the western society and the First Nations population...? I know in the urban areas it seems to be a little bit easier, but in rural areas where there are certain mindsets of*

assignments. In this way, she maintains her participation in the larger dialogue of the institution. She has been able to negotiate a space which "affirms native values, strengthens identity, allows for the full expression of an Indian worldview within the course of study, and provides the skills and knowledge necessary for successful completion of the program" (Bobiwash, 1999, par. 11).

It is in the dialogue between Native and non-Native classes that Native students become present in academia. Without the dialogue, Native bodies may be present in an academic setting, but they do not "give a Native voice in a non-Native context."

Ruby poses a question with which Native women students who negotiate spaces between academia and their Native culture must contend: How can they, outside of the context of the educational institution, continue successfully to negotiate within the larger context of society? Ruby knows from experience that the dialogue that academia has facilitated among Native and non Native is a small one compared

individuals, and that's sometimes hard to do. I'm a guest here; I feel like I can't [always] pursue that.

Buffalo: I think a lengthy discussion about voice would create voice for a lot of the not-so-outspoken people. I think that comes from oppression. The other thing is that *some people are just not as talkative as others. Right? Some is about oppression and some people just... like they want to hear me blab. They're taking it all in, they're processing it, [and] they're writing amazing papers. They are introverts, or whatever...and that's cool. I feel lonely, though, in that space...in that place.*

Kelp: I'm quiet in the class, all the time. I heard the others really participating... *I'm usually just quiet. I'm pretty sure if [the instructor] had asked me, I wouldn't mind answering, and I know I would have said what was on my mind, but usually I like sitting in the corner. I think all the education that I got... after, it gave me more self-confidence, and I could speak more. I started to feel better about myself.*

Dragonfly: With the learning that I've got from

to the larger circle of society where there are still many closed (monologic) "mindsets" that pressure her to choose between the "western society" and the "First nations population." It makes it "sometimes hard to do."

Buffalo struggles to come to terms with the different ways that people participate in the dialogic circle. She realizes that some people take a posture of witnessing rather than speaking: "They're taking it all in, they're processing it...they're writing amazing papers." Yet she wonders if in fact their silence is a product of oppression. When "not-so-outspoken" Native students are silent, Buffalo feels an absence in the circle, and she blabs on. She feels lonely in that space, and she longs for more externalized dialogue.

Kelp talks about her process of coming to voice. She begins from a position of "speaking when spoken to." As Buffalo opined, one interpretation might be that her silence is due to oppression. Slipperjack (Anishnaabe) (1991) offers another point of view: "We were raised in a non-verbal culture. You only used words when they were necessary or in direct conversations. Most of the time, nobody said anything at all, because you didn't need to" (pp. 212-213). Silence in this context *is* one's voice; it is not a sign of nothing said. Indeed Kelp says, "I know I would have said what was on my mind." She did not lack confidence in her ability to speak her mind, but rather perhaps in her understanding of the tacit rules of engagement in an academic setting.

In contrast to Kelp, Dragonfly's reason for previously avoiding

those courses, I'm now able to express who I am. *Before, I was always so very...I wouldn't talk. I would not say anything, because I was always so scared.*

Jackpine: I think it's valuable having the First Nations women's studies first and *have everybody be able to see the issues and already have gone through emotional healing and being able to separate it and respond academically to a situation. [Otherwise] I think it would have not have been as safe. I also think that the First Nations students would not have had the background and might have taken the differences personally and got off track on those issues. Because women's studies [in general] is women, I think it's hard to start out being able to detach your emotions from something academic, and I think it is something that women, through courses or however they are getting their education, learn what is necessary and are able to manage it.*

Elk: [Native] women's studies affects people. Even in our little small groups, *you can see how much emotion is brought out in people from all the different subjects that we touch on.* It's something that just hits a lot of people.

externalized dialogue was that she was "always so scared." In her case, silence was the absence of voice. For both Dragonfly and Kelp, their experiences in academia helped them to express themselves through externalized speech. Yet, given the continual demand in academia to do just that, silence as utterance becomes lost.

Jackpine suggests that emotion and the personal are properties of one of the roads Native women students must walk, and that things academic and detachment are the properties of the other road. She alludes to the Bakhtinian notion that words themselves contain no emotion; they are detached. It is the way that words are spoken and acted out that gives utterances their emotional content (Burkitt, 1998, p. 169). Jackpine points out that without the "background" and without emotional healing of negative inner voices, it can be difficult for some students to keep "on track." Bobiwash (Anishnaabe) (1999) also claims that "indeed the development of culturally-safe space for Native students is...one of the prerequisites to the negotiation for middle-ground for Native students" (par. 16).

Elk also remarks on the emotional aspect of women's studies courses. She realizes that she had a preconceived and monologic notion of a very controlled classroom interaction in which the instructor would be able to foresee and orchestrate emotional outbursts. She saw

That's how it was for me. *A lot of things would be like, oh my god! I thought that [the instructor] had it all set up where, ok this is going to come out of these people, and this is going to come out of these people. But it's just [that] everybody's doing their own interpretation,* so a lot of things do come out.

Rabbit: There's lots of homework in women's studies. *(laughter)* There's lots of reading. And not only that, it's stressful to read, because there's lots to read. But sometimes people don't want to read, because *it's too sad or it hits close to home.* It hits close to home for a lot of women. They're in shock because they can't believe what women went through. *It's kind of heartbreaking to listen to other women's stories.*

Anne: The course discussions were intense and serious at times because they dealt with women's lives and experiences.

Phoenix Rising: I learned how to speak. I *learned how to translate and incorporate a lot of the information that I collected from all the other different divisions of my education.* From there I got to speak out. I knew what I was saying. *I wasn't just spewing out like*

the instructor as an external director who controlled a script for dialogue among the students: "[the instructor] had it all set up where, ok this is going to come out of these people and this is going to come out of these people." She learned instead that "everybody's doing their own interpretation, so a lot of things [inner voicings] do come out." She sees that the making of meaning through dialogue turns out to be a far more egalitarian and much less controlled exercise than she had previously imagined.

Rabbit, like Anemone, Jackpine and Elk, relates the emotionally difficult realities of marginalized or oppressed people's entrance into dialogue about previously silenced or discredited topics. The supposed "liberation" from silence—the externalizing of inner dialogue—can be heartbreaking and shocking. As well, for First Nations people in general, becoming literate has exposed them to a vast literature of heartbreaking and shocking things written *about* them. Therefore, Native students are confronted with both the literature *by* First Nations and *about* First Nations that is "sad" and "hits close to home."

"Women's Rights! Rah! Rah! Rah!" I had intellectual questions, something that I needed more information on, or clarification.

Whenever the instructor's talking, it's like something'll hit me. If it hits me and I feel it in my body, I know it's important. So I want more. *"What was that? What are you talking about?"* It gives me another understanding of the world that I live in. *I mean, how did I get to be here, sitting here at this table today? Why did the oppression happen to me? I don't think I got the "why" down, but "how" is my favorite question.* I learned a lot of "how," [and] that happened from the First Nations women's studies in particular, and from the European women's studies in general.

Anne: *My speaking voice was to ask questions. I asked many "why?" questions because it was my way of learning. I learned the "why?" question is a very difficult question to answer at times. The instructors did not know the answer at times.* Just knowing that the instructors did not know the answer sometimes, and therefore drew on the knowledge in class, revealed to me that the *instructors learned from the students as much*

Phoenix Rising relates how her education taught her to "translate and incorporate." She learned to speak the various speech genres of the academic community. She mimics a stereotypical expression of women's right, and contrasts it with the "intellectual questions" that she poses, which would interrupt such a monologic expression of the women's movement. As well, she contests the authoritative voice of the instructor: "What was that? What are you talking about?"

Phoenix Rising dialogues with her history, seeking to make sense of her present. She hints at the open-endedness of her questions—"I don't think I got the 'why' down, but 'how' is my favorite question."

Like Phoenix Rising, Anne's orientation to her studies is to question rather than answer back. She also learned to ask open-ended questions and learned that "the 'why' question is a very difficult question to answer at times." Her questioning brings the instructors inside the circle of dialogue where they do not know all the answers. Anne realizes that within the dialogic circle, there is the possibility of equality, where the "instructors learned from the students as much as the students learned from the instructors." She sees that there is a space *between* what she

as the students learned from the instructors.

Buffalo: Yeah, I want to teach [First Nations women's courses]! *I'm going to teach them.* I'm going to get my masters in English and Women's Studies and I'm going to teach these courses.

Dolphin: *I thought it was inspirational to have First Nations women teaching the course...* people that went on to further their education, and then to be able to teach to other women. I really enjoyed that. That, for me, was *like role-modeling...that women have come a long way...the dedication and the time and the commitment...how much it does take.*

Eagle: My goal is to teach Native art. *Nobody would listen to me, even though I've been working since 1984, unless I have a paper [degree] saying [I can teach Native art].* If I wanted to write to any other [university] as an academic, they wouldn't even look at my paper *if I put "artist, Eagle."* *They'd go, "Yeah, right!"* Even though I had done a lot of research. Mind you, I never kept records of it because I didn't need to because it was for my own use and for [an elder] because he'd asked me to go look for maps, pictures...anything. I

previously perceived as completely separate parameters of identity and authority—where clearly X was the instructor and Y was the student.

Buffalo expresses an inner voice of firm intention and a promise that she will in the future teach First Nations women's studies.

Dolphin indicates the importance of having First Nations women teach the

Eagle talks about the rules for being "listened to" in the academic teaching circle, again referring to the institution's lack of acknowledgement for age and experience, and the incompatibility of culturally specific knowledge and academic evaluation. She is an established artist and her art is integral to dialogue with her environment. Her art is the "record" of her research, yet the hegemonic influence of written records in academia excludes her from being heard as an artist. Paper equals public recognition. She has not kept a paper (public) record of her research, and consequently, she doesn't "have a paper saying" she is an artist. This questions again the assumption that the use of documents for voicing experience is unquestionably valuable, or the only valid representation of experience. Eagle

never kept records of it. But *I would still not be recognized by any academic institution without that piece of paper.*

Buffalo: What I noticed right off, was that there was no prerequisite for First Nations women's studies. That's the thing that I didn't like. *Anybody can just go in there and learn about Aboriginal women's issues. You just sit in on that little workshop class.* That's how I felt about it. I felt *a history of colonialism and First Nations people...that people should of taken that at least before they took the course.*

Eagle: *I think a prerequisite would be excellent, because a lot of the white people don't even realize—in fact, I didn't realize what our people went through.* Yeah! It was so brutal and it was history. I didn't know that history because we're not taught any of that stuff in school. We're taught all about the explorers and everything, and we're not taught about the genocide of our people. I think it would be good, if even there was a part of a session in the beginning of the woman's studies session devoted to that, so that they do know.

Anemone: *I find the [mainstream] classes are...I don't know if linear's the right word, but in a*

plays out an abrupt and short inner dialogue where she introduces herself as an artist, and receives a mocking response from the university: "Yeah, right!"

Buffalo parodies the voice of the an Other who would see her as an object of easy study rather than a subject in her own right: "Anybody can just go in there and learn about Aboriginal women's issues." "Thus the speech of another is introduced into the author's discourse (the story) in *concealed form* [original italics], that is, without any of the *formal* [original italics] markers usually accompanying such speech, whether direct or indirect. But this is not just another's speech in the same 'language'—it is another's utterance in a language that is itself 'other' to the author as well..." (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 303).

In contrast to Eagle's frustration over the non-transferability from her position as artist in her Native culture to the culture of academia, Buffalo suggests that in order to enter the academic environment of Native women's studies, one should have a piece of paper saying that the person knows the history of First Nations and colonialism. On this point, Eagle agrees, clarifying that in this case, the Other could be non-Native *or* Native—that being Native does not automatically mean that one knows one's history. Eagle admits, "...in fact *I* didn't realize what our people went through."

First Nations class the syllabus is there, but if you have to shift a bit or if something relates to something else, there's always room to bring that in, seeing some of the connections.

Sometimes what happens in a non-Native class, the syllabus only changes if the instructor changes it. It's very rigid in that way, but interesting...just styles. It doesn't weigh one better than the other.....*it's different. It's not right or wrong. It's just different.*

Dolphin: *It wasn't right or wrong, what we were learning.* What we were doing in the class was gathering ideas and looking at everybody's perspective with those ideas.

Anemone: I can't remember if we watched it in a women's studies class, but there's a mother of many children in a scene... and I'll always remember that line. *"You do it different" is what this Elder said, because this girl was cleaning a fish. She didn't say, "Oh, you're doing it wrong"... "You're doing it different."* I thought that's sort of an interesting way to describe the teaching styles of the non-native classes. Less ha-ha! A lot less laughter! I remember for one of our classes in [mainstream] Women's Studies we were

For Anemone the notion of learning according to a certain timeline and sequence lacks flexibility and does not leave room for the necessary dialogue to facilitate "seeing some of the connections." However, Anemone does not close down dialogue about the way she perceives mainstream classes: "it's different. It's not right or wrong. It's just different."

Dolphin echoes Anemone's words, applying them to First Nations courses.

"When people talk of remembering everyday life when they make 'memory claims' they are rarely, if ever, simply describing or reporting an internal process or mental state: they are engaging in the rhetorical, and often contentious, activity of social life, and telling of, or expressing, something of their own position in the current scheme of things in relation to the others around them" (Shotter & Billig, 1998, p. 18). Anemone connects her opinion about teaching styles with a remembered past in which she hears the voice of an elder. Anemone makes a distinction between an utterance that encourages dialogue—"You do it different."—and an utterance which blocks dialogue—"You're doing it wrong." The latter voice echoes many of the experiences of First Nations peoples within western schooling systems. For example, within residential schools

talking about men's and women's voices in this one particular group, and we had to dissect this article and present it. *I suggested we have a talk show with Barbie dolls.* (laughter) *Let's lighten up this material!* For me the mainstream classes come across as dry and not as stimulating. Laughter helps me remember. I think maybe it comes from that oral [tradition]. Despite being separated from family and community growing up, there's something in my blood that remembers. *Learning from classes the oral side of things, I can see how my relationship to learning in a Native-style environment has influenced my going into a non Native environment. So there's definitely some overlap.*

Phoenix Rising: In one of the [mainstream women's studies] classes, *we had lots of cohesiveness with the women in the group. But we didn't make a circle, and what I found interesting was that a lot of the First Nations women, including myself, gravitated to the back of the room, and all the European women were at the front of the room.* Geographically, we migrated to the back of the room. I think that it's a habitual thing. Going through the education system, you're naturally put in the

Native languages, customs and beliefs were regarded as wrong, and thus Native children often were "doing it wrong." In a previous comment, Eagle also talks about the A, B, C, D, E, F grading system which told her that her way of sharing her cultural knowledge in university courses was "wrong."

Anemone suggests a carnival approach as a strategy for stimulating dialogue. She would use Barbie dolls—often cited as symbols of patriarchal discourse about women—to teach a "heavy" topic in women's studies in a way that people can laugh: "Let's lighten up this material!" Maintaining "good feelings" is important in many Aboriginal societies, which is one reason why a sense of humour pervades them (Little Bear, 2000, p. 79).

Here, Anemone relates how the two environments she experiences—Native and non Native—are intertwined, and how dialogue with her Native culture ("the oral side of things") influences her experiences in a non Native environment.

Dialogue does not always manifest itself in words. Phoenix Rising relates the case of a women's studies class where the Native women sat at the back and the non-Native women at the front. The scene reminds Phoenix Rising of the old scenario where non Natives expect Natives to be "naturally put in the back of the class." There is nonetheless "lots of cohesiveness" among the students, yet physically the Native women distance themselves from the Others. Phoenix Rising wonders if the Native women did it out of habit—out of an entrenched inner monologue involving an authoritative discourse about Native people's "place" in academia

back of the class if you're First Nations...never allowed at the front of the class. *So how many of us went to the back out of habit, without knowing?* It's all like underground...just not aware of it. In the First Nations courses that I've taken, I didn't see that seating arrangement happen, [but] if I went into any of the other classes, I would see First Nations people in the back row, or close to it...as close to the back as they could be. *[But] even though we were still in back, we made a lot of noise.* Yeah. Even though we [often] sat in the back, *we had influence in that room, and the only way we got to have influence is that we... I found my voice through the collective of courses.*

Anemone: Yeah. [And] those [mainstream courses] were really neat too because *it's good to hear the other side. I say that with a smile because I'm part white and I've always straddled between worlds* in that way. So when I am sitting in the mainstream classes I think [there's] less interaction with the people around you...far less. And the brown faces sort of look for each other, and we'll often sit together.

Jackpine: *The environment that I grew up in...we*

Did the Native women move to the back out of habit? Were they hearing the old inner voices relegating Indians to the back of the room? However, as Phoenix Rising notes, they were not silent. Even though they “didn’t make a circle” in the class, they were not outside of the dialogue. They were not without influence. There were two separate groups, but the physical gap was filled with noise (utterances) and influence: “Dialogic relationships, therefore are extralinguistic. But at the same time they must not be separated from the realm of *discourse* [original italics], that is from language as a concrete integral phenomenon” (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 183).

Anemone smiles at her positioning as a Native women listening to the voices of “the other side”—the non Native side. Like many Native people, she is of mixed ancestry, so while she speaks of the Other, she simultaneously hears inner voices telling her that she is that same Other herself. Her utterances designate two roads/cultures, yet the voices of the two are difficult to separate clearly. She remains “straddled between worlds.”

didn't talk. We behaved. And to hear people [in class] jump in and be anxious to get their say in everything...I just thought it was wonderful. I really enjoyed it and *it took me a little while to get my hand up and to say my piece* or whatever, and I just thought it was incredible that the atmosphere was open and safe to do that. It was just a contrast to what I had been used to, and to me it seemed lively. *Anything was accepted and respected...like different opinions. That was huge for me too... differing from what I always call "the family politics." Differing from [family politics] was not a place to go and be o.k.*

Anemone: *A big fear about being Native and in university is being shunned by our own people as being "know-it-alls."* I go back to [my reserve] and *I'm a fast-talking city slicker.* I joked with my partner once and I started talking real slow. *He said, "You know, that's the first time I heard you talk like an Indian!" (laughter)* It's funny because I go back to the reserve and I probably spend more time listening there than anywhere else, because I feel like I'm talking super fast with everybody and just feeling out of place there. *There's the eagle-eye view in the bigger*

Jackpine grew up behaving, following the rules of an authoritative discourse in which behaving meant being silent—in the sense of being “without voice.” She had internalized that discourse, thus silencing the externalization of her inner speech (her “piece”); and it took her a little while to get her hand up and externalize her thoughts.

In contrast to her experience in NWS, Jackpine refers to the monologue of “family politics” which did not allow for dialogue. Having a differing opinion—creating a site of externalized struggle—“was not a place to go and be o.k.” “If we feel those around us will not play their dialogical part in building the appropriate relational bridges between us, then we will feel inhibited in voicing our utterances in words to which we know they will not respond appropriately” (Shotter & Billig, 1998, p. 19),

Previously, Anemone talked about her efforts at university to break through the I-know-the-jargon-and-you-don't monologue that some people who are “know-it-alls” use to intimidate and to stop dialogue. Anemone also struggles with inner voices telling her that as “a fast-talking city slicker,” who doesn't (except in jest) “talk like an Indian,” she herself risks the designation of “know-it-all.”

An eagle flies high and can see where the miniscule sits or fits in the larger landscape. When she dialogues internally with only the miniscule, external details of her difference, Anemone feels out of place on reserve.

picture, but we're part of that picture emotionally, physically. In all of those things we're not separate from it. As a result of going through a program like this, I've been able to come back and share our understandings in a more real, learnable way for our audience, whether it's at high schools or women's shelters or whatever...wherever we're sharing our information. We're able to share it as people, not as know-it-alls.

