Urban Aboriginal Youth in Winnipeg:
Culture and Identity Formation in Cities

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Executive Summary

The Aboriginal population in Winnipeg is much younger than the non-Aboriginal population which has heightened interest in designing efficient and effective systems for delivering services and programs designed to aid Aboriginal youth in their identity development. This study is a formal assessment of what socio-cultural variables influence Aboriginal urban youth identity development and culture retention in the city of Winnipeg as we gauge the interests, preferences and factors that influence the formation of culture and identity among urban Aboriginal youth (15-24 yrs). The primary questions we elaborate upon are: 1) What influences are the youth drawing upon in the development and continuation of their identity? 2) Do the youth have resources in the city or beyond the urban setting that they draw upon to aid in the development of their identity? 3) How do youth retain their identity in an urban environment? and, 4) What makes Aboriginal identity so resilient?

Twenty youth were interviewed and took place in focus groups. All were forthcoming and provided the research team with their perspectives on identity construction and culture retention that by all accounts appeared to be well-informed, perceptive and critically focussed. And, in keeping with the mandate of this project, which was to present an Aboriginal perspective of the issues, this report will present the beliefs and feelings of these opinion leaders as we begin to formally evaluate the collected data.

Our findings are as follows. Half of the respondents claimed that they remained in close contact with one or more of their grandparents, who were also cited as important contacts when it came to passing on cultural teachings. Both discussion circles illustrated that the youth were frustrated at not having anyone to speak with who had experience with the urban acculturation process. All of the youth listed their peers as influencing their identity development in significant ways, and the participants did not claim close friendships with individuals who were not Aboriginal. It appears that the opinion leaders believe there are sufficient inner-city resources available to aid in their identity development. Programs, workshops, and the large urban Aboriginal population were all presented as major influences positively impacting upon their identity.

The reserves on the whole were considered a potentially negative influence or were generally viewed as places where alcoholism was rampant and violence the norm. Both discussion circles focussed prominently on three ideas: 1) the perceived lack of Aboriginal identity on reserve; and, 2) the negative influence formal politics is having upon those communities; and, 3) how people comprehend their role in the community. The majority of respondents failed to recognize the reserve as a repository of culture able to further aid their identity development even though they simultaneously claimed elders who lived on-reserve were the true cultural teachers. Seventeen of the youth believed their sense of identity profited by living in the city because of the availability of social programs. The number of peers available to socially interact with was also viewed as a key reason to stay in the city.

The opinion leaders were not very positive about politics in the urban setting and all were unanimous in their vilification of both politics and politicians, principally because they do not believe there are effective candidates to represent their interests as Aboriginal people. Each participant articulated that they would not vote in formal elections on or off reserve due to what they perceive to be a lack of qualified candidates and current political leaders who are unable to relate to their needs. Of the youth who were legally permitted to vote, all stated that they would not cast a ballot in the upcoming municipal election or future federal elections.

Most of the respondents rarely left the city to participate in cultural events, although the majority did not claim lack of funds to be the reason. Resources utilized to enhance identity development were quite varied and included the Internet, academic and non-fiction books, magazines and newspapers, movies, television and radio. The Internet was mentioned by 13 of the participants as a primary resource they regularly employ to find out information about Aboriginal culture and history. Chat lines were also quite popular and permitted youth from various reaches of the city (and beyond) to engage in discussion and debate.

More specifically, the youth did not consider mainstream movies, television, and radio as educational media to employ for identity development, but books (fiction and non-fiction), mainstream newspapers and the Aboriginal press, and movies that contained significant Aboriginal content were regularly accessed to guide the participants' education about contemporary and historical issues. However, for educating themselves about cross-cultural relations in Canada, the participants employed material that could be considered quite disturbing even if it did convey the reality of the situation.

The 20 participants demonstrated an awareness that suggests they are able to clearly delineate between what sources of information are most beneficial to their sense of self and what information they encounter that has little probative value in relation to their identity development. The youth are cognizant of the role the media plays by consistently portraying Aboriginal culture negatively. The participants also indicated that they did not relate to popular culture icons as readily as they did to cultural groups such as the Maori and Africans. Another cultural group the youth were able to identify with was the Afghanis.

We asked the question, "Can Aboriginal identity flourish in an urban environment?" All of the participants unanimously responded yes, albeit with certain caveats attached. For instance, all of the respondents indicated that racism is at times an impediment to positive identity development and that there was currently a lack of programs available to facilitate a positive sense of self. The participants were almost evenly split between those who equated Aboriginal culture with what they could call traditional pursuits (smudging, dancing, and attending powwows) and those who associated culture retention and identity development with attending university or becoming involved with programs designed to assist urban Aboriginal youth. The youth also believe that they are best suited to assist non-Aboriginal society in better understanding urban Aboriginal people.