Lark: When I first started university, I felt like a little bit of a traitor to my family....not so much my immediate family, but my extended family. *I had a lot from aunts and some of my uncles [saying], "You're going to that white man's institution? (laughter) You're gonna become one of them!" I felt guilty. I felt silly, like, "Why am I getting this? Why am I going there?"* [In Native women's studies] class... especially having the other First Nations people in there...it's good. *Yes, right on! There's other people here and I'm not the only silly one! (laughter)* And it was. It was crazy. Our class was crazy. That's what I remember about it. It was just absolute craziness. It was always laughing and there was always joking, *and it felt like sitting in a living room at a*

But in the larger picture of the relationships created through dialogue, she knows that she is not separate: she is "part of that picture emotionally, physically."

Anemone juxtaposes know-it-alls with people who share their information in "real" and "learnable" ways—in ways that do not cut off dialogue. For her, knowledge and its expression have become fluid and open-ended, creating a space where, unlike that of the know-it-all, the last word is never spoken.

Internalized voices of her family tell Lark that for Native people, there is no safe relationship with academia. The voices tell her that she will "become one of them"—ironically, a white *man* instead of a white woman. These voices are strong. Lark feels guilty and silly attending classes, and she repeats to herself the questions from aunts and uncles who fear that her attempted dialogue with academia will become a monologue in which a Native woman will "become" white.

Lark attends classes and dialogues with other "silly" Native people—those who attend "that white man's institution." Her inner voice of protest against the teasing of her aunts and uncles is no longer along to defend itself. She moves from feeling silly, to feeling at home with the craziness of many voices that, instead of creating a monologic

family gathering with my aunts and uncles and just how they get...crazy! That was the class.

Anemone: Often we were tested in Native women's studies...tested on what we thought. *I'm allowed to think rather than being a marionette and a puppet and going through the motions.* In the Native Women's Studies class it seemed more flexible. It was a relief to go to class. It wasn't a drag-your-butt-to-class kind of experience; it was an environment where there was some active learning going on. We weren't passive in the experience. *We were participating in our experience, and experiencing our participation, because it was so interactive. That made the environment really stimulating.*

Elk: I started going to college when I was nineteen. I was taking just Arts courses, but I was just like...it has no relevance to me. It's all geared towards the Euro-centric values and beliefs, so I just said, "Oh, I'll go do something else."

Lark: Yeah...the content. In university it was one of my first opportunities to read articles about First Nations people by First Nations people.

environment, create an environment of craziness, which is full of possibility, laughter, joking, and surprise—an environment that is familiar to Lark. The voices of her family are now included in a larger dialogic circle.

Anemone uses the metaphor of a puppet to describe an external monologic and authoritative discourse that "pulls the strings," controlling, monitoring and policing utterances, both external and internal. Instead of going through the motions of an always already choreographed dialogue, Anemone says that she was "allowed to think." She describes the resultant environment as participatory, active, flexible, "a relief," and stimulating. This description resembles Lark's description of the craziness of her interactions with other Native students in class.

Throughout my whole high school experience it was those really dry, awkward social studies textbooks that have these pictures [that are] very...cheesy. (laughter)

Throughout all of my [non Native] classes in university, they had what I'd call the token chapter. There's always out of your twelve classes that you go through in a semester, a Native night! (laughter) It was nice to go beyond a topical look at issues and to have it be First Nations people who are discussing it, [and] to have it be all articles written by First Nations peoples, and to have a First Nations instructor teaching it.

Urchin: I think that Native Women's studies is very important, especially for First Nations women, because *this allows women from all backgrounds to share their experiences, because after all, our experiences are what we learn from.*

Dolphin: Yeah...to really think about where they [the Native women] were coming from and where they were going, because *we usually base our learning experience on where we come from.*

Anne: *I enjoyed learning from other women's*

Lark refers to the way in which social studies text books have created a particular monologic discourse about Indians as a topic of study: they are "dry," "awkward," and "cheesy." Lee Maracle (Sto:lo/Métis) (1990a) refers to the internalization of that discourse: "It did not dawn on me then why there were no books about Indians on the shelves outside of the trash dished out by the likes of Louis L'Amour. Instead, the absence of our people's stories on those shelves whispered ugly things to my unconscious. 'We are not interesting enough to be there'" (p. 203). Maracle claims, as does Toni Morrison (1993) in regard to Black presence in literature, that in the realm of discourse, books about white people only *are* books that whisper about the colored Other.

Urchin, Dolphin, Anne and several of the other women refer to the sharing of experiences so that learning can occur. Sharing in this way is not a monologic event. It is, according to Leroy Little Bear (Blood) (2000), an Aboriginal value which manifests in relationships within the group and with all of creation. It speaks "to the strength to create and sustain 'good feelings'," which are integral to maintaining community (p. 79).

experiences because it helped me to put my own experiences into perspective and context.

Anemonee: I don't feel that I got at university until I was able to take some [Native] women's studies classes.

Petite Kokum: *I knew that it was possible [to succeed] because they [elders, instructors] said it was possible for each one of us. I always had this feeling that like-people, like-mind and like-heart come together. We're in a group like that and someone will say, "Oh yeah, I always thought I was dumb, and that there was nothing that I could do in life, and that I would never go anywhere." And I think, "Well yes, that's exactly how I felt." So here we are doing this. Look at us doing this!*

Eagle: In the second year [of my studies], I was asked to go to New Zealand. That was really good because when I went over, even though I was just touching the *basic literature the First Nation people wrote, it was good because I could take that with me.* I had to really stretch myself to talk about it, because I wasn't really involved in all those books yet. *But the way I feel is, if I'm an Indian, you know other First Nation women, right? If you've lived*

Petite Kokum has internalized the voices of elders and instructors who have told her it is possible to succeed. These voices have assumed a certain authority, an authority which counteracts the doubting voices of others who would say that Indians cannot succeed.

Although the phrasing varies, Petite Kokum reiterates a pervasive, internalized discourse to which many of the women refer, one which tells them that they cannot succeed, that they are stupid, that their personal experiences are without value. This internalized discourse blocks the externalization of inner dialogue, thus creating a self-fulfilling prophecy within an academic environment. "The wider and deeper the breach between the official and the unofficial consciousness, the more difficult it becomes for motives of inner speech to turn into outward speech...wherein they might acquire formulation, clarity, and rigor" (Voloshinov, 1976, p. 89).

"...if I'm an Indian, you know other First Nation women, right?" Eagle's statement relates to the notion of identity as socially constructed, and dialogically oriented. Eagle confirms her

*through the hard times and you're an Indian, you know. That's like with Maria Campbell when she wrote *Halfbreed*. I could identify with that. I knew where she was coming from, and being there in some of the parts of her life. I could talk about her, but with no problem. And Lee Maracle...the book I took that she wrote...that was when she first went to the white school...and you know you been there. It's all part of your life that these women write about.* So I felt comfortable talking about these books and comfortable with being in a leadership role even though I didn't have any degrees as such to do it.

Nettle: I got my mom to take a look at that book [*Halfbreed*]. *I said, "It's really good, Mum. You should read it. It's about a Native woman. She's a half-breed, and she grew up in the city, and had a really hard life." And she says, "Oh, ok."* She was starting to get interested in a lot of books coming out now by women and Native people. I think what she was doing was comparing what they were writing and her own life. *She was saying that it's good that Native people are finally talking about their history. She says, "Gee, that's just awful the way [Native] women*

identity through other First Nations women who have "lived through the hard times," and who know what it is like to be Indian. She says that she must extend (stretch) herself to externalize her inner dialogue with the written literature of First Nations people. She "knows" of her experience of being Indian, yet she implies that previously much of her knowing was internal. Now she has begun to externalize it. She refers to the book *Halfbreed* (1973) in which Métis author Maria Campbell tells of the internalized voices of the grandmothers who guided her to do the same thing. Eagle affirms her relationship with the literature: "It's all part of your life that these women write about." That connection authorized her to take a leadership role related to academia even though she didn't have "any degrees as such to do it."

Nettle brings home the voices of other Native women who speak/write about their lives, and invites her mother into the dialogue about their lives. Here, she re-enacts a scene where she encourages her mother to enter the dialogue. She reiterates the notion that it's "all part of your life that these women write about" (Eagle).

Nettle's mother dialogues with Nettle about previously unspoken events in her life, and she dialogues with Maria Campbell's book, confirming and validating it through her own experiences, experiences which are of a history "not too far past." Emma LaRocque (Métis, in an interview (1991), talks about this same process: "In terms of consciousness, you cannot be liberated unless you have articulated

were treated! But that's the way it was," she says. "I remember seeing that in my life when I was younger." So you can see that that kind of history is not too far past. Before, she wouldn't even discuss anything like that. She wouldn't even think about [it]. I guess [she] just kept all her feelings just closed up inside, and she didn't say anything. And then finally seeing that Native people are talking about the hardships in their lives, and the kind of lives that they led, and she said, "Oh, I remember that." Before she passed away, she started saying, "You know, I remember this." She started talking more about what her life was like as a child, and how it was for Native people at that time. I think she was really happy about our First Nations courses. It is for women, too, [and] she always felt that there's something more, but that it would be interesting to have Native women's stories. She would say that it's important.

Turtle: Well, I'll tell you something. The ladies that I hang out with...they've have had a hard life also. *One of my friends, she talks to me about her problems, and I says, "Look, _____ I gotcha to read this Native woman's book." It's a true story [about] this Native woman.*

what that pain is about...Articulation does not mean that we just open our mouths. It means we take the time to understand the places of invasion in our lives, be they historical, cultural, emotional, psychological, or physical invasions. We must understand what colonization or abuse has done to us before we can be truly decolonized or healed. By articulation, I mean an intellectual and emotional comprehension of our oppression. (p. 197).

Nettle realizes that her mother previously kept many of her experiences as inner dialogue, unable to externalize utterances about unpleasant events: she "just kept all her feelings just closed up inside, and she didn't say anything." Later, she begins to remember and externalize some of her experiences: "Oh, I remember that."

Nettle's mother begins to tell more stories which will strengthen relationships in a wide circle involving her family, her community, and her culture. "That's how we [Native people] see each other's work and we want to read each other, and to see each other, and to experience each other, because the more pathways we trace to get to the centre of the circle, the more rich our circle is going to be, the fuller, the rounder, the more magnificent. (Maracle, 1991, p. 176).

She murdered someone, and she had to go to jail, and she's still in jail, and it wasn't her fault." She read it, and she goes, "Wow, Turtle! I didn't know people go through what I did...like Native women." So I says, "See, life isn't so bad, because you're not the only one who goes through it. Oh, _____ just loved it. She couldn't believe it. And I just gave her another book... a funny one. (laughter)

Grouse: My parents are very religious, and when I would have questions about evolution and stuff like that, boy *you should have heard my dad. He would have grabbed the bible out and chained me to a chair and make me believe what he believed. But he's been actually one of the ones who's helped my brain work harder just to learn as much as I could, because I almost like debating with him, and he was the one who pushed me to learn a lot more.*

Anne: Taking women's studies courses affected my relationship with my mother both negatively and positively. In the beginning, because the women's studies courses affected me *I wanted to start a women's group on the reserve* to enlighten them through what I was learning. *My mother did not want me to do*

Turtle, like Nettle, widens the dialogic circle, inviting her friend in to listen, to read, to remember, and to speak. The short dialogue that Turtle re-enacts is a complete story in itself: The friend has problems. Turtle gives her a book. The friend reads the book and realizes that she is not alone, that "life isn't so bad." And Turtle demonstrates that this story (dialogue) is open-ended, never finished. "I just gave her another book."

Although Grouse's father's approach to his daughter's religious education appears to be authoritarian, Grouse is able, through continual externalizing of her questions, to keep the experience in flux. Her interaction with her father becomes a debate (dialogue) rather than a sermon (monologue). In this context, her father's remonstrations ironically create a motivational environment for Grouse's refusal to believe what he believes: "He was the one who pushed me to learn a lot more."

Buffalo, Turtle and Lark have talked previously about some of the difficulties caused within close family relationships when Native women seek higher education. In this example, Anne wants to start a women's group on her reserve. Her mother alerts her to the danger—divorce—that some Native women are exposed to when they wish to widen their circle of relationships beyond the circle defined by their close community relationships. LaRocque (Métis)

this because she felt it was going to cause trouble with the women and their relationships. *In other words, she felt it was going to cause divorces with these women.* I think it was the change she saw in me and the way I started speaking of what I learned from the courses. *I did not start the women's group, and I think I quit discussing what I learned in college with my family. I quit because they viewed educating oneself negatively, and that I was becoming too "white".* Over the last five years my mother has come to appreciate the knowledge and education I have gained.

Grouse: I know to this day my mom thinks that my counselor that I was seeing at the time and my education contributed to me coming out. *(laughter) She was thinking that I came to school and was educated on how to be gay.*

Buffalo: *I would like to meet somewhere in the middle. I want to be as maternal as I am, and not as maternal as I should be. I want to be as able as I am, and not as able as somebody wants me to be. And I want to be ambitious and I want that to be o.k., and I want to be cultural as well. I want academics and I want my spiritual life. I'm not going to trade one for the other. And I think that that's my*

(1990b) empathizes: "I know, too, that those of us who have raised these unwieldy and painful issues risk censorship. Neither white nor Native Canadians seem ready to deal with racism or sexism" (p. 88). More specifically for Anne, this dilemma spoke to the notion that her education removed her from her culture and that she "was becoming too white;" and for a time she quit discussing what she learned in school. This was only a temporary measure, however; over the years Anne's mother came to appreciate what her daughter had learned.

Like Lark's and Anne's families, Grouse's mother equates her daughter's counseling and her education as experiences which teach her, through some form of indoctrination, to "become" something other than she was previously. Although the notion of "learning to be gay" has been debunked generally, the notion of education as a potential threat to cultural laws, practices or values is very real. The generation of Grouse's mother was directly and negatively affected by western education in the form of residential schools. Although those schools were not bastions of free choice, they still presented (albeit often violently) different cultural ways that undermined First Nations cultures. It is not without reason that for many First Nations families and communities, western systems of education represent the destruction of their cultures.

Buffalo's polemic responds to internal and external voices similar to those that Anne, Grouse and Anemone

generation's idea or notion, because, jeez, there's pressure. If you're spiritual, you're not academic. If you're academic, you're not spiritual. If you're political, you're not spiritual. You cannot be a spiritual person and be a leader, because you're a spiritual leader, not a political leader. Yeah, one or the other. It's a big struggle.

Phoenix Rising: I think I was expecting to [learn] about the bead blankets and the art, [and] women's roles in First Nations communities...where they were contributors to the community. That's what I wanted to learn about, and I wanted to learn about their place in First Nations society. *Was it always the romantic Pocohontas thing? Or what was their goal? What was their goal in First Nations communities? I think I already got that it wasn't all that simplistic. You didn't just chew hides all day, right? (laughter)*

Anne: I felt that taking the [Native] women's studies courses was, in a sense, learning about yourself. *It was a healing, listening to the different women's life stories.* Knowledge, being heard, lots of reading, excitement, excited to go to class. [I] felt empowered sharing. *I always liked to go*

hear regarding Native women's roles in their communities. Her listing of restrictions based on if-you-are-this-you-can't-be-that discourse provides an example of the centrifugal and centripetal social forces with which some Native women must contend while seeking an academic degree. Buffalo, like Eagle, imagines a middle ground between these social forces, a place where she will not have to choose one side/road/path over another: "I'm not going to trade one for the other." Her imagined middle ground remains, however, a dynamic place of "big struggle."

Phoenix Rising asks questions both of the ancestors and of academia regarding women's place in First Nations society. She realizes that her knowledge is partial and tentative, and she jokingly refers to the stereotypical image of the silent, Indian drudge: "I think I already got that it wasn't all that simplistic. You didn't just chew hides all day, right?"

class where there was diverse voices that come through the class. There were some voices that I felt carried the tradition, and that had the knowledge of traditions. There was some that were more academic in terms of what they shared. There was also non Native women that attended, and some men that attended the classes. So, it was a diverse...existence. (laughter)...and there was resistance! (laughter)

Turtle: Look what happened when _____ ran out of the classroom because she was failing the class. *She's Native and I ran out and grabbed her, and I said to her, "Look, you've got kids and you're Native. You've already got points against you. You got a hard life to live and you got one chance only because the band's paying for it. You quit now and you never go back. They're not going to pay your way to go back to get educated. You know it and I know it that you can do this. Your marks are really low...so what! We haven't been back in school in years. I'm a single mom with three kids. I don't have any help. I don't have my husband there, but I'm doing it on my own in society. Keep on going. Finish that line."* And she did...she got her BA. *In the third year she said*

Like Ruby, Anne elaborates on the differences and different voices within academia. She also recognizes that such diversity is bound to generate sites of resistance as well. Listening to diverse voices is a healing experience; but that healing is not without resistance. Healing is not a monologic exercise where one is the passive receiver of the words of another. Anne's enjoyment of diversity seems not to be of the overly romanticized kind where all is pleasant and even-keeled.

Turtle re-enacts a dialogue with a classmate, a dialogue which demonstrates a well known theory of language where one's inner speech (speech for oneself) becomes externalized as social speech (speech for others) (Vygotsky, 1962). As the dialogue begins, Turtle talks *to* the other woman. As the talk progresses, she begins to talk *about* her own circumstances which parallel those of the other woman. As she ends the dialogue, she talks to the other woman *and* to

she was going to kick my ass because I wasn't finishing ...but I had nobody around, right?

[But] I still believe education for Natives and women's studies have brought me a long way. I still strive for strength, knowledge and understanding, but I still profited [from the education I got].

Petite Kokum: I fully believe that when a student is ready, the teacher appears no matter what age that student is. And when that learning is wanted and hoped for, that sets up stair steps. I had one teacher who used to call it "the stair steps to heaven." If you take the step and do the work you're supposed to do there, then you go to the next step...and then you go to the next step. My investigation and research has no borders, and that's what's beautiful. The 49th parallel is there and the border between the provinces is there on provincial maps and federal maps. *But for us as First Nations women studying First Nations history and studying the potential to make them greater than they actually were, there are no borders. There are just no borders to what we can do.*

herself: "Keep on going. Finish that line." When Turtle later falters in her courses, she anticipates the response of the other woman who would—if she were there—repeat to Turtle the same utterances.

Petite Kokum makes reference to academic studies that give her the potential to make women ancestors "greater than they actually were." For her, history is without monologic borders that would disallow questioning, embellishment and imagination. History is a "doing": "There are just no borders to what we can do."

Conclusion

Running down one road while trying to reconstruct another

The assurance that one is spiritually never alone or completely isolated relates to many Native cultures' deep belief in their connection with the ancestors and their responsibilities to the land and future generations. Inner and external voices confirm that connection, yet not without great struggle within the context of academia. In relation to the women in this project, neither the notion of their occupying a middle ground nor the notion of their being caught between centripetal and centrifugal forces adequately portrays their positioning in academia. Both of these ideas portray an image of a sort of balancing act. But these women are engaged in a struggle of monumental proportion in relation to their histories and the futures they seek for themselves and their communities. The arena of struggle is often not level, not balanced, not spiritually uplifting.

Perhaps Eagle's image of walking two roads is a better description of the women's experiences as a whole, but only if one realizes that the women are running down the road of academia, and simultaneously trying to pause and do thoughtful reconstruction on the colonization-torn road of their cultures. They do not have one foot firmly planted on each of the roads. At this point in history, their struggle is very much more about survival than about balance. This does not make their struggles less worthy, nor does it eliminate the possibility of balance at a future time. Nor does it portray them as victims. The struggle is not about "bad" western academia versus "good" Native cultures. It is about the past, the present and an imagined future variously swirling, pulling, pushing, colliding, supporting and oppressing in ways that continue to make it clear that to succeed as a Native woman in academia, she must commit to a sort of schizophrenic, painful and exhausting struggle toward reconciling a myriad of contending inner voices in order to articulate and identify herself within the parameters

of an institution that remains for the most part foreign and unattainable. The women have chosen the struggle, and in some ways they even glory in it. But to say that they are somehow balanced or stabilized on a middle ground or between centripetal and centrifugal forces would be a misrepresentation of their present reality in academia, and their dialogue, both inner and external, testifies to it.

Hearing the worst

One recurrent, insidious and powerful inner voice that these women live with comes both from ugly past and recent histories regarding Native peoples' relationship with western schooling, and from patriarchal influences that have negatively affected Native cultures. Inner voices tell these women that, as Indians, they cannot succeed in academia, that their history and their experiences are not of value, and that they don't know or do the right things. In academia, many of the women find it challenging and sometimes very difficult to contend with inner voices that, as Maracle (1996) states, whisper ugly things to them—things like, "you don't understand," "you don't know the jargon," "you don't speak up," "your stories are inappropriate," "you don't have the documentation to prove that you are worthy," "your people merit only one class period of study," "you sit at the back," "you even fail in First Nations Studies," "you are becoming a white person."

Many of the women respond to those ugly whispers with questions, challenging the whispers to answer in full voice. Some respond with silence. Reactions to those voices are full of emotion: anger, grief, sadness, outrage and fear. Those emotions engender tears, silence, painful testimonials, and angry talk, as well as joking and laughter—strategies that the women acknowledge and regard as important in their struggle to establish their presence in an institution that in some ways seems determined to make them absent.

In relation to their cultural background, many of them hear fearful, angry or pained voices suggesting paradoxically that they can succeed in academia, but will as a consequence fail within their First Nations communities: they risk becoming women who are inappropriate, unacceptable, undesirable and disconnected from their communities. Most of the women recognize this no-win situation and are variously angered, challenged, frightened, and pained by it. In order to continue, they must in some way distance themselves from their cultures. They must—instead of troubling overly with external, day-to-day details that serve as evidence for voices that tell them they are turning into white people—keep the bigger picture in mind—the picture which, as Anemone insists, “We’re part of...emotionally, physically.”

What is that bigger picture? It does not accord with a romanticized view of connectedness that would create peace and harmony by recognizing sameness. Instead, the women recognize and validate difference. It is not easy. In order to maintain their own differences, they must not only recognize the differences of the Other, they must validate them as well. In an institution where the western Other is not routinely called to analyze critically her or his difference in relation to Native peoples—in other words, the Other’s identity is not in question—these women sometimes find the Other annoying, ignorant, presumptuous and dangerous. But although the women may find non Natives troublesome, they do not aspire to change them. They appear to see a future not of sameness, but of besideness where they can participate in western schooling and deal with non Native people in an Indian way.

In a classroom such as NWS, where these women are in the majority, they can take for granted that other Native women hear the inner voices threatening failure, even if they remain un-externalized; and they can contend with those voices as a group. The women are from many different First Nations, yet the inner voices about failure bind them together in courses such as NWS, where they can commiserate about, create, and

practice an academic identity. Many of them feel that the Native classroom environment affords them a bit of a respite from their ongoing struggles in academia. Here they can recoup, react, and reconnect in the relative safety of tacitly understood and accepted utterances and behaviors. As Anemone states, it's a place where things are more in balance—where it's cool to be smart and Indian at the same time; and the presence of a Native instructor affirms that notion. Here they can experience that discursive contradiction openly, articulate it, and imagine themselves present as Native women in academia. A big part of that experience is about shared emotions—anger, confusion, sadness, fear, love—and having a place in academia where those emotions are understood and accepted, and where the women can share their experiences without having to explain them at every turn. The courses affirm that on some important inner level these women “know” each other; because, as Eagle says, “if you’ve lived through the hard times and you’re an Indian, you know.” And NWS is a place where they can externalize their questions and their emotions about the roles of Native women, thus opening up critical dialogue.

The women also connect on several levels with mainstream women's studies. They appreciate the knowledge they gain about western history, about patriarchy, and about white women. These courses and other mainstream courses also provide them the opportunity to explore their distinctive identity and to distinguish themselves as Native women. This is sometimes fun, sometimes scary, and sometimes frustrating when they are not understood or well received. In this environment, numbers count. Being with other Native students in mainstream courses helps them cope with challenges. Paradoxically, they sometimes congregate at the back of the class, outwardly re-enacting an old discourse about Native peoples and schooling, and at the same time troubling that discourse when, from the back they speak out.

Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo) (1992) writes that, unlike Native cultures, western cultures have a prevalent "antibackground bias" in which those who are in the background are viewed as shadows merely serving to highlight the foreground. She claims that in Native cultures

it is the nature of woman's existence to be and to create background. This fact, viewed with unhappiness by many feminists, is of ultimate importance in a tribal context...In the tribal view the mutual relationships among shadows and light in all their varying degrees of intensity create a living web of definition and depth, and significance arises from their interplay. (pp. 243-244)

One can relate this same idea to the case of inner voices that form the background for external voices. In academia, external articulation (written or oral) is held in high esteem, and the idea of not speaking—of being silent, or remaining in the background created by inner voices—is viewed as a lesser way of functioning. Many of the women in the dialogue are tormented by this antibackground bias. Alder agonizes over being "so careful" not to externalize words that might upset the balance between foreground and background utterances in class. Eagle also exercises caution in what she externalizes, knowing that there could be upsetting consequences. Jackpine knows that to move out of the background in family politics is not a safe thing to do. Buffalo realizes on the one hand that some of the less talkative women write amazing papers, yet on the other hand she is troubled by the lack of external speech. She feels lonely and isolated in the academically foregrounded position of "blabbing on." Elk sees that when there is no hierarchical positioning in which the instructor in the foreground orchestrates all interactions, students' very emotional inner voices emerge; and in the context of academia these emotional responses can, according to Jackpine, get students "off track" or off the road.

Much of academia's system of evaluation is based on one's ability to foreground oneself in a particular way: to speak out, to write what the instructor deems appropriate, to have a serious demeanor in regard to disciplinary knowledge. The women in this project have the ability to behave in that fashion, and indeed some of them do so rather easily. Yet inner voices plague them at almost every turn, telling them that by gaining an academic identity, they risk losing more than most people might imagine. Annette Henry (1997) notes that some scholars represent the postmodern era, with its epistemological destabilization, with its refutation of the totalizing thought of "grand narratives," and with its recognition of multiplicity and difference, as a hopeful period in which disempowered groups might more easily carve out a historical and social space. "Perhaps," says Henry, "But not without great struggle" (p. 131).

Hope

Holquist (1990) remarks that "dialogue bears within it the seeds of hope: in so far as my 'I' is dialogic, it insures that my existence is not a lonely event but part of a larger whole" (p. 38). When Native women take their place within the dialogic circle, their talk (both inner and external) continually reinforces that connection. Their struggle is living proof of the "seeds of hope" continually germinated through ongoing dialogue.

The women hope for a reconnection with the past, hope for a future where "walking the two roads" can bring peace and understanding. But as Holquist (1990) reminds us, hope is generated through struggle. The "great struggle" for the women in the dialogue includes both inner and external voices that enter into, participate in and expand the dialogic circle of academia. The women struggle to define a space for themselves in relation to academia where they can be present. In that struggle speak inner voices related to orality and literacy, as the women seek a place where the two can be equally validated and accessible. Family members' voices enter into the struggle, sometimes wishing to be included, sometimes fearing the possible effects of education

on their families, and sometimes sharing memories triggered through their indirect connection with academia. The inner voices of traditional teachings and of colonial history speak as the women seek a place where being Native and being an academic do not appear contradictory—where “maybe academic theory is not necessarily/ automatically ‘white’” (Keating, 2002, p. 14). The pained inner voices of growing up Indian and attending school in a racist society speak with other voices of healing and laughter. Inner voices of silencing and fear speak with other voices that in the classroom question things Native and non Native. The histories of these First Nations women speak with dreams for the future.

Finally, one of the women, Petite Kokum, sums up the reality of the dialogic world: “There are just no borders to what we can do.” This statement relates not only to the endless possibilities for Native women getting their postsecondary education; it also relates to the impossibility of establishing clear borders that can separate or isolate combatants and remove them from the struggle. In a dialogic world, these women are never alone, and are never without struggle. At the center of their world must lie dialogue, and dialogue not only as externalized utterance, but also as behavior motivated by inner voices—dialogue not as means but as an end in itself. As Bakhtin explains, dialogue is not the threshold to action; it is the action itself.

[Dialogue] is not a means for revealing, for bringing to the surface the already ready-made character of a person; no, in dialogue a person not only shows [herself or] himself outwardly, but [she or] he becomes for the first time that which [she or] he is—and, we repeat, not only for others but for [herself or] himself as well. To be means to communicate dialogically. When dialogue ends, everything ends. Thus dialogue, by its very essence, cannot and must not come to an end. (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 252).

Epilogue: Struggling with a struggling researcher

Phoenix Rising: Talking about what we've been talking about, Mélody [primary researcher for this project], do you see any other way of being [besides being schooled like this] for First Nations women to get out of that cycle of playing the game of the oppressor?

Mélody: I think that there are other options...which I don't choose, and probably never would. There's always the option of isolation...isolating yourself completely from the situation, and living either as a hermit or in a kind of small, select group that chooses to live in a certain way.

Phoenix Rising: Like a convent for First Nations people? (*laughter*)

Mélody: (*laughter*) Something like that, maybe...rather than living in the larger society. I think there's always that option. Some people may feel that that's not necessarily realistic, but I still think that ideally that's an option. Many of our women have taken other options, like suicide. So I always consider the notion of option or choice. Personally, I don't see a lot of other options [besides schooling], and maybe that's my own blindness. Maybe someone could show me another way. In all honesty, because of my own upbringing, it's probably easier for me in some ways to make that choice [to be an academic], because I am familiar with both worlds. Maybe for me that's an easier option. Maybe that's why I don't see other options that well. I don't know. So far, I haven't seen anything else.

Phoenix Rising: I think too often women, period, settle. And I think [they] settle for what has always been.

Mélody: I think in a sense we are thrown that way. I think that's our strength and our weakness.

Phoenix Rising: So I throw a challenge out to try and see how you can be just that much more...

Mélody: More...bad?

Phoenix Rising: More you! More whatever! That's been really pronounced for me, because I was just given some information about an older sister who has been married for years and years and years...raised a family. And she is not willing to leave her marriage because if she did, she would be on welfare. She is living her life in the means that she is accustomed to. So she's settled herself to live the rest of her life with this person that has never told her that he loves her. I totally understand her fear. She's lived most of her life with this person, and raised their children. But this is the choice that she's made for herself. There's sadness in that, but I also feel that there is a sense that she's made that choice, and it's conviction, I guess. How does a woman come to that place? How do I get my understanding of her place? It was because of what I learned here in women's studies First Nations. This sister is not First Nations, but I get it from the First Nations Studies, and I also get it from the non First Nations studies. Things haven't changed or evolved a whole lot for us, but I do believe things are changing, and I just challenge women to not settle just because it's always been this way. Even if you step out just a little bit...just a little...it's making a difference. We had the trailblazers in the beginning, the women who were willing to step out there and make the changes and flaunt the signs. We don't have all those things going on like it did in the beginning, but it doesn't mean that we can't do anything. It doesn't mean that we can't do something.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

FEMINISM: A WHITE LADY THING?

Introduction

There is no specific word for feminism in the Diné language (or in any Aboriginal language), writes Laura Tobe (Diné) (2000), and “there was no need for feminism because of our [Diné] matrilineal culture” (p. 110). Although her language has no word for it, she alludes to a parallel between her Native culture and feminism when she states that Diné women “continue to possess the qualities of leadership and strength and continue to endure” (p. 104). In comparison, the Native women in this project may not “need” feminism either, but because they choose to take women’s studies courses, they place themselves in active dialogue with the word and the concepts that it represents. Not all of the participants come from matrilineal First Nations cultures, and the majority of the women do not speak the language of their ancestors. The language they have in common with each other and within their academic studies is English. And in order to have meaning for each woman, feminism must somehow come to live within her cultural context. Bakhtin (1981) reminds us that until one makes a word one’s own—until the word has meaning for that person—the word resides “in other people’s mouths, in other people’s contexts, serving other people’s intentions” (p. 294).

In the context of Native women’s studies, the women in the project find they must confront the word for feminism and dialogue with all of its various meanings, histories, voices and ambiguities. They must try to put it in their own mouths, in their contexts, and have it serve their intentions. This struggle questions the very existence of

Native women's studies (NWS): Can there be such a thing without compromising First Nations cultures? And the struggle will certainly question the courses' affiliation with a mainstream women's studies department: Can such courses successfully articulate an alternative meaning for feminism within the context of an already-established and authoritative discourse? Can feminism be a meaningful word in mouths other than those of "white ladies?" Can the word be contextualized successfully through cultural understandings that differ significantly from those of western societies? Can the word come to serve intentions born of histories whose original languages have no word for feminism? These are questions that the following dialogue addresses.

The analysis of the dialogue reflects my own orientation toward the word for feminism. As a Native woman instructing NWS courses, I am fully involved with these same questions, and still seeking to answer some of them, even if only partially, for myself. As a reflection of that position, part of my analysis will be in a particular form of participation in the dialogue itself. My words are not part of the original transcripts; they are a reflection of my inner dialogue with the participants' dialogue. This format allows me to respond directly to participants' utterances, and to demonstrate the kind of intimate listening and responding that happens internally as I read and reflect on them.

That inner dialogue—itsself populated with many voices—will be in an italicized font, and indented toward the right-hand margin. In doing this, I hope to "lower the volume" of my voice in order to portray it more clearly as an inner voice, as well as reduce the visually interruptive effect that my interjections may have in the participants' dialogue. In this way, the reader can choose to read only the participants' dialogue, or only my inner dialogue, or in zig-zag fashion moving back and forth between the main dialogue and the whisperings of my inner voices which, in search of meaning, will support, question, compare and contest.

Talk and whispers

Dolphin: So that's something else that we talked about also in the Women's Studies.

Yeah, about being a feminist. There's lots of discussion around that.

Mélody: As an instructor of NWS, I have never had to introduce to a class the question of being a feminist. Native students have always raised it...over and over. Laura Tobe (Diné) (2000) says that in the 1980s when she was in undergraduate school and came across the term "feminism" in a women's studies class, she just assumed that the term must apply to Native women (p. 109). Women living at the margins of mainstream society—e.g. women of color, poor women, lesbians, aged women—have since criticized that assumption. Some Native women writers such as self-proclaimed Native feminist Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo) (1992) claim, however, that a feminist approach can help Native women reveal the exploitation and oppression by whites and white government, as well as reveal oppression within the tribes and the sources and nature of that oppression (p. 223). For Native women in women's studies, the question of identifying ourselves as feminist begs questions such as: What are we doing here in academic women's studies? What are the real differences between NWS and mainstream women's studies? What is it that we supposedly have in common that puts us in this department/ compartment? Who decides all of this? These are hard questions, and that's why "there's lots of discussion around that."

Buffalo: What I realize is that there are so many schools of thought around women's studies and around feminism and around the Aboriginal women's movement... if it is called that. There are some older Aboriginal women who say that we do

not have feminism. That it's a white lady thing. That what we have is identity and roles in our lives that we know, and we don't have to discuss them, and it's not up for debate, and we're not going to debate them with anybody, especially white women. [These Aboriginal women say], "They want to call it feminism? They want to be equal to men? Go ahead. I take care of my family. And if that means taking care of my man, I'll do so. That's who I am, and I'm a strong woman and I can take care of everybody. And I will. I will slice fish. I will do it. I will take care of that, because that is my role. I am the keeper of this flame. I know this family's history." I know where they come from. I've had many women say that to me. That taking care of your man is not about patriarchy. That's about taking care of your man. That's just what it is and I'm not less of a woman for it. "He's well taken care of and I can do that. That's a gift. I can do that for him." O.k. And there are those too who say, like myself, "No, honey, we're gonna identify also as a bisexual lesbian Aboriginal woman." And so, where do I fit in this? Well, that's difficult. And in terms of feminism, I realize that for the Aboriginal woman feminism is there. I can't even dare to say that. I don't even want to say that for fear of my aunties! (*laughter*). I mean it's not a real cool thing to say!

Mélody: Thirty years ago, Cherrie Moraga (Chicana) and Gloria Anzaldúa (Chicana)¹ (1983) wrote a short poem which, judging from Buffalo's experience, still seems to apply: "We are the colored in a white feminist movement. / We are the feminists among the people of our culture. / We are often the lesbians among the straight"(p. 23). As Native women in women's studies, we can get caught in a bind that portrays "tradition"

¹ There remain complex issues around the inclusion of Chicana women as indigenous peoples. At the risk of committing heresy in some people's eyes, I have decided to include them, as there are those who, like Gloria Anzaldúa, acknowledge, embrace, and wrestle with their indigenous heritage in articulate and painful ways (Miranda & Keating, 2002, p. 203)

as oppositional to change or things new. Yet Jane Flax (1990) cautions that in attempting to rethink and revalue the "traditionally" feminine, we may end up "participating in a reprisoning of a slightly reconceived 'angel' within a somewhat commodious and aesthetically pleasing house" (p. 170). Emma LaRocque Métis(1996) reminds us that culture is not immutable; we cannot realistically expect our traditions to be always of value or relevant to our contemporary lives. This leaves us with difficult and painful choices (p. 14). This dilemma is particularly acute within First Nations cultures where we respect and revere our elders who hold the stories and knowledge that we know are important to our survival as Native people. At the same time, as Buffalo says, "For Aboriginal women feminism is there," even if it is perceived as "a white lady thing." Kim Anderson (Métis) (2000) suggests that we need to clarify within our communities that when we say "tradition," we are not referring only to values, philosophies and lifestyles that pre-date the arrival of Europeans. We are also speaking of ways that are being created within a larger framework of Euro-Canadian culture, or in resistance to it (p. 35). It seems that in terms of feminism, Buffalo has not yet found much opportunity for such clarification.

Fox: Part of what I expected was that there would not actually be a lot of Native women in Native women's studies, because there would be a fear of feminism. There are also some negative connotations still within the community and within families about feminism, but that's across the board, I think. It doesn't matter if you're Indian or not. Sometimes if I talk about it in a roundabout way, there's acceptability. But if I use the word "feminism" in certain circles, it's like, Aaach!"

Mélody: Whether "you're Indian or not," the word "feminism" has negative connotations in some circles. Does that mean the fear of the word within

different societies arises from the same understanding of feminism? Do some Native people fear the word because it represents for them a threat to the traditional gender relations that respected women and supported a balance in gender roles, or does it in fact threaten the loss of a created tradition which people are loathe to change, even though it may constrain Native women to live fully within a contemporary framework?

Petite Kokum: It was interesting to note that when we said, "women's studies First Nations" when we were in the First Nations Department, there wasn't that much notice taken. But when we said, "women's studies " outside of the First Nations, eyebrows were raised because..."Oh, those are women's issues. You're against males. You're feminists." So there was sort of a label. Whereas coming back into First Nations, it's an accepted thing and a valued thing, in that the women are contributing.

Mélody: It's interesting that the addition of the descriptor "First Nations" to the term "women's studies" seems to waylay some of the fears that Fox describes. Judging from Petite Kokum's experience, it appears that some people assume that NWS is different from mainstream women's studies in that there is no male bashing in NWS.

Raven~*~Magic: I always get asked questions about women's studies: "Oh, you male bash!" That's the first thing the majority of people say to me. And that is one of the reasons why women that I have spoken with will not take women's studies courses, and I have to explain to them, "We don't even discuss males, they're not worth discussing!" (*laughter*) No, I don't say it that way. I tell them, "That isn't so. That isn't what we do in there." But that is a really big fear of women's studies.