The majority of the respondents when not in school remained at home with friends and family or became involved with social groups that are focussed on the needs of Aboriginal youth. More than 90 per cent of the questionnaire respondents indicated that racism was an issue they

believed influenced their sense of self and each of the 20 discussion circle participants indicated that they had at one time witnessed directly an overtly racist act or heard first-hand commentary that was racist in scope.

Curiously even though the youth indicated previously that there are currently sufficient programs in place to aid their identity construction, respondents from both discussion circles also made reference to the lack of programs available in Winnipeg, generating somewhat conflicting opinions. Participants in both discussion groups indicated that they had Internet access or a close acquaintance online that would allow them computer access. Respondents also stated that email and/or a website would be an effective tool to promote youth programs in Winnipeg.

In all, the opinion leaders indicate that Aboriginal youth appear to separate the events they participate in into two categories: traditional Aboriginal pursuits that may influence identity; and, those they consider specifically aid identity construction in the urban setting. Identity appears to be informed by their perception of what Aboriginal culture represents which is then adapted to suit their ever changing urban needs as these youth reinvent themselves to better negotiate that environment.

PART ONE

1.1   Background

Commissioned by Canadian Heritage, *Urban Aboriginal Youth in Winnipeg: Culture and Identity Formation in Cities* is a formal assessment of what socio-cultural variables influence urban Aboriginal youth identity development and culture retention in the city of Winnipeg. A four-member research team consisting of one non-Aboriginal project leader, a Metis project manager, and two Aboriginal researchers conducted interviews and held two formal discussion circles with 20 Aboriginal youth in Winnipeg in order to discern what influences Aboriginal youth identity development in the urban environment.

1.2   Study Mandate

In this study, we gauge the interests, preferences and factors that influence the formation of identity and culture retention among urban Aboriginal youth (15-24 yrs) the intent being that the research results will guide policy makers to better respond to the cultural realities of this important demographic group. Statistics demonstrate that currently 49 per cent of Canadian Aboriginal people live in urban centers and existing trends indicate that there is an Aboriginal baby-boom under way. The average age of the Aboriginal population is just under 25-years-old compared to 37.7 years-of-age for Canadians in general. Consequently, as the growing number of Aboriginal youth becomes increasingly urbanized, questions concerning culture retention and identity development within this environment arise. The primary questions investigated are:

1)   What influences are the youth drawing upon in the development and continuation of their identity?
2)   Do the youth have resources in the city or beyond the urban setting that they draw upon to aid in the development of their identity?
3)   How do youth retain their identity in an urban environment?
4)   What makes Aboriginal identity so resilient?

A distinctive feature of this study is that the results are based primarily upon the views and attitudes of Aboriginal people. By "Aboriginal people," we mean any one of the three legally-defined culture groups that form what is known as Aboriginal peoples in Canada (Metis, Inuit, and Indian) and who self-identify as such. Our intention from the beginning was to gain an Aboriginal perspective on the interests, preferences and factors that influence the formation of culture and identity among Aboriginal youth in Winnipeg's urban environment.

In Part One of the study, we outline the research mandate and explain the significance of to the project. After presenting current demographics, our methodology is then outlined and each step of the research process summarized. An evaluation of researchers' assumptions and how these opinions were fully considered and integrated into our research agenda prior to any data collection is included. A brief discussion then follows regarding capacity building and what steps were taken to ensure the Aboriginal researchers were trained with the necessary skills for this project that could be carried over and applied to future research endeavours.

Part Two is a respondent-guided general discussion of the key themes that emerged during the discussion circles and three of the four questions listed above are dealt with separately. In Part Three, we engage in our analyses detailing how Aboriginal identity formation and cultural retention is directly influenced. Part Four presents a number of recommendations that the participants believed should be implemented to better aid Aboriginal youth in their identity development within the urban Winnipeg environment. All data collections tools are included in the appendices.

1.3   Winnipeg's Aboriginal Population – Demographics

The province of Manitoba and the city of Winnipeg have a relatively large Aboriginal population both of which are growing more rapidly than the non-Aboriginal population. Manitoba's Aboriginal population is largely urban (49%), which corresponds with the Canadian national average, whereas 35 per cent of Manitoba's Aboriginal population lives on a reserve (Statistics Canada 2003a). According to the Manitoba Bureau of Statistics (1997), it is expected that by 2016 greater than 40 per cent of the provincial Aboriginal population will be living in Winnipeg and that the overall reserve population rate will drop to 23 per cent. The Manitoba Aboriginal population is also significantly younger than the non-Aboriginal population and will remain so in the foreseeable future. Existing projections anticipate that the urban Aboriginal youth population will continue to grow steadily, suggesting that the majority of Aboriginal youth in Manitoba will be forced to develop their sense of identity within Winnipeg's confines.