Mélody: Raven~~Magic's little joke makes me wonder about how different people from different cultural contexts might differently understand male bashing. I remember at a focus group meeting when she said that males weren't worth discussing. We all laughed really hard. For someone else, might that have seemed to be male bashing? We call it teasing, and in the Native women's studies courses I have taught, statements such as Raven~*~Magic's are not that unusual...nor is the raucous laughter. On the other side of the coin, what makes us uncomfortable when we think mainstream courses male bash? Is it because we think they are too serious about their words? Is it because there is no laughter to break the tension?*

Quail: When I [first] took women's studies, (*laughter*)...I don't know how to say this, but I was the kind of person...I was still at the stage of my life where I was like, "Oh, women's studies! Oh, my god, why would I want to take that?" (*laughter*) And that's really what my idea was about it. My husband used to tease me about it when I first took the course. He used to say, "Oh, you're going to come home saying 'I am woman, hear me roar!'"...stuff like that. And I just couldn't comprehend. "What the heck are you talking about?"

Mélody: The question of why a Native woman would want to take a women's studies course does not have an easy answer. During my first year teaching in the department, I remember talking to a First Nations woman (whom I had known for several years) about the possibility of her taking a NWS course. To my surprise, she looked at me and said, "Why would I take a course like that? If there's one thing that I'm sure I already know, it's how to be a Native woman." In contrast to Quail's husband, who teased his wife that such courses would make her exhibit unusual behavior for a Native woman, the woman I talked to assumed

that the course was meant to do just the opposite! Are both assumptions correct to some extent? How does a Native woman navigate in this contradictory space?

Buffalo: One Native woman and two non Native women dropped [a mainstream women's studies] course [I was in]. I found out the Native woman thought we were male bashing, and she was just appalled.

Mackerel: I find the higher [in the mainstream courses] I went, the less there was male bashing. There was, I felt, a lot of male bashing in the early parts, and I didn't like it. But the higher we went, the more people were willing to be more open about that.

Mélody: I wonder why that is. Perhaps the initial shock of focusing on the history of gender relations provokes angry responses regarding males, and then later students may come to contextualize that information and begin to exercise agency in terms of dealing with it. Jane Flax (1990) writes that when we view women as totally innocent, acted upon beings with no agency, we don't see the ways that they also have and exert powers over others (pp. 181-182). We fail to see the possibility of women as agents of their own lives. Maybe this is the same as a process that I have observed in Native Studies. The more Native content courses Native students take, the more their initial anger and sadness about colonial history seems to transform into an understanding and acceptance of their own agency, making them "willing to be more open." That is not to say, however, that white bashing in Native studies disappears, and Mackerel indicates as well that male bashing does not disappear completely from upper-level women's studies courses. It would be naïve to see students as merely passive receivers of the sad

histories of sexism and racism. One difference for Native women in women's studies is that we confront a history of both racism and sexism; and although we may "tease" about our men or bash our men in our own way, when non Native women do it, we may also feel the sting of Indian-bashing. Is that part of what makes us defensive?

Indigo: Yeah. I found in [the fourth year mainstream women's studies course], everyone was respectful to each other in what they said and what they shared, and there was a lot of support. Whereas I found in some of the third year that I took, that there was a bit of a standoff...there was the feminism.

Lark: There was days when I was like, "When is this class gonna end?" (*laughter*) Yeah. I think it had more to do with the makeup of the class. We [Native women] all sat on the left. There was [non Native] women off to the right who dominated the whole class. It was very political. I don't think political is bad, but I think their mode of expressing themselves was more political...confrontational. And it's like, "Gosh, if I throw out one sentence, then I'm going to get into this political confrontation or disagreement with this woman over there!" And I don't feel like it.

Mélody: Lark's words remind me of the dialogue about academia (previous chapter) where Phoenix Rising talks about how the Native women in the class would group together at the back of the class, creating a physical separation or, as Indigo says, "...a bit of a stand-off." Lark equates "more political" with "confrontational." It may be that while the non Native women confront politically charged gender issues, the Native women confront both gender and race issues. The race issues, born of a colonial history, are painful and tiresome; yet Native women cannot simply wish them away so that they can engage in a political debate

solely about gender issues. The "political" for Native women is about confronting both gender and race, and if a Native woman throws out even one sentence, it will perforce not only confront gender issues, but race issues as well, putting her in "a political confrontation or disagreement with this [non Native] woman over there!" Is Cora J. Voyageur (Athabasca Chipewyan) (1996) accurate then, when she states that the Indian world is a political world, and there is just no getting around it (p. 105)?

Oolichan: There was a few native women—me and Mackerel—we would all kind of go against that [male bashing]. And we changed their minds basically! *(laughter)* We ended up changing their minds and told them, "Well, our men are strong men. They try." And it's a fact that men got put down before us, or got put in like a hierarchy—white man, then the Native man, then the Native woman. It wasn't their fault that they got put there. They weren't like that before. I couldn't bash our Native men the way they were bashing their white men.

Mélody: Devon Mihesuah (Choctaw/French) (1998a) claims that some Indian women hold white feminists in disdain because they consider them part of the white supremacy and colonialism that continues to dispossess Indians (p. 40). Oolichan highlights one of the dilemmas that many women of color face regarding feminism: it tends to focus on binary issue of gender (women/men), at the risk of erasing the inseparable issue of racism. Bonita Lawrence (Mi'kmaq) states that feminism still sees even poor men as the enemy, as a competitor for power; and she also wonders where that leaves Native men (as cited in Anderson, 2000, p. 277). Ramona Bennett (Puyallup) (1995) says she does not blame Indian men, because they did not learn sexism from traditional teachings. They learned it from their experiences with a sexist, non

Native society (p. 159). Native women cannot ignore the collective oppression of both Native women and Native men, and as Oolichan claims, if a Native woman does acknowledge the victimization of Native men, she "couldn't bash our Native men the way they were bashing their white men."

Raven~*~Magic: I'm thinking of white issues. There was [in the mainstream women's studies] women and violence, but it was [about] white women. So, there was a lot of issues that pertained to the white society...that's what I learned. There was some health issues that I studied, but again, all white. The content was for white women. It was issues that affect women, but it didn't go on a deeper level, because Native and white women aren't the same. It was like I had to be polite. I was an outsider being polite in a classroom. That was my feeling. I think issues of women that I did learn about do affect all women, but it didn't go into the deeper dynamics of Native women and the different problems that they face.

Mélody: Raven~~Magic indicates a couple of times that somehow the mainstream women's studies courses that she took lacked a certain depth. She says they addressed issues common to all women, but "didn't go into the deeper dynamics of Native women." Again, as Oolichan and Buffalo pointed out, racial, ethnic, and sexuality issues lie just under the surface of some feminist approaches, but they are not always addressed. Laura Tobe (Diné) (2000) writes that in the 1970s, when Indian women joined the feminist dialogue, they found, as did Raven~*~Magic, that equality for women was generally directed toward white women's issues. The issues that were relevant to tribal communities were not part of white feminist dialogue. The reality for Native peoples was that they were struggling just to survive (p. 109). This dilemma questions the place of courses for Native women within a Women's Studies department. If a*

primary working principle of the discipline is to address issues common to all women, can courses ever successfully go "into the deeper dynamics of Native women?"

Petite Kokum: Well, Women's Studies in the non-First Nations area still are determined by the academic feminist. And First Nations women...most of them do not consider themselves feminist. They consider themselves a woman...period. So, there's a difference there. Oh, it's such a wild difference. And yet there are very strong similarities. And even though we're different cultures, we're still suffering and struggling with the same issues. There's a very large gap there, but they're all doing the same thing. Maybe it will always stay this way. I'm not sure...there's such a line there, and it's a very thin line, but it's there. Like they [over here] are First Nations—and they [over there] are not First Nations—they [over here] are women—and they [over there] are feminists—sort of thing. It's hard to bring that together. But I guess in our hearts, we're all together doing the same thing as women. So, really I think that's just great, just as long as they keep it going.

Quail: I started [by] taking [mainstream women's studies], and it was even worse because it was this whole wide spectrum of things, and we got onto the topic of witches and stuff. It was just like, "Oh, this isn't for me!" But then when we started moving into different areas like the medical area, and patriarchy and colonization and stuff like that. Then I started to open up and think, "Oh, o.k. This seems a little more interesting." So with all of that, and then going through the whole process, and saying, "Women's studies really isn't that bad. I've learned some really good stuff out of it." And then taking that over to here, and wow! A First Nations women's studies! It couldn't be any better! So I registered for it and it was just wonderful! (*laughter*) But going from one extreme all the way to the other...I mean...Oh! What a difference! (*laughter*).

Buffalo: There's a huge, huge difference, and what are those differences in us? And not only to think of them in terms of there being a divide or those white ladies being more privileged, but how do you bridge that difference? And do you do that without spending a lot of your own energy? Because I don't have that much. I only have so much. We're different women and have different issues. Though [there's] rape and violence against us and lower pay, and we all have children and reproductive rights and different things like that that we share.

Mélody: Cora J. Voyageur (Chipewyan) (1996) tells us that a study of the past shows that Indian men have not always acted in the best interest of Indian women (p. 109). Her conclusion points to a broad area of commonality between Native and non Native women: that of women's oppression by men. One of the women present at the incident at Wounded Knee in 1973 talked about this same issue. She said that in non Native culture there were lots of problems with men, and the same might be said of Native culture. She points to a significant difference, however, in the way the two cultural groups act upon those problems. According to her, dealing directly with sexism, as the feminist movement does, must come second for Native women, because their primary concern at this point in history must be about survival (as cited in Mihesuah, 1998a, p. 41). It's a conundrum. Where do Native women best place their energies? If we place them primarily with the feminist movement, can we count on that movement to support the survival of our cultures and our communities? If we put our energies primarily toward the day-to-day survival of our communities, are we supporting the erasure or silencing of very real issues of sexism? As Buffalo says, it takes a good deal of energy to even attempt to bridge this gap. Emma LaRocque (Métis) (1991) states that because white Canadians are

"dismally ignorant of Aboriginal peoples," we are forever forced to explain our histories and our cultures before we can even begin to dialogue, and "a lot of energy is being derailed and drained that way" (p. 186).

Ruby: I think with all the courses that I took, that was the positive aspect about it. It was the cohesiveness of the class, and getting to share your true feelings about sisterhood.

Mélody: So far in this dialogue, many of the speakers have been struggling mightily to articulate some of the differences between Native and non Native women. Speakers have variously described the differences as "big, "wild," "extreme," "deep." Yet there is also a general agreement that there are areas of strong commonality, and Ruby affirms that with her comment. Hmmmm...very contradictory! Shotter and Billig (1998) claim that human thinking is inherently "two-sided": we can agree and disagree, question and answer, criticize and justify. So as we speak (externally and internally), our utterances (external and internal) demonstrate a dialectic tension between centrifugal and centripetal tendencies, tendencies towards merging and unity, and towards separation and multiplicity (pp.16-17). Leroy Little Bear (Blood) (2000) claims that Indigenous peoples, like everyone else, have an integrated mind, a "fluxing and ambidextrous consciousness" that flows into a colonized consciousness and out again into a precolonized consciousness. He writes that people attempt to understand these different ways of viewing the world, and to make choices about how to live their lives. The "clash of worldviews" between these two consciousnesses is, he writes, what suppresses diversity in choices and denies Aboriginal people harmony in their daily lives (p. 85). If this is the case, can the

participants in this dialogue ever clarify the differences about which they speak? Does feminism suppress diversity in Native women's choices? Does it deny them harmony in their daily lives?

Buffalo: But also to just also sit with the difference...to say, "My experiences are this way and I don't have to buy into the whole. I don't have to buy the whole white feminist movement to care about what's happening to my sisters or in my community. I don't have to buy the whole thing and say that I believe it all, or that it's true for me or to be a good feminist or whatever. Or do I call myself a feminist? Is that a word that I want to use for myself?"

Mélody: Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) tells us it is difficult for some people in some contexts to make a word their own: to make it have meaning in their world: "Many words stubbornly resist, others remain alien, sound foreign in the mouth of the one who appropriated them and who now speaks them; they cannot be assimilated into [her or] his context and fall out of it; it is as if they put themselves in quotation marks against the will of the speaker" (p. 294). Buffalo struggles to make the concept of feminism her own. She isn't going to "buy into the whole" of what she sees as white feminism, and possibly that partial space allows her to bridge some of the divisions of race, class, and sexual orientation without erasing them. She also makes an interesting distinction between the concept of feminism and the word itself, saying that one can own a truth about feminism without using the word, which, as Buffalo indicated previously, she doesn't dare use around her aunties! Annette Henry (1997) remarks that words are historiographical, often reflecting oppressive discursive practices. Like Buffalo, many marginalized people soon realize that they are held hostage by the oppressor's language, a language that manipulates them. And thus they find themselves not

totally independent of the very dichotomies they are attempting to shatter (p. 139). Martha Demientieff (Native Alaskan) says, "Contrary to some views that exposure to the dominant culture gives one an advantage in learning, in my opinion it is the ownership of words that gives one confidence. I must want the word, enjoy the word and use the word to own it. When the new word becomes synonymous in my head as well as externally, then I can think with it" (as cited in Cazden, 1993, p. 197). Buffalo also asks herself whether feminism is a word she wants to use to identify herself. Can she be feminist and still maintain her independence as Aboriginal?

Herring: That's the understanding of what feminism is all about, though. Feminism... the interpretation of economic rights and human rights in the white, feminist movement has a different focus in economics than say, a First Nations women's focus. It's our right. The treaty for land claims is about our relationship to the land, and what we have been excluded from on the land. Theirs is in the workplace. Still economic, but two different kinds of economics that are not with the same value systems. And so that's where the First Nations women's studies is going to be very helpful to those women who come with the issues of women's rights. But, you know, when you take up class time to try to explain that...but then on the other hand, we'd be looking at what feminism is.

Mélody: Laura Tobe (Diné) (2000) also talks about contemporary economic issues regarding Native women. She says that in the 1970s, when Native women began to dialogue with feminism, they were on the bottom rung economically, and going nowhere. She mockingly comments that Indian women could hardly have participated in the symbolic act of bra-burning, because some probably owned only one bra and would not have considered burning it. Tobe remarks that within the last twenty or so

years, Indian women have since that time made strides in terms of education, jobs, and political organizations (p. 109). In contrast, Herring moves outside of judging the economic status of Native women using non Native criteria such as education, jobs and political organizations. She sees a fundamental difference in value systems reflected in "our relationship to the land, and what we have been excluded from on the land. Theirs is in the workplace." Lee Maracle (Sto:lo/Métis) (1996) reiterates that success is too often seen as synonymous with wealth, useful employment or a regular salary, when it should be viewed as the by-product of what knowledge a person applies to life (pp. 90-91). This may be one answer to Buffalo's question about what the differences are between Native and non Native women. Also, Herring, like Buffalo, points to the question of taking class time and energy to dialogue with and teach non Native students about such differences. Too much class time devoted to it might make the course more "about" Native women than "for" Native women. On the other hand, as Herring says, that dialogue is not without benefit to Native women: "We'd be looking at what feminism is." So the questions seem to be rather practical ones: How much time and energy can be spent teaching non Native students about Native cultures, without losing a focus on the Native women in the class? And to what extent is it important or necessary for Native women to "look at what feminism is?"

Abalone: I started enjoying it [the mainstream women's studies course], but then she [the instructor] got into the feminist issues, so I wasn't happy with the course, but I got some insight as to where, Aborigine women, oriental women... not so much the First Nations women, but mostly the oriental and the Aborigine... where it was kind of interesting. But she [the instructor] would bring up her

feminist side and it was more or less a man bashing course...not so much a women's studies course. Yeah, how the men are kind of put on pedestals, rather than women. How the women today are fighting for equal rights in regards to wages, division of labor, and stuff like that. That's what it was more or less like...not to study [Native] women's issues. A lot of negative issues came out for me, especially with my relationship with my husband and the family. He would call me the "woman of the 90s", because I started standing up for myself, and saying no...learning to say no. That was kind of positive for me but it was negative for him. But, in regards to the family and friends, they seen a change in me, in my behavior and my vocalness, and confidence, but I didn't really take on those feminist issues. They were really negative, because I'm a born-again Christian. It was really, really difficult that way. I would come out of there every night with a headache.

Mélody: Wow...Abalone was enjoying mainstream women's studies, then not happy with the course. She gained insight into other cultures, but missed having a greater focus on First Nations culture. She thought initially it was a woman's studies course, but later thought it was a man-bashing course. She was learning to say no, which was positive for her but negative for her husband. She was becoming more vocal and confident in spite of, it seems, feminist issues. I see why she had a headache. It sounds like she was in the very middle of a tornado, where, as Bakhtin would say, there are centrifugal and centripetal forces acting on her all the time.

Dolphin: One of the instructor's questions was, are we feminists, and what do we think of people that are feminists, and how do we perceive ourselves in society today? We had a chance to really discuss that and ask ourselves, "Are we feminists?" A lot of people didn't agree that they were feminists. They just said that yes, we as

women have been going through a lot of transitions throughout the years where the rules were women stay at home, take care of children and stuff, while the male goes out to work. [But] nobody really was strong in their sense of saying, "Well yeah, I'm a feminist." But there were strong feelings of women's issues that they were going through.

Mélody: Devon Mihesuah (Choctaw/French)(1998a) writes that terms such as "feminist," "womanist," or "tribalist" may be used to describe Native women. But she claims that most Indian women are either comfortable in what feminism would consider their "subservient" positions, or are too busy working to preserve their cultures to worry about such labels that non-Indians and academics assign to them (p. 41). Would then Native women in general be more willing to be "strong in their sense of saying, 'Well yeah, I'm a feminist'" if such current and pressing issues of tribal sovereignty, reclaiming Indian names, and reclaiming membership in bands were resolved? These issues are all related to Native peoples' struggles to name themselves: to name their systems of governance, to bestow on their children powerful names of the ancestors, and to name the members of their communities. As Dolphin says, Native women in the class feel strongly about women's issues that they are going through, but it seems that many are loathe to name those issues with a word from outside of their Native cultures and/or language.

Oolichan: The literature [in the mainstream women's studies]... everything was patriarchy! I mean all the books we read about were the man on top of the woman and the woman's being bashed and held down. If they wanted to do something about it, they should've done it way back then. Why were those books written? If women were strong enough to stop that, they should've stopped that from being written.

Dolphin: I didn't feel I was a feminist, but I understand what they [feminist writers] meant by feminist because they were fighting for women's rights who had been oppressed, or in getting equal pay...where they're doing the same job, but one's getting less because she's female. That's what I don't really agree with at all because I think that women do just as well. [But] then we start getting into the other stuff like, "What if they're a fireman and policeman and all this other kind of profession?" So, I thought, "Well yeah. Well, naturally the man's stronger in that sense, like physically. But that doesn't mean that the woman couldn't be able to pull or hold her own if she needs to."

Mélody: Dolphin doesn't "feel like a feminist," but that does not prevent her from gaining a certain understanding of feminist ideas. Yet because she doesn't identify herself as feminist, she continues to articulate a gap between feminism and her cultural positioning. She is drawn into active dialogue with feminism, however, as she realizes and questions some of its gaps and contradictions (e.g. difficult questions arising from the general notion of employment equity for women.). In dialoguing with the complexities of feminist ideas, Dolphin identifies gaps within the gaps.

Turtle: To this day I'm still strong [because of what I learned about feminism]. I'm still doing construction work. I still don't let the men walk over me. I'll still do twice as much work as they do. Maybe I can't carry all the heavy crap they do, but I'll do it in a little style and carry twice as much ...do it twice as fast. And it's still like that...the boss is chauvinistic...what am I supposed to do? Well, I can do it...I'm learning. And I won't let them put me down.

Mélody: Previously, Herring pointed out that at the treaty tables, First Nations women seek to have their traditional, economic values understood and

acknowledged—values that she sees as quite different from mainstream feminist, economic values. As Turtle points out, however, contemporary Native women are also involved in economic activities that sometimes place them in the thick of sexist issues that feminisms seek to address. In Turtle's case, learning about feminism has been of practical use to her in the workplace.

Frog: What I've heard about Women's Studies—normal [mainstream] women's studies—is about what men have done to us, and how we need to be equal and need to do the jobs they're doing and all of that. So I was grateful that that wasn't what it was about [in NWS]. I remember the first class we did an article about the birdcage effect and I thought, "Oh god, I don't know if I want to be in this. Like I don't want to be looking at men, looking down at men or thinking men did something to me, or whatever." That's not where I operate from, but it ended up that's not how it was presented. I just had to wait it out to see. [The instructor] didn't come at it from the angle I thought she was going to come at it from. It wasn't what I had expected, because I thought it was about us bashing men and it wasn't, thank god. Because I have fathers and sons and brothers and a husband! There's lots of males in my life that I don't want to be looking down on. It wasn't about that. But it was just looking at the role of women, and that role played a big part in our communities and in our society, and how it was a positive...looking at it from a positive point of view.

Mélody: The notion of male bashing for several of the speakers seems to touch a very personal and tender chord. When there is talk about men—especially negative talk—some of the women seem to think automatically of the men in their family and community...the men close to them. And that makes them defensive. Several of the women have mentioned that one of Native women's roles is to nurture and take care of the men so

that the family and community will remain strong. Cora J. Voyageur (Athabasca Chipewyan) (1996) agrees that in many respects, Indian women still play that particular traditional role they played before European contact. But she also says that the times and the conditions have changed. She claims that Native women are no longer the social and political equals of Indian men that they once were, and that Indian women will not be given the respect and recognition they deserve until Indian men heed their call. She calls Native men to wake up (p. 111). Emma LaRocque (Creel/Métis) concurs that times and conditions have changed—and some of them very negatively—yet she, like Frog, wants to maintain a positive point of view. She talks of finding new constructs that build on “wonderful values and traditions, and yet at the same time move us forward (as cited in Anderson, 2000, p. 153). Melanie Corbiere (Ojibway), quoting her mother’s teachings, says that if Native women allow themselves to be clouded by negativity or all the negative experiences they have been through, they will forget that they are mothers, grandmothers, and aunties. They will smother and suffocate in that negativity, and the survival of their nation will be in jeopardy (as cited in Anderson, 2000, pp. 151-152).

Abalone: [In the Native women’s studies] there was no feminist issues. It was just the study of authors who were First Nations women, and we actually read the books, saw videos, and first-hand experience with Elders. So, that was really interesting and positive.

Mélody: Again, I get the sense that much of the discomfort that some of the women experience around socio-political issues regarding Native women is not that the issues themselves might be feminist related, but that they might be named as feminist issues. I wonder: If the instructor or other

students do not use the word "feminism" within the context of a discussion about Native literature, films or stories told by First Nations women, does that make Native women feel that they are not engaging with feminist issues, or at least not engaging with them in a manner inappropriate to their cultural positioning? Previously, Fox said that if she "talked around" the topic without using the word, she could gain some acceptance for her ideas. Buffalo also indicated that she could believe in some feminist ideas and still manage within her family as long as she stayed cool and didn't say the word "feminism." It seems that for some women, the word remains foreign and threatening, even though some of the ideas it signifies apply easily to Native women's issues.

Anne: In taking the first two introductory First Nations women's studies courses, I don't think I had any expectations, aside from just getting into the academic system. And I was encouraged to take the women's studies courses. I think it was not exactly what I expected. I was thinking that it was just going to be just the history of First Nations women. But reflecting back on some of the material, I realize that it also incorporated non native writers that were thinking about...that wrote about First Nations women. It incorporated a lot of that material. Even though [the course] is titled First Nations Women, I still think that it also incorporated a feminist aspect to the courses. I thought that was neat to be able to do that in a way where it's not threatening to Native women. Because feminists, you know, have very negative connotations to just the word itself, and so I find that with Native women, they don't want to be categorized as feminists! *(laughter)*

Mélody: Anne seems to support Abalone's contention to a certain extent, but also indicates that there were feminist issues introduced in the course, albeit in an indirect way. Again I am struck by the idea that in

separating some concepts or issues from the word "feminism," some of the women in the dialogue are seeking to make what they are learning and thinking their own without making it an "-ism," or giving it a specific name. Gerald Vizenor (Anishnaabe)(1998) writes extensively on the pitfalls of naming ideas or concepts, and suggests that it is better to keep putting it off, a strategy that will keep the lively dialogue going instead of turning it into a "terminal creed" to be used for judging, categorizing and silencing. Is it preferable then for Native women to work with concepts related to feminism without using the word "feminism?"

Alder: I thought when I first went in there [Native women's studies], "Jeez", I thought, "This is a feminist libber deal." That's what I thought. I thought they were going to all turn us into something else. (laughter) That was my thoughts. It sounds silly but that's how I thought. And then that was my thought. "Oh, jeez, what they going do with me now?" But I wanted to be there because I thought this is so unique to have a First Nations plus a women's studies. I thought I better take advantage and learn from it, because where else am I going to learn if I don't go into the program and learn? I have my own biases, but learning is more important for me.

Mélody: *It's ironic that a field of study that overtly seeks women's liberation from oppression can sometimes be so threatening to Native women. Colonial history has been about turning Native people "into something else": into civilized people, into white people, into dependents, into menial labor, into good citizens, etc. So although as Native women we may seek liberation from oppression involving men, we seek equally liberation from oppressive western ideologies. Our path is full of*

landmines, yet, as Alder says, "I better take advantage and learn from it, because where else am I going to learn?"

Eagle: The only part about these courses—First Nations Women's courses—that I don't like is when you have a white feminist yuppie who thinks she knows what it's like to be an Indian. Like...hello!? (*laughter*) I don't think so! And that's the really hard part I found in classes, because those white women don't know what it's like to be an Indian. They don't know. They do not have a clue. I think about when I was nursing and I was with this woman who was having a baby. I was saying, "It's o.k., dear"...now get this.... I can't believe I was so horrible! "It's o.k. Here's a wet cloth for your forehead. Don't worry, now. Things are going to be fine." She goes, "I'm going to be bearing down!" I said, "Oh no you're not. Now, I'm timing your contractions. It's fine now. You're going to be fine." What the hell did I know at nineteen years old about having a baby? Nothing! Anyhow, she ended up screaming at me, telling me to get the doctor, so I went running down. "Get a doctor in here!" And she was in hard labor. The doctor walks in and she had delivered that baby on her own. You compare that to this white feminist... they don't know! They do not know what it's like to be an Indian. And that's the times that I hate it. You know, it's a hard road to walk. Yeah, and you always know. But, yeah, that's the hard part I had about women's studies [in general] is these white women saying they understand...they knew what it was like. And I'm going, "Yeah, right!" We soon, sort of, in our own Indian way put them in their place, right? It wasn't done maliciously. I think they come into the class with a superior attitude, and by the time they leave the class, I think they understand us a little bit better. And that's really good too because we have to have that understanding if we're going to grow, and if they're going to grow, right? But yeah, it does come up often, I find, and sometimes I go, "Aw, jeez, not again. Not again!" (*laughter*)

Mélody: Feminist theory tends to place identity through race, ethnicity, class and sexuality as secondary to gender identity, so a student such as the one Eagle describes (white feminist yuppie) might think she "knows" the most important aspect of Native women because they (Native women) and she are of the same gender. As Eagle points out, however, her Indianness is not secondary; it is integral to her identity. She also indicates that the white feminist yuppie can never know what it's like to be an Indian. The best that can happen is that she will understand "a little better" by being put in her place in an Indian way. What seems to anger Eagle is that the Other assumes that she can know the experience of being Indian. This arrogance reminds me of Alder's words as well, where she intimates that courses in a western system of education are based on an assumption that western education has the transformative power (and maybe even the right) to change people into something else because it "knows" what is best.

Alder: Oh, they are really determined when they speak that they're right when they speak. Nobody else...what they say counts. To me, that's what I thought. That's a women's libber. They don't have no respect. I saw it when I heard them speak, and they don't believe in people. Like they have their own perspectives, and if I gave a traditional perspective, it wasn't always accepted. That was my own interpretation of what a women's libber is. That's the part that hurt me. And, because you're taught to value who you are as a little child, you have to kind of earn that value in the academia world. That's the difference. You have to earn it before they acknowledge you for having the knowledge. But the respect's more important for me. What I was taught is different, because it's more valued... respect for the other person. So what [the women's libbers] have to say counts,

not just what I have to say. That's the beauty of seeing it happen in class. I could make it work without hurting anyone.

Mélody: This is a scathing description of a western system of education in which one is not respected automatically; one must "earn that value in the academia world" by giving an "accepted" perspective. It seems like an impossible bind: "You have to earn it [respect] before they acknowledge you for having the knowledge." Jeannette Armstrong (Okanagan) (1989) also talks about the kind of traditional education to which Alder refers, in which respect was paramount. Armstrong emphasizes, for example that many First Nations stories use non-gendered figures such as animals for teachings about human worth. As well, First Nations languages do not have strict designations for he or she because of the importance placed on human dignity and personal recognition. She claims that the idea of colonization of one group of people by another goes against the understanding of people whose language and philosophy strive for co-operation and harmony whenever possible with all things. It is the way of survival. For Alder, some of the "women's libbers" do not work from a premise of automatic respect; and she finds that hurtful. Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo) (1992) claims that the Native sense of the importance of continuity with one's cultural origins runs counter to contemporary North American ideas which favor the rejection of traditions because they are viewed as backward, restrictive or even shameful. Most western cultural institutions validate this attitude toward tradition, she says, and feminist practice tends to follow this trend as well (p. 210). If this is indeed the case, how can Native women like Alder successfully participate in the feminist movement? Alder, however, says that, although she feels hurt at times

because of classroom incidents, she is still able to continue to practice her traditional ways.

Oolichan: That's exactly what I saw...that's exactly what I saw. You know, burning the brassiere, and I am woman, and screaming at the top of their lungs, and then turning round and putting somebody else down. The man is supposed to be beside the woman, not running away from her.

Mélody: Oolichan sees a sort of reverse oppression/sexism happening when women who have been oppressed by men and turn around and put the men down: "The man is supposed to be beside the woman, not running away from her." This theme keeps coming around: that stereotypical feminist behaviors—bra-burning, yelling, deriding—jeopardize the cultural survival of First Nations families and communities. Indeed Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo) (1992) writes that survival, both on a cultural and biological level, is the central issue confronting Native women (p. 189), which makes some issues in the feminist movement irrelevant or secondary to the day-to-day lives of some Native women.

Indigo: There was...I don't know if the word is "radical" [or] "more strong." Some of the women in there...the non-First Nation women were constantly being aggressive and pushy and vocal. I think some of them were annoyed with us. We First Nation, we weren't as vocal. I couldn't understand if they wanted us to be angry with the men, stand up to the men, or what. But I knew there was something in there. One [non Native woman]...sometimes I was sitting in the back and a lot of times she was sitting close to me. She'd just go...(big, loud sigh)...and then if one First Nation woman stood up and spoke out vocally and said what she thought, she goes, "That's what I want to hear!" She would say, "That's what I want to hear!" and would be so...I guess, pissed off at us if we

wouldn't say what we were feeling. She knew that we weren't coming forth and saying, "Well, that was wrong. They shouldn't have done that to us. They shouldn't have done that to my mother. They shouldn't have done that to my grandmother, and they shouldn't have done that to this person!" That's what she wanted us to say and be able to come and bring it clear and straight out in front. Because she was that way, she felt we should all...but I could see her get really annoyed with us. There was two of them I could see were just like, "Why don't they say it?" It was just under their breath, but I knew. I felt it, and then when I did speak up maybe I wouldn't be saying what they want me to say and they would be even more pissed off at me...like "Oh, come on woman, get up and stand up for yourself!"

Mélody: Sherene Razack (1998) writes that the narrative about white women as the saviors of less fortunate women is centuries old and still being told (p. 5). This positioning within the context of the classroom, she says (1993), can (as in the case of Kelp) create an "unreasonably high demand for storytelling from those in dominant positions" (p. 91). She explains that people of color are always being asked to tell their stories for the benefit of white people, but that white people can't really hear the stories because of the benefit—reinforcement of their role as savior—they derive from hearing them.

Turtle: The Native women, we have harder laughs and we're more personal, and we understand each other because we've gone through the experiences. They [Native women] haven't been able to express themselves, but they've gone through it. And it's just like they're also embarrassed. They don't want to talk about personal things because it's private, and it's pride and respect that they carry.

Mélody: Turtle and Indigo both talk about a delicate issue in class, and I face it as an instructor as well. It's all well and good to think of oneself as multicultural, liberationist, just, or other kinds of characteristics we associate with being open-minded; but sometimes the actions that fall from these stances are oppressive. Within the context of liberating First Nations voices, most people seem to be quite aware of issues regarding overt silencing and appropriation of another's voice, but have more difficulty dealing consistently with the issue of demanding that oppressed peoples speak on cue. How often have some of us had the proverbial spotlight put on us by non Native people who announce that they are now ready to listen, and assume that we have just been waiting for their cue to pour out our hearts? And how could we be so ungrateful or so weak as to not take the opportunity they afford us? As Indigo indicates, non Native students' tacit "permission" for her to speak also contains an expectation of what will be the acceptable thing to say. There seems to be at times a fine line between sincerely wishing to understand the situation of oppressed peoples better, and demanding that they speak on cue. Marilyn Dumont (Cree) (1998) writes, " the Great white way could silence us all / if we let it / it's had a hand over my mouth since my first day of school / since Dick and Jane, ABC's and fingernail checks / syntactic laws: use the wrong order or / register and you're a dumb Indian (p. 391). Thus, a feminism that does not take into account the effects of colonial history can produce a behavior that reinforces the silencing of Native women.

Fox: I would say that most of the [NWS] courses that I took, they always brought an element of feminism. It was always the base of their teachings, anyways, in any course that they [the instructors] taught. One course that I took talked about

watching Native women writers start to develop through the 60's and up to what is happening today. I found that also, these women talked on a day-to-day level to you about being a Native woman, about being a writer, because "We have a lotta work to do," they'd always say. So, they'd tell us to get on with it.

Wolf: I'm really glad they [NWS] were offered, because I was never confident taking just [mainstream] women's studies classes. Even in my first year, I didn't. I don't know really why, but just having a First Nations women's studies there with a First Nations instructor really comforted me. I'd know that I could really easily understand a lot of what was going to be taught. I think otherwise I really wouldn't have taken a women's studies course.

Anne: I think that the [Native women's studies] courses were set in a way that you did get a feminist aspect to it. But I think the students—especially the group of Native women that were in the class—brought personal experiences to it. It kind of helped put everything into context in terms of just learning from the other Native women, and then seeing that you could place the readings in terms of listening to other women. So although you were getting the readings, it was also kind of incorporating the Native women's experiences also.

Mélody: I know of another university that offers Native women's studies. The classes are large, yet routinely only about 10% of the students in the course are Native. Anne's comment points to the idea that in order for Native women to contextualize successfully feminist concepts, there must be a significant number of Native women in the class; otherwise, the course risks becoming a feminist course about Native women rather than a course for Native women to make sense of feminism. Given the comments of many of the speakers about the importance of having other Native women in the class, I see a potential danger born of a practical

issue of numbers of Native women in the course. Without multiple Native women's voices in the class, would the courses become what they seek to resist: treating Native people as objects of study? As well, would non Native students taking a Native women's studies course in which there are no significant numbers of Native women get the understanding that they seek, or (as Eagle puts it) that they need in order to grow? Susan Gardner (1995), talking about teaching a course in Native literature, argues that a course about contemporary peoples not one's own cannot in fact have any objectivity unless accompanied by involvement with those same people (p. 369).

Herring: I guess learning the jargon around feminism was really good for me because some of those things that I was trying to relate, I didn't have the words to talk about. So that's been really good for me.

Mélody: *Feminism, patriarchy, women's experiences, division of labor, equal pay, colonization: this is some of the jargon that the speakers have learned in their studies, and have used to talk about their experiences. Herring seems to indicate some ambivalence, however, when she says she "guesses" that learning some of the jargon helped her to articulate experiences that she previously didn't have the words to talk about, Katherine Beatty Chiste (1999) suggests that being familiar with such jargon will have a significant impact. She writes that although there are divisions that crosscut Aboriginal communities, there is historically a common ground for Native women where factors such as gender, poverty, and loss of Indian status coincide and protective kinship networks have broken down. She claims that Native women, by using mainstream institutions and mainstream rhetoric, are able to challenge entrenched leadership within their communities (p. 73). Janice Acoose*

(Nehiowè-Métis/Ninahkawè) (1995) also writes that it is vitally important that Native women appropriate the English language in order to rename and redefine people and places through their own experiences (p. 58). Judging from the participants' dialogue, renaming and redefining feminism through Native women's experiences is far from simple.

Eagle: I think [white] feminists are all right. They don't know their place, that's all. They try to speak for all women, and they can't speak for all women. And they should understand that they can't speak for all women, and yet they do. They stand up there and...it's just too ridiculous.

Mélody: Joy Asham Fedorick (Cree) (1991) presents a rather unflattering picture of a dynamic similar to that which Eagle recounts. She writes that there can be seven Native people in the room, and the non Native person will hog the conversations, hog the attention; and the seven Native people have to go through a whole educational process to get that one person to the point where she can understand what is happening (p. 222). It seems that students in NWS can end up at cross-purposes. Who is in the course, to study Native women? Who is in there to be a Native woman? Who is in there to learn from Native women? Who is in there to do all of those things? As well, Eagle's remarks recall some of the previous talk around the energy it takes for Native women to stay in dialogue with feminists and feminist issues—energy which the women feel is at a premium given the task of working for the survival of their families and communities. In support of Eagle's contention, Jane Flax (1990) insists that no one can speak for "woman" because no such person exists except within a specific set of already gendered relations—to "man" and to many concrete and different women (p. 27). Norma

Alarcón (Chicana) (1990) adds that the feminist requirement of gender consciousness only in relationship to man leaves women of color out of the loop about a good many things, including interracial and intercultural relations. And this does not help us to reconfigure feminist theory to include the "Native female" (p. 362).

Raven~*~Magic: I think I'm just a strong woman...a powerful woman. And I have strong ideas and opinions and I don't need the feminists behind me. I don't need that word in my life, but I want to be respected for really strong qualities that I own.

Rabbit: I learned in [Native] women's studies that women aren't really encouraged to take over the world. They're just encouraged to voice their opinions and not be intimidated enough to clam up.

Dolphin: I didn't agree with being a feminist because I still enjoy having that relationship between male and female and being able to work together rather than saying, "Well, I'm asserting my rights so I'm going to be fighting for issues that women deal with." I didn't want to be in with, like a fight thing. There is just a transition period that's happening.

Mélody: Both Rabbit and Dolphin seem to have found a place of some comfort regarding their stance about being feminist. Rabbit has calmed her concerns around feminists seeking to "take over the world" and feels that women's studies courses can support women in voicing their opinions and refusing to be silenced. Dolphin also has come to terms with her desire not to be involved in feminist issues in a way that will cause "a fight thing" with men, and she looks at present conditions regarding women as "just a transition period that's happening." She indicates that things are changing, and in the meantime she can "still enjoy having

that relationship between male and female," a relationship that she feels is often contradictory to being feminist. Trinh T. Minh-ha (1992) claims that issues regarding gender raised by women of color have less to do with questions of cultural difference than with a different notion of feminism itself—how it is lived and how it is practiced. She writes that it is important to maintain that difference or gap between the cultures, because in the context of marginalization, it's necessary to be able to use the label of feminist while fighting for the situation of women, while keeping a certain latitude to be able to refuse that label when feminism tends to become an occupied territory. Refusal to be labeled feminist does not necessarily mean that one doesn't want to side with other feminists; it can be simply a desire to keep open the space of naming/labeling in feminism (p. 151-152).