Location of Manitoba's Aboriginal Population, 2001

On Reserve: 52065
Rural non-Reserve: 24875
Urban: 73100
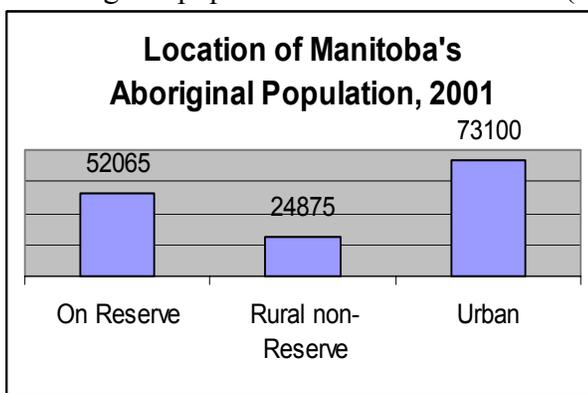
Just seven years ago the province of Manitoba contained a higher proportion of Aboriginal people than any other province in Canada at 11.7 per cent. However 2001 census figures indicate that Ontario (19.3%), B.C. (17.4%) and Alberta (16%) now rank ahead of Manitoba (15.4%) in per capita Aboriginal population figures (Statistics Canada 2003c, 23). Winnipeg continues to claim the highest Aboriginal population of any other Canadian city totalling 55,755 (Ibid. 23). Winnipeg's Aboriginal population is also growing rapidly: in 1981, for example, the population was 16,575, a total that has increased by 39,180 during the last two decades. Aboriginal people now constitute 8.4 per cent of Winnipeg's total population of 661,730 (Ibid. 23).

The Aboriginal population in Winnipeg is also considerably younger, mirroring current national trends, and is increasing at a rate of 1.87 per cent annually due to the effects of an existing baby-boom. A comparison of provincial trends indicates that the Aboriginal population is growing six times faster than Manitoba's non-Aboriginal population. Of the 55,755 Aboriginal people living in Winnipeg, 10,585 (19%) are between the age of 15-24. The average age for Canadians is 37.7 years whereas the national level for Aboriginal people is 24.7. The Manitoba population is slightly younger at just under 23 years of age (Statistics Canada 2003c, 7). Finally, 38 per cent of the Manitoba Aboriginal population is under the age of 14 (Statistics Canada 2003b).

The Métis and Inuit are considered also to be Aboriginal peoples according to Sec. 35(1) of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, and make-up a significant portion of the Manitoba Aboriginal population. Provincially 56,795 people reported Métis identity in 2001, which represent 19.4 per cent of the overall Canadian Métis population (Statistics Canada 2003c, 25). The Winnipeg Métis population alone is listed at 31,395 and the number of Métis youth currently totals 5,195, representing 17 per cent of the overall provincial Métis population (Ibid. 14). Greater than 55 per cent of the Manitoba Métis population resides in an urban area, which is a higher percentage than the Aboriginal population in general. Provincial statistics indicate that 540 Inuit live in Manitoba and only 25 Inuit youth reside in Winnipeg (Statistics Canada 2003b).

Aboriginal Youth in Winnipeg, 2001

4920		5195	
	35		435
Indian	Inuit	Metis	Aboriginal (other)
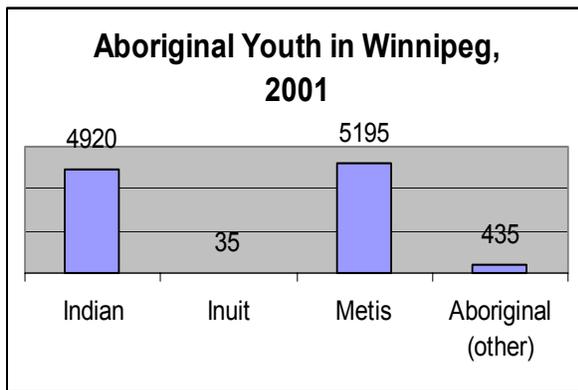
Current trends suggest that the Aboriginal population will remain relatively young in comparison to the Canadian non-Aboriginal population. In Winnipeg alone, there are currently 10,680 Aboriginal people between the age 15-24 and an additional 21,295, representing 38 per cent of the urban Aboriginal population, who are under the age of 14 (Statistics Canada 2003b). In all, 57 per cent of the contemporary Winnipeg Aboriginal population is under the age of 24 suggesting that Aboriginal youth will be for some time an important demographic group. Statistics for the Métis also correspond to the aforementioned trends. We are able to conclude that the majority of Aboriginal youth in Manitoba are developing their sense of self within the boundaries of Winnipeg's city limits.