Indigo: It's just like this one lady in our class who's like, "Speak up, speak up!" It's because we're afraid to. We don't want to. I didn't want to end my marriage. I'm happy with my husband, so I do what I have to, to make things smooth; or else I could be out on my own, divorced, and very quickly.

Mélody: *Indigo's words reiterate a pervasive theme in the dialogue: although feminism offers the possibility of certain gains for Native women, it also puts them at risk of losing family and community relationships if they "become" feminists. When expressing those fears, they have used descriptors for feminists and feminism such as "not cool," "a white lady thing," "Aaach!" "male bashing," "confrontational," "woman of the 90s," "feminist libber," "white feminist yuppie," "burning the brassiere," "I am woman," "screaming at the top of their lungs," "radical," "aggressive," "pushy," "vocal," "don't know their place," "try to speak for all women," "take over the world," "fight." Indigo, like*

several of the other speakers, does what she has to do to "make things smooth." In Indigo's case, she does so in order that her marriage will survive, and thus her wider circle of family and community.

LaFromboise, Heyle, Ozer (1994) state that non-Indian feminists tend to emphasize middle-class themes of independence and androgyny whereas Indian women often see their work in the context of their families, their nations, and Sacred Mother Earth (p.482). And even though there may be social and economic problems making reserve life very difficult, the authors contend that a Native woman within her own cultural context at least can have the social support of her extended family network and community of people who share her values and practices (p. 474).

Katherine Beaty Chiste (1999) also argues that although feminist discourse is quite varied, it has directed much of its energies towards social changes that would enable women to participate fully in economics and politics outside of their homes. Aboriginal women, however, typically are more interested in the reconstruction of family ties and obligations rather than their deconstruction (p.76).

Oolichan: I'm not a feminist. I couldn't get along with it too well, because it was just too whiny...crying. Women talking about "Oh, I'm woman" and all this, and they try to be something else. It just seemed like they had nothing to really...excuse my language...to really bitch about...I mean, something that would make sense to a woman like me....like what they're fighting for, something they want. And it was just like hating men. It ended up to me like that's exactly what it was. "Oh, men are wrong. Men don't know what they're doing." They blame the man. Well, don't blame the man. Go and look at yourself and say, "Do it!" Don't talk about [or] put somebody else down." That's how I thought. They were bashing men and "men have put us down so long." Well, that's their problem.

They should have stood up long time ago, before putting it into the class. Some Native women are angry, too. But they didn't put it the same way. They didn't say, "Oh, men have held us down, and men have this and that." But First Nations people altogether have said white people have put their thumb on top of us and kept us down. And that kind of goes right throughout the nation.

Mélody: Oolichan adds "whiny" and "crying" to the list of negative descriptors for feminism. She admits, "Some Native women are angry too," but claims that they have not lost sight of the role that colonization has played in the oppression of all Native peoples, not just Native women.

Mackerel: The creation of patriarchy...I really enjoyed [learning about] that. It really opened my eyes. It showed me how women were intentionally subjugated in the non Native society. The book we read by Gerda Learner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, was very good, and it outlined right from early biblical times right through to today. It outlined the steps that were taken to subjugate women, and I really enjoyed that because it paralleled the subjugation of First Nations people.

Mélody: Mackerel, like some of the other speakers, sees parallels between non Native women's subjugation, and the subjugation of First Nations people as a collective, rather than as a specific, gendered group. This is again an example of the participants' attempts to articulate a contradictory, same-but-different view of feminism in relation to Native women.

Anne: I know that some fellow students that I consider friends felt that I was feminist because of the way I talked of the issues that related to gender and power. I think being categorized as a feminist has negative connotations. This negativity was due to the learning from the non-native women's studies courses more about gender, power and oppression. These other women's studies courses helped me

to understand more about gender relationships. [But] when you are a First Nations woman taking women studies...I came across the negativity many times. You are constantly having to face where you stand on certain issues, for example, individual and collective rights. I had to determine where I stood on the issues. In First Nations culture you are taught to be part of and work for the collective of the family and community. I struggled with the concept of individuality and collectivity, and I guess my opinions at times on certain issues leaned towards individuality. Individuality is associated with the European culture, and women's individual rights would be unseen and unheard of in First Nations culture. I remember in one of the introductory First Nations women's studies courses, one of our guest speakers discussed her experiences in class. She talked about as a First Nations woman she had no identity. Her identity was defined in family. As an example, she stated [that] when she was introduced in conversation, she was _____'s wife, or _____'s mother, or _____'s daughter. I thought when she said that, that it was so true and powerful. It was a good example of the treatment of First Nation women in the community after contact. To be defined in someone [else]'s identity leads to ownership of women perceived as property.

Mélody: Anne describes the lived experience of a dialogic identity: an identity that struggles constantly in the space between utterances and words that attempt to name her in a definitive and static way. People call upon her to announce where she stands on issues—which suggests a monologic stance—yet she talks about “leaning” toward certain ideas—suggesting a more fluid, dialogic approach. She sees a contradiction inherent in being named only as someone’s wife/mother/daughter: she would be denied both an identity as a First Nations woman, as an individual. The irony is that this type of naming is an effect of colonial history, not of

traditional ways. Women traditionally had names that marked them as valued "individuals" within a network of other individually named and valued people. Contemporary Native people on Vancouver Island still talk about an individual having the "right" to an Indian name. Anne was raised to be a part of and work for the collective, yet she finds that the traditional dialogue between individuality and collectivity has been closed down due to some Native people's perception that individuality is "owned" by European culture. Anne gives no indication that she is willing to choose definitively either collectivity or individuality. Yet even her "leaning" toward individuality makes some of her friends suspect her of feminist leanings—leanings which they associate with European culture and which they consider incompatible with a First Nations upbringing. However, writers such as Kim Anderson (2000), Paula Gunn Allen (1992), LaFromboise et al. (1994), Rebecca Tsosie (1988), Patricia Albers (1983), and many others continue to insist that the notion of individuality as foreign to Native cultures is erroneous. There are strong indications that many tribes held to principles of individual autonomy for all their people. First Nations may have conventional ideals of collective behavior for men and women, but at least historically many Native collectives identified and sanctioned individual nonconformity through dreams and appropriate rituals (LaFromboise et al., 1994, p 467). According to many contemporary Native writers, individuality is not the "property" of western society. And although Anne's present experience may be that "women's individual rights would be unseen and unheard of in First Nations culture," there is reason for her to doubt and to question this stance as emerging from traditional Native societies. As she indicates, however, in attempting to re-open the dialogue between the collective and the

individual she risks being categorized as a feminist and coming “across its negativity many times.”

Buffalo: There are two sorts of notions clear to me right now. One is like, yeah, women do it all. Yeah, so what? That's me and I'll do it all. Then there's the other notion, which is young Aboriginal women who are tired of men being privileged, tired of the men being coddled by the women, tired of women backbiting other women and doing boyfriend stealing and political rivalry, and the kitchen snobbery, and all that kind of stuff that seeps into our political, emotional, academic lives, spiritual lives. [Young Aboriginal women] who crave that sisterhood that may have been. I think that's where I'm at.

Mélody: In their “individual” ways Anne and Buffalo summarize a key point from the dialogue: there is Aboriginal culture and there is feminism, and while there are parallels, there are no easy answers to fill the gap between them. No clear word for feminism in these Native women's lives has emerged. They speak English and can say the word, but it continues to remain (and maybe rightly so) very much in the mouths of Others. Thus, the struggle/dialogue for meaning continues. Some of the struggles are exhilarating and some are difficult and tiring. Gloria Anzaldúa (Chicana) (1990), like Buffalo, laments the heartbreaking aspects of the struggles among women—“this constant snarling at our own shadows” (p. 114)—which, according to Buffalo, keeps Aboriginal women from “that sisterhood that may have been.” Lee Maracle (Sto:lol/Métis) (1996) writes that we are slaves by our own consent because we do not support each other. We revere our men who speak passionately on our behalf, yet we view women who do so as intimidating (p. 18). We are left to wonder if that sisterhood is possible without either accepting the word for feminism in NWS, or creating another word to describe the collective of

Aboriginal women's experiences. In terms of academic women's studies, it may be as Marie Battiste (Mi'kmaq) (2000) claims, that confronting the difficulties of maintaining Aboriginal consciousness in modern thought may be too much for the current educational system (p. 193).

Conclusion

In the participants' dialogue on feminism, there is throughout it the almost palpable presence of the non Native as owner of the word for feminism. Although the women dialogue with the word in many different ways and from many different angles, in the end it still seems to "belong" mostly to "white ladies." Cazden (1993) writes of the difficult and complicated process of making an Other's word one's own, especially when those Others occupy a more powerful place in a stratified society (p. 206). Indeed none of the participants lets the word for feminism get very close to her. Throughout the dialogue, the word remains "out there" in a place separate in some significant—albeit often not clearly articulated—way from her reality.

The women relentlessly confront head-on the word and the meaning that it holds for them. Yet they consistently hold it at bay, viewing it from many different angles with caution, with suspicion, and with curiosity. They do not choose, as some writers such as Gayle Two Eagles (Lakota) (as cited in Brant, 1988, p. 238) and Kate Shanley (Assiniboine/ Irish) (1988) have done: simply to modify the word, using the term "Indian feminism" to indicate at least their partial affiliation with feminism, while maintaining that space or gap signifying the differences between Native and non Native. Nor do they talk about such terms as "tribalism," or "womanism," a term coined by Alice Walker (1983) and subsequently adopted by a number of African-American women and other women of color as a word that incorporates and defines the distinct experiences of sexism and racism by women of color. No. The women in this project seem to seek a deeper clarity or maybe a truly Indian word for their understanding of their experiences with and understandings of feminism.

Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo) (1992) writes, "Many Indian women are uncomfortable with feminism because they perceive it (correctly) as white-dominated. They (not so correctly) believe it is concerned with issues that have little bearing on their lives" (p. 224). Invariably, the participants in this project do cast feminism as white-dominated. The label of "feminist" is particularly contentious, carrying with it a variety of negatively charged perceptions. As Gunn Allen predicts, there are feminist issues that for some of the women, "have little bearing on their lives." But there remains a consciousness that continually highlights the importance of opening up and maintaining dialogue about feminist issues—which leads to the question of where that dialogue should take place in order to be of greatest benefit.

In specific terms of Native women situating themselves within a mainstream women's studies department, there appear to be positive benefits. Even though they may feel at times angry, frustrated, puzzled, or harassed by the presence of non Native students who embrace feminisms, many of the participants talk about the benefits of being in an environment where they can learn more about and negotiate understandings with the Other.

There are, however, also some disturbing indications about Native women's experience within a discipline centered on feminisms. Because women's studies is centered on white-dominated feminist theories which now struggle to articulate a clear space for women of color, it is possible that such a placement creates for these Native students a constant battleground which distracts them from finding or creating language to articulate a worldview based on their own experiences. Often their attempts to describe differences center on what they are "not," indicating that western feminisms occupy the center. Deborah Miranda (Esselen) (2002) talks also about her struggle in academia and especially in women's studies to resist becoming an apologist for Native women. She states, "Indigenous women who try to explain 'indigenous women' end up 'negotiating,' criticizing ourselves and our cultures in order to minimize or apologize for

difference" (p. 197). Several of the women in the dialogue refer to the time and energy that it takes to dialogue with the Other so that the Other will understand—time and energy that the women possibly could better use to come to terms with feminism.

The women in the dialogue manage to maintain a strong Aboriginal presence in their dialogue with feminism, constantly questioning its relevance to their experiences, and refusing to "let it in" without thorough examination. The question remains whether this struggle for presence could be better facilitated outside of a strongly feminist-oriented department, or whether it is the intensity of the struggle itself that provides the ideal environment for the participants to demonstrate and validate their presence as Native women. Their dialogue reminds us that "no text is autonomous, and that no forms of expression in natural languages are neutral referential codes. All bring with them—for all of us as speakers and writers—both pain and promise" (Cazden, 1993, p. 209). For the women in this project attempting to come to terms with the word for feminism, this is certainly the case.

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE NEXT WORD

A reminder of our monologic tendencies

One night, several months after all of the participants had agreed to the finalized dialogues in this document, Anne (project participant) and I were reading over and talking about them. Anne and five other participants, including Keri and myself, have continued to work with those dialogues, planning to write an article for publication. Anne told me that as time went on, she felt strange reading her own words, because, through her ongoing dialogue with the group, she found some of her opinions had either changed or needed updating. At a later meeting with other members of the group, Anne repeated her impression, and several of the women present agreed that they too felt the strangeness of seeing written certain utterances that indeed represented their opinion at the time, but with which they either no longer agreed, or which they at least wished to discuss further. This initial “discovery” centered on the dialogue regarding feminism, and the later discussion in fact continued to address the same general question posed in the initial dialogue: whether NWS is/is not/ can/ should/ should not be feminist oriented. There was general agreement that during interviews, this topic had been the most difficult to talk about in an articulate manner. A lengthy discussion ensued about the possibilities of finding or creating a word or words that would distinguish or better represent the basis of a Native WS. We taped the lively talk, promising to continue it and to write about it, so that people will know that this document does not represent our only or final words about these topics.

During the discussion, we talked about the very real risks that the written word poses for decolonizing peoples attempting to break stereotypes and create an open environment where they are free to work out their respective destinies, including their contradictions and errors. The history of research on Native peoples demonstrates the power of the written word to create stereotypes or final truths that then block Native peoples' efforts to keep open dialogue in their lives. In our attempts to counter that history with our written words, we risk the possibility that the reader of this document will take even our own words as the last words about us, thus hindering our right—indeed our need—to continue dialogue.

In a Bakhtinian sense, a participant's possible recanting, revising or extending of some of her views does not render this document worthless, but it does remind us that the document is worth *less* than the dialogue it is meant to open and sustain. There will always be more to say, and the participants and I have not come even close to a last word. As with Te Hennepe's (1993) attempt to avoid the pitfalls of representation in written text, I can only say that this document has something to do with the difficulties of constructing a text and something to do with what we learned about Native women in WS. Therefore, rather than offer *concluding* words to this document, the best I can do is say/write the *next* words, in anticipation of the words—both mine and others'—that will follow in response. The study of culture, writes Bell (1998), should aspire to nothing more, and to nothing less (p. 59).

This final chapter contains my next words. I speak to and anticipate the responses of three groups of listeners: the Native women who participated in the project, WS faculty involved in creating/supporting NWS, and postsecondary educational institutions. I am a member of each of the abovementioned groups, which are actual or potential stakeholders in the education of Native women. It is not possible for me at this time, however, to speak effectively and honestly to them as one larger group. Given my

positioning in the three groups, I must face my own confusions and contradictions in uttering words to one group that may contradict my utterances to another group.

Forms of address vary with each of the groups, and say something about my positioning as I speak to them. I speak to the women in the project using the plural "you." I do this in order to honor my relationship with them as a group, and to invite them to (re)situate my representation of them within the context of their open-ended and continual dialogue. By addressing them directly, I wish to acknowledge their presence as Native women, and to re-emphasize that my words continue to invite their next words about themselves. In contrast, I begin by speaking to WS faculty using the inclusive "we," also anticipating their engagement with me in dialogue. Later, however, as the discussion turns to issues related to feminism and cultural differences, I reveal—like the women in this project—my own ambivalent positioning as a Native woman in a mainstream WS department. I discontinue the use of "we," and begin to talk about WS using the third person form of address. In speaking to postsecondary institutions, I use only the third person, addressing no one person or group of people, thus revealing my perception of large institutions as a relatively impersonal entities which do not lend themselves to direct address.

I, like the women in this project, am continually in dialogue, trying to pull together some sort of unified vision of the world. The participants' words and my analysis of them tell me that we have not yet overcome the fracturing within, between, and among our societies. So out of the reality of my own precarious and sometimes contradictory positionings, and out of respect for each group's particularities, I address each group as a member of that group, hoping the words that follow mine will bring a greater mutual understanding.

To the women in the project

In my attempt to assess the impact or importance of NWS in your lives, it is important to foreground that assessment on a background of your initial agency. You choose to come to university. You choose to be present in a place that is generally foreign and even hostile to many of your diverse cultural ways, and to your diverse dreams of what constitutes a good life for your people. You re-enact that choice in all the courses you attend, but the necessary energy you carry with you to do so seems particularly concentrated in NWS courses. At the risk of inappropriately naming, I dare to say that this concentrated energy emerging from the courage and power of your choice to be at university seems to be at least one defining factor of “indian-ness” in those courses.

You come from many different nations and upbringings, and your opinions are often divergent. Yet, though you do not always converge at the level of concrete process or specific goals, you do seem to meet on a spiritual level of intentionality about connecting with the world of your respective ancestors, and changing the current world within which we all live. Rebecca Tsosie (1998) claims that Native women manage to express both the diversity of Indian people and the centrality of an Indian “ethos,” and that it is this act that establishes our voice and our identities (pp. 2-3). Whether we refer to this phenomenon as spirituality, as indianness, or as Indian ethos—or some other term similarly open to misunderstanding or misuse—it seems to motivate and sustain dialogue in NWS courses.

It is important for us to keep in mind the dangers of naming this phenomenon, however. We can be misled by what may appear to be similarities among Native women in their efforts to decolonize. As Mihesuah (Choctaw/French) (1998) points out, Native women have many *common* experiences of externally induced adversity; but the women change in *dissimilar* ways because of cultural differences among tribes, and

because of different individual life situations (p. 38). Indeed you, the women in this project, testify to a wide range of diverse reactions to common experiences of sexism and racism from outside of, inside of, and between your respective nations. Oppressive acts visited on you and supported by stereotypical views of Native women have not produced common reactions that one can label as typically or essentially Indian. This said, still your dialogue about your attempts to make the best of what colonialism has wrought contains a constant and common voice about your apperception as Native women who remember, revisit and recreate community.

Your dialogues are crowded with voices that refer to community: the longing for it, the difficulty of (re)creating it, the tragedy of its demise, the fear of losing it or being banished from it, the struggle to enter it, the struggle within it, the beauty of it, the expansion of it, the protection of it, the maintenance of it, the constraints of it, the naming of it. Your respective communities are not the same, nor do you represent or dream of a larger community in the same way. Yet these multiple expressions still seem to converge in a positive mindfulness of an imagined community that will facilitate and celebrate your efforts to be present as Native women. This pervades your talk.

On the one hand, NWS courses support community on a practical level by providing a consistent time and place for you, within the context of academia, to commiserate about it: to re-enact it, to practice it, to revitalize it, to celebrate it, and to redefine it many times and in many ways. The physical presence of significant numbers of Native women in the courses seems to facilitate greatly those experiences. You share the experience of marginality, but the "togetherness" you have in class is not about uniformity of action or thought. It is more akin to a tacit understanding of the need for and the reasons behind change, and the intention to participate in initiating and sustaining that change. Bobiwash (Ojibway) (1999) intimates that it is indeed the role of Native women in academia to work toward creating and maintaining contemporary communities that are fluid and changing.

When a significant enough number of [Native] women are enrolled in the same cohort they are able to provide support for each other. Perhaps more importantly however they can assert themselves, identify positions and leaders, and speak their voice—in other words they...have the capacity to change the culture they live in. (par. 4).

Bobiwash's statement certainly coincides with a good deal of the content and tone of the dialogues in this document. A critical mass—an imagined community—of Native women in dialogue seems central to the experiences that you, the participants, have in NWS courses; and that community seems to provide you with significant motivation and support.

Interestingly, although the community you enjoy and relate to in NWS is very much racially and culturally defined, the communities you are committed to recreate are not necessarily racially or culturally exclusive. Equally pervasive in your dialogues about the challenges of creating and sustaining community is the presence of non Native people. That presence is often difficult to deal with as you continue to struggle with the binary of Indian/white. Non Natives in NWS courses and in mainstream courses annoy, anger, or intimidate you, as well as interest you, teach you and learn from you. You are very aware that you are in a non Native institution, where you must be careful and strong both in order to survive according to its rules, and in order to be present according to your own views about community. From your intentionality that focuses on community, you hint of other realities—where the negative or stereotypical characteristics of whiteness are not applied to all white people, and where the positive and equally stereotypical characteristics of indianness are not applied to all Native people. In NWS courses and in mainstream WS courses you encounter the voices of everyone in dialogue—even those you hate or disagree with—and you take for granted that you must engage with them. You do not want to accede to white or male dominance, but in the end you cannot abide the exclusion of men and white people. Although some of you do not hesitate to relate unflattering details about these

problematic Others, that talk never drowns out the dream/talk of a community with room for all of these.

Racial difference is one way that you identify yourselves within a predominantly white institution, and gender difference is one way of identifying yourselves in NWS courses. Yet most of you are mixed-bloods. You are very aware that many of you carry the Other within you, and that you have no choice but to create or negotiate a community that includes that Other. As well, because you have deep, spiritual connections to both real and imagined communities, you are keenly aware of the importance of men. You have no illusions about the difficulty of creating an inclusive community—negative voices continually rail, warn, demean, and discourage—but many of you clearly feel that it is your responsibility to provide leadership for that creation. Leadership includes negotiating a space for yourselves as powerful Native women and academics within your home communities and within the university college, yet never closing down that space to the Other. In order to accomplish that, you consistently refer to the need for contact with other Indians “on the same path.”

In order to move toward community, being together with other Native women in significant numbers is particularly important to you in NWS courses—and in academia in general. For most of you, being with many other Indians in a postsecondary school setting is a new experience which opens up possibilities for establishing your presence as Native women within the school system. There is danger, however; you remain particularly vulnerable to the vicissitudes of enrolment. What will happen if NWS courses become filled with mostly non Native students? Will Native women still be able to make their presence known and respected? Will NWS courses become merely token courses where non Native people can study and state/reinforce/sustain their opinions about Native women? Or will the courses disappear altogether for lack of enrolment and/or interest?

The positive realities of NWS providing a time and a place for you to form a community and to dialogue are not to be underestimated, but neither is the fact that the face of that community could change drastically and quickly if the larger picture of First Nations education in postsecondary institutions is not adequately addressed. This is a precarious time of transition for you in the university, where at first a place has been made *for* you within the parameters of the university structure and policy. From there, a place must be made *by* you so that systemic machinations cannot—in the name of discourses about inclusivity, multiculturalism, or integration—reduce, dilute, or reject your strategic, “essentialist” positions by closing down courses or programs where you congregate in significant, multi-tribal numbers to form a community of Native women.

NWS courses are created and controlled to a certain extent by the larger institution and the WS Department. Within those courses you have a good many positive experiences, but the courses are not sanctuaries in the sense of shielding you from the vagaries of your individual situations, or from the systemic and cultural rigidity of the university, or from the continual pressure to come to terms with feminist ideologies. You make it clear that the academic institution is generally a place where an Indian woman would have a difficult time making it alone. Courses such as NWS provide a sort of respite from the great struggle to succeed in a system of western education, but those courses are still imbued with academic jargon and grading systems which assail your senses of cultural appropriateness and put at risk your survival in the institution.

Most of you feel that having “paper” (a degree) is important to your ability to provide leadership in your respective communities, and in the larger community that you envision. Ironically, the ability of paper to provide support for the monumental tasks that lie ahead of you in regard to your work to recreate and sustain your communities seems, at least on some levels, “thin,” both to some of you, and to many of your families and friends. It doesn’t adequately express who you are either within or

beyond the institution, and in fact it can work against you in your communities by providing a distorted image of who you have or will become. Notwithstanding that the knowledge you gain in academic studies may provide you with advantages in your later work, by seeking a degree you also court difficulty in your respective communities, and thus in your life. NWS courses seem to provide support for you to deal with many issues, but those courses, embedded on the one hand in the university system, and on the other hand, in the painful gender-based oppressions, exclusions, hardships and even violence of your individual and community lives, remain issues as well.

In WS courses, feminist ideologies pressure especially your visions of community. You fend off committing yourselves to feminist thought and action, yet you are definitely drawn to consider them. Because you take courses—both NWS and mainstream WS—in a department whose fundamental reason for being is to expose students to feminist thought, the pressure seems constant. Not infrequently you react in frustration, in anger, or in confusion. You do not reject all feminist thought outright, but your dialogue points consistently to its significant lack of congruity with your points of view, especially about community. Feminism for most of you is to be studied and practiced in a very guarded fashion, lest you be distracted from your intentions about community. You cannot seem to get away from a sense of exclusion that feminist thought appears to provoke in you. Even when, as individual women, you feel included in its dialogue, you sense that your communities are not. You clearly equate feminisms with non Native thought, and you are wary, if not hostile. Thus the great paradox: you resist the very foundation of a standard WS curriculum, while appreciating the dailiness of being together as a community of diverse Native women in that department. NWS seems to have supported you in articulating what you are *not* in terms of feminism, but also you have had to help those same courses help you by resisting an already determined notion of Native women's identities, as well as a pre-determined notion of a Native feminism.

Analouise Keating (Nepantlera) (2002) asks of other Native women, "What happens, once you've made others aware of your presence, once you've shattered stereotypes? What's the next step? What do you envision for the future...for your children's, your grandchildren's future?" (p. 11). These may be hard questions for you to answer definitively at this time, or at any time. Although you clearly intend to make your presence known and to shatter stereotypes, your talk about the future does not point to a definitive end to struggle and a "next step" to the future. Your visions are of a community, large and sometimes unwieldy, necessitating continual dialogue/struggle in order to create and to sustain it. You do not have a last, clear word about that community, but you definitely are preparing to utter the next words. There are no overarching, definitive markers present where you take the "next step" into your futures. Your pasts and your futures are the present, and your experiences in NWS seem to confirm that.

To WS faculty involved in creating/supporting NWS

As we worked to create NWS courses in a mainstream WS department, we didn't have at the time a clear notion of what Native women's courses would look like or what their effects would be. We were very aware, however, that we initiated those courses within a department whose curriculum focuses on the study of western feminisms. We also knew that the Native women developing and teaching NWS courses did not have a formal background in academic WS. Thus, from the beginning there was a sort of accepted (or at least informed) incompleteness about NWS that placed students, instructors and the department in an odd situation.

Rebecca Tsosie (1998) muses that a clear notion of "American Indian feminine identity" is a myth, because the diversity of tribal systems and worldviews is immense, and the thoughts and feelings of Indian women are equally diffuse—not to mention that such a myth excludes women who are not gendered feminine. Extending Tsosie's

judgment, we could say that the idea of NWS perpetuates a myth. Extending even further, we could apply this same judgment to all WS. One difference is that even if the notion of a western feminine identity *is* a myth, it still holds—unlike any notion of an Indian feminine identity—significant attention and sway in academic and political circles of North American society in general. Mythic or not, feminine or not, women's identities sustain intense dialogue, particularly in academia.

One aspect of First Nations women's identities emerging from the participants' dialogues is their general rejection or arm's length stance regarding feminism as an ideological or philosophical position for *themselves* as Native women. True, they do agree with and support certain common feminist concerns, for example, the need to address violence against women, women's health, and the protection of children. But the eventual means of addressing some of those common issues differ greatly because of their different material conditions and their different worldviews related to women's identity and to community.

From the point of view of a WS department, it is curious that the Native women in this project seem to feel no embarrassment about their often negative attitudes toward feminism. Equally curious is that the women do not generally equate those attitudes with a need to stay away from WS courses. Yet they are in some senses harassed by the specter of western feminisms that swirls around them in the department, and by the tacit insistence of those feminisms to speak for all women, thus threatening the participants' identities as Native women. We must ask, "If these women are suspicious of or antagonistic toward the fundamental orientation of WS, why do they participate in these courses?"

There are two possible answers. One may lie in the fact that in the context of NWS courses, the participants feel less bothered by what they perceive as the negative sides of academic feminisms, e.g. speaking for all women, male-bashing, lacking a

community focus. Some of the women feel that in avoiding mainstream WS courses altogether, they will be able to avoid feminist teachings. Others who do take mainstream WS courses seem to feel that NWS supports them to establish their differences with the feminisms they encounter in those courses. They see NWS courses as decidedly different than mainstream courses, and an important part of that difference seems to be a general perception that NWS courses lack a significant feminist focus.

Another possibility for the participants' continued presence in the department points to a very instrumental reason: there are very few if any spaces in academia, apart from WS, where these women can come together to address issues particular to them. Perhaps WS is not only the logical, but also the *only* place these women can get together to talk about and understand the oppressive relations men have maintained them in personally, tribally and in terms of a colonial history of colonizers talking only to the men. Still, these courses remain anomalies within WS, and they say something profound about that area of study. Depending on how we look at them, NWS in a mainstream WS department either condemns WS as a field of study, or foreshadows its transformation.

From one perspective, the women in this project point to the abject failure of academic WS to dialogue effectively with Native women. By according a space for Native women to be together in significant numbers, we might even speculate that the WS department contributes to its own demise by creating a situation which highlights the inability of western feminisms to include or attract non mainstream women on any more than a superficial level. The women in this project express a range of reactions toward feminist thought: hostility, discomfort, tolerance, cautious consideration, and enthusiasm. But even in their most positive comments, they do not express a solid confidence about feminism; and they strongly resist using the word to describe themselves. A mainstream WS department must then ask itself how it can justify continuing to offer specially organized courses for women who so clearly resist and

even undermine WS' persistently mainstream interpretations of "feminist" leanings. As well, Native women on faculty in a mainstream WS department must ask themselves what they are doing there.

From a dialogic point of view, however, the above questions would be moot. Very simply, to invite dialogue is to invite change. To invite dialogue with Native women within the context of mainstream WS is to invite serious questioning of the viability of western feminisms for Native women, for all women, and for "feminism" itself. Even more specifically, NWS questions the ongoing viability of mainstream WS within contemporary academic institutions. So rather than see NWS courses as an abortive attempt on the part of a WS department to save or support Native women by orienting them toward feminism, we might look at the courses as an opportunity to transform and strengthen WS by orienting it toward another worldview.

However we might perceive what has happened with our creation, and however we choose to address it, one thing is clear. Native women's presence in WS will continue to question the relevance and appropriateness of mainstream WS, and in turn mainstream WS must question the relevance and appropriateness of NWS courses to the success and survival of its areas of study. If a WS Department seeks merely to include Native women in its already-established theories, it assumes a position of superiority and power in regard to the creation of those courses. If mainstream WS seeks to *be* included in something larger or greater than itself, then possibly it has made a wise choice in opening up dialogue with Native women. If, in the face of the kind of relentless assault on feminism that the women in the project engage in, mainstream WS retreats to the safety of its established position in academia, dialogue will cease. On the other hand, allowed to expand, that dialogue likely will be intense and confrontational—as indeed it already is—and will test the strength and resolve of all parties to find a place to meet respectfully—to make a community—in the borderzones between cultures.

To postsecondary institutions

The women in this project want the “paper” that the university offers. They are in general alignment with the institution in believing that a university degree will be of benefit to them individually, to their communities, and to the world at large. Somewhat ironically, although the residential schools were a powerful tool for the colonization of Native peoples, attempting to annihilate their cultures and adapt them to non Native culture, these women now see a degree as a potential enhancement to their ability to work toward decolonization. What, then, has brought about this change, and what is the status of that process within the postsecondary institution?

Native people can take much of the credit for the change. They have become increasingly and forcefully involved in the education of their children, especially at the elementary and secondary levels, and they are now making inroads into postsecondary institutions. Native communities seek to be involved in orienting curriculum and program development, as well as in the teaching of their histories. Bands support many of their people, both financially and socially, to attend university; and there is an increasing number of First Nations university graduates who work in areas involving the well-being of Native peoples.

Individual universities can take some credit as well, in that they have, over the last 10-15 years especially, made attempts to address the needs and desires of Native students. There is an increasing number of Native Studies programs and courses focusing on the histories, literatures, and material cultures of Native peoples. Some universities have Native student centers and associations, employ Native elders, faculty and staff, and make serious attempts both to recruit Native students, and to support them once they are at university.

Postsecondary schooling for Native students is much better than it used to be—on the face of it. Judging from the participants’ dialogues there are still aspects that

are disturbing and disheartening, and we must continue to dialogue about whether they can ever be rectified within the current system of education which does not seem to do much more than improvise within the parameters of its already-established and static ideologies that limit its capacity for dialogue and its appreciation of difference.

The women in this project are continually surprised and dismayed by other people's ignorance of the histories of Native peoples—an ignorance which extends beyond fellow students to include, significantly, university researchers, instructors and professors themselves. That ignorance is a wound that these women often feel they are alone in trying to heal, and it burdens them unduly. They must contend already with the multi-generational, wounding effects of colonial history; yet their presence at the institution attests in part to their intention to begin or to continue healing. They seem to face, however, an educational institution lacking in education about Native peoples—an institution that does not realize that it too needs to heal its own wounds wrought by colonial history. The women in this project do not seek to be helped by an outside power as much as they seek to form a community of healing that includes academic rigor and an understanding about the need for all people to take responsibility for their own healing.

The project participants hold no illusions about their precarious status in the institution. Failure at many levels threatens them constantly as they carry their personal burdens, those of their histories and their communities, as well as the burden of ignorance that they encounter at school. So tired are they of the burden of others' ignorance, some ask for relief and a show of respect by requiring students to have knowledge of Native histories before being admitted to NWS courses. Why, in an institution that does not hesitate to impose prerequisites for admittance to other courses, is there no acknowledgment of the general ignorance about Native peoples among the student and faculty body? These women have critical work to do, but they often feel forced to do the "busywork" of informing their Others in the institution of things those

Others should already know if they claim to be educated. Leaving to these women (and to other Native students) such a large part of the responsibility of educating/healing Others, greatly threatens their own success. The institution's lack of understanding and acceptance of the important role it must assume toward healing the ignorance it has helped to create, adds greatly to the challenges already threatening these women's struggle to obtain "paper."

Academia for these women continues to loom, like the residential schools, as a place to *be* changed rather than a place to be an agent of their own change—let alone as a place to be, itself, *changed*. Native women so positioned are greatly encumbered by academia's lack of knowledge about them, and they risk failure at almost every turn. Courses like NWS provide temporary sites of some relief for them, and thus for an institution attempting to remain sensitive to Native students. Yet these courses are but a whisper in the resounding silence of academia's refusal to heal itself through serious dialogue about its own history in regard to Native peoples. The women in this project understand that their healing must eventually involve dialogue/struggle with everyone; otherwise their wounds will fester and they will not survive. It may be very difficult for educational institutions to see themselves as among the "wounded," when they retain in many ways such great powers. But until they can view themselves in this way, they will not be able to dialogue effectively with Native women about education.

Next

Over the last ten years, a number of Native women writers (e.g. Anderson, 2000; L. Smith, 1999; Maracle, 1996; Allen, 1992; Brant, 1988; Chrystos 1988b; Shanley 1988; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983) have engaged with notions of feminism, attempting to articulate various ways in which Native women's lives do/do not accord with those ideologies. The diversity of Native women's responses to feminism is reflected in Devon Mihesuah's (Choctaw/French) (2001) cautioning about assuming that the

partnering of Native Studies and WS will be ideal and easily done. On a theoretical level there are certainly common areas of concern regarding histories of oppression and resistance that would make it relatively easy to construct a curriculum that “looks” appropriate: in other words, that includes both women’s and First Nations peoples’ perspectives. The women in this project, however, have brought with them very diverse histories and life situations that form a shifting background for their common, intangible, spiritual understanding and intention related to land, and to the community it is meant to support and sustain. Extant theories in WS either do not adequately address, or cannot address these women’s presence. And although a WS department may not deny a place for them, academic feminisms seem to them—in spite of efforts on both sides—to deny their diverse voices that insist on speaking of community. In “feminist” courses they engage with each other and with their classmates in dialogical practices of freedom, yet those dialogues are landlocked within a larger academic institution seemingly blind and deaf to their constant struggle simply to be present as Native women.

APPENDIX A:

ETHICAL APPROVAL OF RESEARCH

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

OFFICE OF VICE-PRESIDENT, RESEARCH



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April 6, 2001

Ms. Melody R. Martin
 Graduate Student
 Faculty of Education
 Simon Fraser University

Dear Ms. Martin:

**Re: Native Women in Women's Studies: Resistance, Contradiction
 And Emergent Theory**
Malaspina University College, Nanaimo, B.C.

I am pleased to inform you that the above referenced Request for Ethical Approval of Research has been approved on behalf of the University Research Ethics Review Committee. This approval is in effect for twenty-four months from the above date. Any changes in the procedures affecting interaction with human subjects should be reported to the University Research Ethics Review Committee. Significant changes will require the submission of a revised Request for Ethical Approval of Research. This approval is in effect only while you are a registered SFU student.

Best wishes for success in this research.

Sincerely,

Dr. James R.P. Ogloff, Chair
 University Research Ethics Review Committee

c: S. deCastell, Supervisor

/bjr

APPENDIX B:

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

May 1, 2001

Mélody Martin
First Nations and Women's Studies
Malaspina University College
Nanaimo, BC

Dear _____,

My name is Mélody Martin. I am Wailaki Pomo and am currently an instructor in First Nations Studies and Women's Studies. I will be on leave from Malaspina University College for the next year, working to finish my doctoral degree. I write to you in hopes of engaging your participation in a research project initiated by me, with permission and support of Malaspina University College and the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University. This project involves Native women who are current or past students in Native women's studies courses at Malaspina.

This project has two main goals. First, it intends to study how Native women view the relationship between their experience in women's studies and their particular cultural backgrounds. Second, the project attempts to include the participants at virtually every level of the study.

At this time, no substantial research has been done in this particular area, yet such research is a critical part of defining our places within an academic institution. As well, the great majority of First Nations students in post-secondary institutions are women, which I believe provides us with a responsibility and an opportunity to offer some guidance and inspiration to the future education of Native peoples.

In this project, there are several sequential levels at which you might wish to participate, ranging from an individual interview to co-authoring an article for publication. You are invited to participate as far along the sequence as you wish or as is possible for you. In other words, it is not necessary that you commit to completing all 5 steps.

The sequence of the project is as follows:

1. Providing an individual interview.

2. Meeting with a group of other Native women participants to discuss questions arising from the interviews.
3. Meeting with other participants to critique the draft analysis of the interviews.
4. Participating in a symposium on this project at Malaspina University College.
5. Co-authoring with me and other participants an article regarding the results of the project, to be submitted for publication in a national journal.

If you are interested in participating, please indicate below. My research assistant or I will then contact you in order to answer any questions you may have and to set up the initial interview. At the time of the interview, a letter of consent outlining mutual agreements about your participation and your rights regarding confidentiality will be provided for you to read and sign. If you wish more information prior to making your decision, please do not hesitate to phone me at (250) 753-3245, Local 2774, or e-mail me at martinm@mala.bc.ca, or the research assistant, Keri Blacker, at (250) 741-0262 (email: keriisallino@netscape.com).

I look forward to hearing from you. I think this project will not only allow us as a group to have a powerful voice in academic circles, but will also allow us as Native women to spend time together talking about some of the issues important to us.

Sincerely,

Mélody Martin

Yes, I would like to participate in this project.

No, I am unable to/do not care to participate in this project.

If you have decided to participate, please provide the following:

Full Name _____

Address _____

Signature _____

APPENDIX C:

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Please Note: These are the questions that will be asked during your interview. You do not need to answer them prior to your interview.

Demographic Information

1. Where do you presently reside (do not provide your specific address)? How long have you lived there?
2. Where did you live previously?
3. Age?
4. To what First Nation do you belong? To what band? (Note: You may leave this question unanswered, if you wish)
5. In what area(s) of study are you seeking to earn a BA?

Information regarding Native women's studies courses

1. Which women's studies courses do you remember as most significant, either positively or negatively?
 - a. What were those courses like?
 - b. What subject matters did they involve?
 - c. What did you experience that was significant to you?
2. How do you view the relationship between Native women's studies courses and your cultural background or positioning?
 - a. Does it influence your relationships (positively or negatively) with family? Friends? Community?

APPENDIX D:

QUESTIONS FOR FOCUS GROUPS

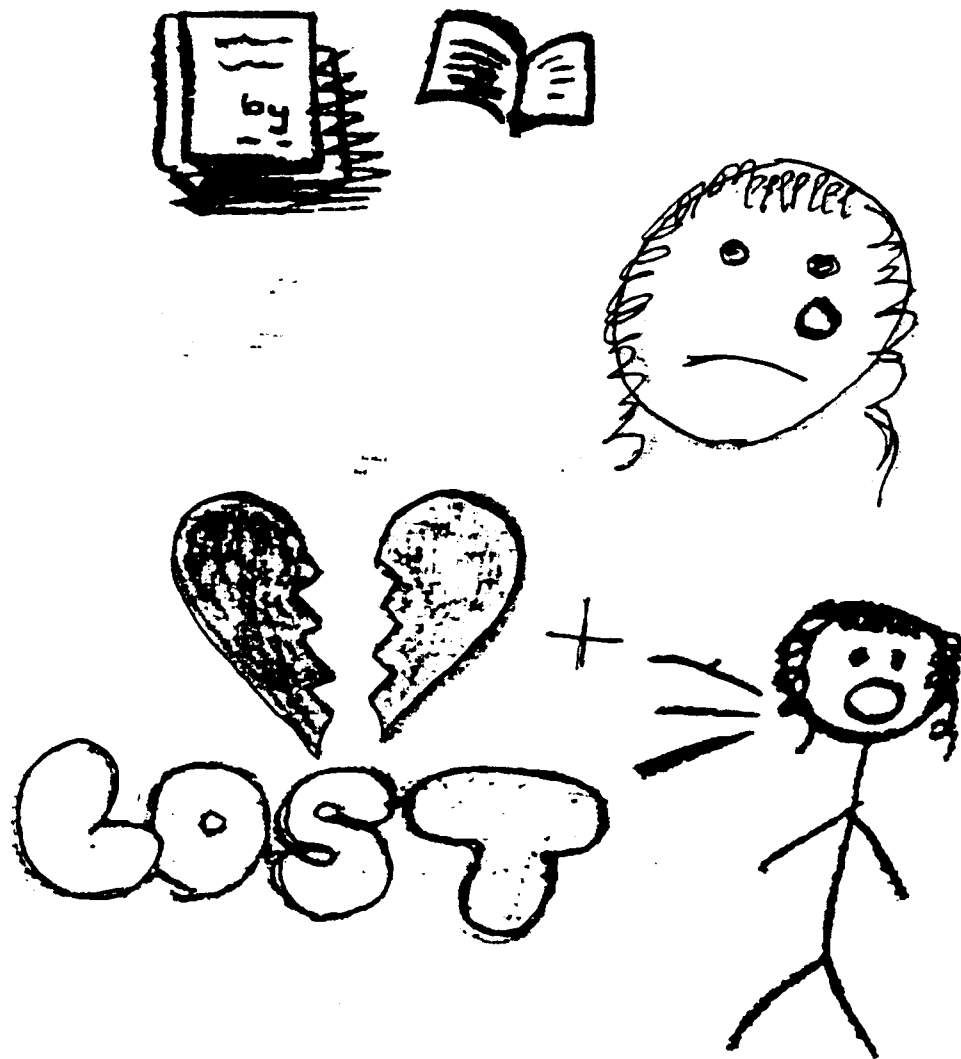
1. What expectations did you have before entering your first native women's studies course? What was the outcome of those expectations?
2. What words/terms/concepts presented in these courses do you see as helpful to Native women attempting to describe their experiences? Where are there gaps?
3. What might you say to another native woman to encourage her about Native Women's Studies? What might you say to caution her? (Note: For this question, participants are asked to represent their responses with paper and acrylics, and then to describe it to the rest of the group.)

APPENDIX E:

SAMPLES OF DRAWINGS FROM FOCUS GROUPS

The following pages provide a few examples of the participants/ drawings in response to the following two questions: What might you say to another Native woman to encourage her about Native Women's Studies? What might you say to caution her? Below each drawing is the transcription of her oral response. Note that the original drawings were done with acrylics, and here they have been reduced in size in order to fit on the page. All drawings have been reproduced with the oral consent of the participants.

SAMPLE 1



Rabbit: Well, the top left is supposed to be a book. Because there's lots of homework in women's studies. *(laughter)* There's lots of reading. And not only that. It's stressful to read, because there's lots to read. But sometimes people don't want to read, because it's too sad or it hits close to home. And that tear, because it hits close to home for a lot of women. Or, you know, they're in shock because they can't believe what women went through. That heartbreak... that's always the same thing. That's the one telling the story, and someone's heart's breaking. In our very last women's studies class, we did a group thing and then we heard someone talk. I was kind of sad because I thought of my mom, and she died and everything...so it's kind of heartbreaking to listen to other women's stories. And

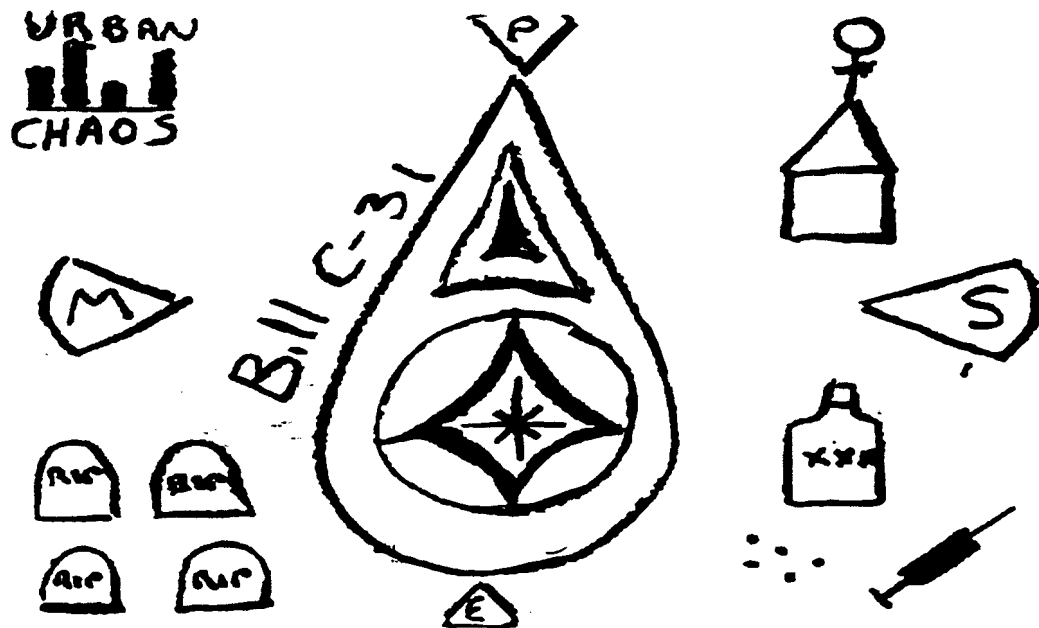
the word "lost" is from stories out there that you don't or you can't hear. There's no documentation.

SAMPLE 2



Eagle: Mine represents the division. And I was looking for something to do a complete circle. I wanted to do a complete circle. I couldn't find anything on the table, so I thought, "It isn't really a complete circle." Because I have to pull that circle together myself. I can learn all I want to learn, but I still have to pull the circle together myself, and throw off what I don't want, and take what I want. The woman's mouth is black in the center. And that's because of all that we're going to share as time goes on. And we don't know what's going to come up. It's just there and eventually it's going to come out. I have one eye closed sort of and one eye open because when you go into the women's studies, you go in with your eyes wide open thinking, "This is really great!" And then you kind of go, "Ok. I think I should use a bit of caution." "I think I should watch what I do in there." I felt I had to be really cautious with what I was saying. And it really angered me too, because I thought that's what I was here for, was to share, you know, and to learn. But it's not like that. So I have one eye wide open and one eye half closed. So I really have to be cautious as a First Nation woman...what you share in a western academic institution. I'm saying because as there is professors, there is also elders-in-residence who don't appreciate sometimes what you share. So I have half and half there and I go, "The sun always rises. Don't ever get so

discouraged, because the sun always rises and there's always another day." I like the owl too. To me it represents the new life and the beginning of a new day. And the bottom part is done in gray, and that just represents our womanness...part of the moon.



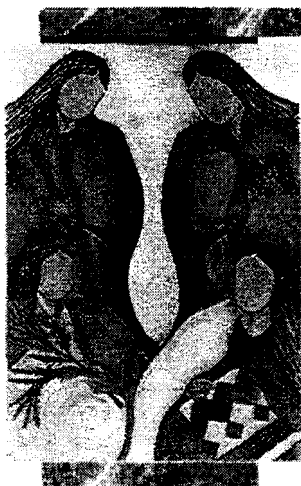
Phoenix Rising: Talk about my caution. It's about the dismemberment. And when you go into the First Nations [women's] studies program, you get to see how the women were dismembered by the government. One example there is Bill C-31, and the church, and the women's symbol and the cross there. They were dismembered by residential school and churches, and the alcohol, the drugs, the death, urban chaos. Like where a lot of first nations people have gone into from their reserves to the cities. And I've been lost in those places. I saw a lot of that in the writings and the readings that we did. And I have a big tear. That's about myself. I went to a lot places with tears and anger. And when I'm angry, I cry. And it's so hard, and when I'm really pissed off, I cry. BIG tears...the great big tear, right? And the dismemberment I have about the circle...the physical, the spiritual, the emotional, the mental. They're dismembered, right? There's systematic dismemberment. And that's what that represents. It's like they're not fragmented. It's like it was just an accident that First Nations women got fragmented. [This is] to show that it was on purpose. And that's what I came to know. And what I caution is that you need to know that when you go in, you will need help. First Nations women were dismembered, and isn't pretty, and with that knowledge you will know how to take care of yourself. You will know that you need to take of yourself. Whether that means therapy or make sure your support systems are really strong when you go in. Because when you go in, your eyes will be opened up to, you know, not only the good things, but also the really harsh reality of the abuse that happened to women, and the abuse...the systematic abuse, right? I don't believe in accidents of abuse. There was systematic abuse that happened by the government and churches. I saw that

through the program. And the symptoms of that is the death and the drink, and what they call DD in our society...just a symptom of what really happened to us. I have a star in there. I love the stars. In the darkness, you will see the light. And in the darkness, there is always a glimmer of hope. And all of this darkness is so important. It's important to know what happened. And that's where the hope is. If you understand that it was systematic, then maybe you can do something about it...to change it, to bring it back. So that's the caution.

APPENDIX F:**SAMPLES OF NEWSLETTERS**

Following are copies of three of the seven newsletters sent to the participants over the course of the project—one for each of the years 2001, 2002, 2003—and reproduced with permission of the Native Women's Research Project. The originals are in color. As well, the copies have been reduced in size in order to fit on the page.

Sample 1



NATIVE WOMEN'S RESEARCH PROJECT

December 14, 2001

Volume 1, Issue 3

First Nation Womyn

Dreamers of visions, songs, medicine
 She holds history in her hands
 Dances with grace purpose
 Strong powerful flow
 Voices Wisdom sent into the universe
 Chants, drums, songs of strength and change
 Ancient healers, steady hands
 Vibrant colors woven, painted, printed, carved
 Marks of destiny
 Keepers of fires, embers glowing sparks flying

Heat transformed.....Love
 Leaders, Teachers, Mothers of
 Knowledge Shared stories
 Growth, success, failure, pain, laughter
 Womyn Warriors making new paths.

Jane Kwaklamahk Marston, 2001

Inside this issue:

First Nation Womyn:
 Logo and Poem

Word Warring:
 Trying to Make it a
 Win-Win

Keri's Two Bits

Of Special Note

Artist Jane Marston has painted and given us permission to use the beautiful picture above as our logo. Her accompanying poem tells the story of the painting. Many thanks to her for this wonderful contribution to the project.

Contact Information

• **Melody:** Tel: 248-3951 or
 marston@msns.bc.ca

• **Keri:** Tel: 741-5262 or
 kerib@msns.net

Word Warring: Trying to Make it a Win-Win

*T*hings are moving along here.

Transcriptions are almost finished, and I've done a good deal of analysis (although there is *much* more to do). Some days I feel like I'm fighting with words, trying to pin them down on paper and make them say what I think they should say, while at the same time trying not to dominate them completely. I wonder how many of you are smiling now, thinking of me agonizing over this.

Naming

*A*fter receiving feedback on the draft writing I sent out, I realize now that most of you will recognize your own words, and probably the words of many others. It makes me laugh; I should have known better than to think I could keep the aliases from you! Therefore, after consultation with my supervisor and careful consideration of some of the negative implications of naming other people, I

have decided to ask each of you to provide me with the name that *you* would like to have attached to your words. Please let me know what you decide. I'm curious to see what you will choose!

*T*here's something else to think about. In the beginning, because I wanted to maintain at least some confidentiality, I did not intend to introduce each of you individually naming your First Nation, where you live, and your age. Now this bothers me. It seems to represent you as disembodied voices rather than real people. I have worked out a possible way to introduce you without indicating your name nor matching your alias to your personal information. You will receive a draft of my idea. I will be interested to see if you think that it is acceptable and in keeping with the confidentiality agreement.

Writing the oral

♀ have also received feedback

from quite a few of you regarding the way that I have tried to keep your styles of speech as intact as possible without making it too confusing. Generally, the opinion seems positive for keeping the particular styles. I have made concessions, however, especially in terms of eliminating some of the repetitive words and hesitations.

Sending drafts

*B*ecause the sections of writing are becoming increasingly large (and therefore costly to duplicate), those of you who have e-mail will receive them that way. Those of you without access to e-mail will receive them in concentrated print form by regular mail. If you have an e-mail address and haven't let me know, please do so, o.k.?

♀ wish you all happy and safe holidays!

Melody

Keri's Two Bits

*L*ast month I sent out questionnaires to all of you. Let me know if you did not receive one. Thank you to those of you that have responded so quickly. I hope to hear from many others early in the new year.

♀ am so close to the end of the transcribing that I can see the end of the last tape. I have a couple more interviews to do and once those are transcribed, I will be done. I am so grateful for this experience. It has been an

honour to have this part in the project. Your thoughts, honesty, and insight are formidable.

♀ thank you for your words.

Keri

Sample 2

Volume 2
Issue 2
May 2002

Native Women's Research Project



Getting Down to it



*H*ello everyone! Although it's been a while since we've sent out a newsletter, it hasn't been because of lack of thinking about you! I spent a couple of months in the States with my family. It felt so good to be with them. I

was able to continue my work in between visits. I finished a chapter on methodology, and then got down to the really serious business of hands-on work with the hundreds of pages of interview transcripts. I have used excerpts from the transcripts to create thematic discussions. The discussions are on nine themes: academia, feminism, language, community, non Natives, and hard feelings. I

have included with this letter or by email five of these discussions: academia, feminism, language, non Natives and positioning. I have not yet finished the analysis, so it is not included; but right now it is more important that you read the discussions and make

any comments you wish, especially if you have concerns about any of your words that I have used. I have done a small amount of editing by taking out filler words and repetitions, but I have tried to leave most syntax and vocabulary intact.

*M*y analysis of the discussions will not be exactly conventional. I attempt to avoid the trap of speaking for or about you. I hope to supplement rather than interpret what you say. As Trinh T. Minh-ha says, I ~~don't want to speak~~ about or for you. I want to speak beside you.

*T*hose of you who provided me with your choice of names will find can probably pick them-

selves out. If you want to know your alias, just ask us. You can still provide us with your own alias if you wish.

*W*e have contacted you regarding a general meeting and potluck on June 1 to discuss the content of the final report and plans for the future. I hope

you will come! It will be the first time we have had a chance to be together as a large group. ~~The~~ more thing. This fall, I will teach a women's studies course on First Nations women and identity. I would very much like to give the students the opportunity to read at least three of the thematic discussions (positioning, feminism and non Natives). It's powerful stuff, and there are no other readings like it. I will be asking your permission to print those three discussions (with no analysis) just for the course. I will also hope to get some of you to come and talk to these students during the course. I have been moved by the things you have said, and ~~you did have the same~~ would have been my experience. I hope you will agree.

I will send the other 4 discussions within 10 days, and the analysis will follow. Thank you all for your participation and patience!

Melody

Please let us know if...

- You have a name you wish to include in the final transcripts.
- You have questions or concerns about any of your words that you see printed.

Contact Information

- Melody: Tel: 248-3951 or melody@nwa.bc.ca
- Ker: Tel: 741-0262 or ker@nwa.net

Keri's Two Bits



*T*ime seems to have vanished as graduation is almost here. Thanks in part to all of you I have finished my BA in First

Nations Studies. I presented my BA paper on research methods and First Nations women and it was great, although just the tip of what was possible. When we meet I will make a short present-

tation so you can hear the highlights of my findings.

*T*here are no words that completely express what I have gained from this

opportunity. Just know that it has had a profound impact and I want to acknowledge your part in that.

Keri

Sample 3



Native Women's Research Project



It's About Time

15 April 2003

Volume 3, Issue 1

*H*ello all,

Yes, it's about time. Since the last newsletter, I started back to work in September, and since then, time has become my constant worry. Although I was very happy to get back to teaching (I had a great group of students this year), my work on the project during the fall semester was seriously limited. Since January, however, I have been able to get back on a faster track. I am in the process of finishing up the writing of my dissertation. I am supposed to be ready to defend next fall, but I should be finished with the writing by the end of the summer. Did you ever imagine it would take this long?

Once the writing is finished and approved, you will each receive a copy of the report, as promised. I was not able to use all the interview ma-

terial in my dissertation (my supervisors told me it would be much too long). I don't intend to have the dialogues stay on the shelf, however. They are much too valuable. Once my dissertation is finished, I will continue, with your permission and help, to work with them.

During the fall semester, two of the dialogues were printed in a reader for a Native Women's Studies course I taught. As well, several of you were able to come to the class to talk about them with the students. It was a powerful experience for the women in the course. Several of them said that they felt the dialogues were among the most "real" and relevant things that they read from the course. One woman said that after reading the dialogues, she desperately wanted to talk with each of you!

In the meantime, I ask each of you to send to me a few lines about what you are doing currently. In the next newsletter, I will print your news instead of just mine. I think it's important for us to find ways to continue to encourage each other, and to have some concrete way to show the world that we are surviving and thriving as Native women.

You can send me your update by email, letter or by voicemail. It won't take long, and it will mean a great deal to all of us who are in the project. Do It! (please).

Melody

P.S. Below is a short report on the current activities of 6 of the women from the project and myself.



Carrying On

You may remember that last summer I invited any of you who were interested to join with me to write up an article on our project. Several of you responded and we began in September to meet once a month. Some of you, due to heavy workloads and other responsibilities were not able to continue after a few months, but six of us remain.

Imagine six strong-willed Na-

tive women collaborating on one piece of writing. We laugh, yell, and try to make each other crazy, but we are still there. The process is very slow, but we are convinced that we will succeed.

In May, we have been invited to give a short presentation at a Women's History Network conference about the collaborative aspects of the project. We are now preparing for that and will give you a report after.

We intend to continue with other plans for writing and presenting. Is anyone else interested in joining our dynamic group? In any case, we will keep you updated on our doings.

Below, we sign a Hulqui'minum name for the group, meaning approximately "Strong women"

Kwam-kwam Blankani

Contact Information

• Melody: Tel: 248-3951 or

meltime@msd.bc.ca

• Kai: Tel: 741-0262 or

kazib@shaw.net

Since the last newsletter, one of the participants in the project has passed to the other side. The loss of this brilliant and talented young woman has reminded many of us of the important work that lays before us in terms of making the world a welcoming and safe place for Native women. May our grief become the positive

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