1.4   Aboriginal Identity Development

Metis scholar Olive Patricia Dickason (1992) wrote of Aboriginal identity, "If any one theme can be traced back throughout the history of Canada's Amerindians, it is the persistence of their identity" (Ibid. 419). Concepts of identity and identity-construction are abstract in nature and are as difficult to define as they are to deconstruct for ease of understanding. Investigations are methodologically formidable which may explain why the literature on Aboriginal identity is sparse. Within this limited information on Aboriginal identity is a slowly expanding literature base on Aboriginal youth identity construction. The foundation decreases considerably when we turn our attention to investigating the issue of urban Aboriginal youth identity formation and its varied exigencies.

The urban environment is an intimidating arena to study Aboriginal youth identity due to the multiple influences young people face everyday, where "culture values and the influence of acculturation as a mediating factor in the process of identity development is of critical importance" (Garret 1996, 5; see also Davis Jackson 2001, Deyhle 1992, Fixico 2000, Hornett 1990, Sanders 1987). Despite the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People's (RCAP) failing by associating identity strictly with a rural setting i.e. identity flows specifically from the reserve/land base, it is currently estimated that close to 50 per cent of all Aboriginal people in Canada reside in urban centres and that research must be conducted to investigate this ever-

growing demographic and their concepts of identity (see, for example, Alfred 1996, Gilchrist 1996, Garrett 1996, Mihesuah 1998, Weaver 2001, Wiggins 1997, Applegate Krouse 1999).

Examining urban Aboriginal identity development is difficult due to the fact that, within an urban environment, acculturation of some sort must take place which impacts upon identity development (see, for example, Berry *et al* 1987, 1989, Zimmerman *et al* 1996). Acculturation processes influence Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth and how they define themselves as individuals but also their social, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual well-being (Cummins 1992, Little Soldier 1985, Mitchum 1989, Tierney 1992). However, since an individual can develop a sense of belonging to two cultures without compromising his or her sense of cultural identity (LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton 1993), Aboriginal youth must find ways to satisfy the "need for purpose" through a sense of belonging and independence, mastery and generosity (Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern 1990). They must also begin to identify what constitutes their identity, how to support these concepts, and how to retain these positive influences.

Historically, urbanization was promoted by the political agenda of assimilation that has been the "central pillar to Canadian Indian policy" (Ponting 1986, 25). Beginning in the early sixties, migration to urban centres was significant and increased to levels comparable to migration levels of the non-Aboriginal population by the mid-eighties (Siggner 1986). In what ways does this new environment affect identity development? Speaking to the urban Indian experience in the United States, Wiggins (1997) suggested that "the newly expanded operating culture contributed to a changed personal identity with the interweaving of different cultural patterns" (167).

In this instance, cultural identity reflects the cultural standards that "gives and individual a sense of a common past and of a shared identity" (Green 1995, 7). Accordingly, Aboriginal cultural identity "implies both that such an identity is actually a part of an Aboriginal person's current self-perception, and that it has its roots in Aboriginal experiences" (Berry 1996). Yet this shared identity often "challenges the messages and models of an essentially assimilationist society" which in turn leads to internal conflicts among Aboriginal people (Nieto 1992). It is this sense of identity and the conflicts that one faces asserting this identity among urban Aboriginal youth that requires explication.

Almost all studies to date investigating Aboriginal youth concepts of identity employ comparative frameworks (see Blue, Corenblum, and Annis 1987, Corenblum and Annis 1987, Gohier and Schleiffer 1993, Hunsberger 1976, Lefley 1975, Rosenthal 1974). This is a drawback for youth who oftentimes gauge their own sense of self-worth with other available reference groups (Spencer 1982), which in this case is majority non-Aboriginal society. This can lead to instances where study participants attempt to "leave" their group for a more valued social placement (Yee and Brown 1992). The means of achieving a positive identity occurs when belonging to a group is not valued within the larger culture (see Tajfel and Turner 1979).

Researchers have discussed the significance of early adulthood as a time of rapid change occurring in physical, cognitive, and social growth (Bryde 1972, Erickson 1963, Erickson 1968, Muuss 1988, Smith 1991, Sprinthall 1988). Adolescence has been characterized as the stage "of identity versus confusion" (Erickson 1968) when a child begins to locate his or her place in the social environment (Parham 1989). These environments are multiple, but the home environment

is where children first learn the values (Erickson 1968) that during adolescence are modified as they create an identity while attempting to conform to the norms of peers groups (Parham 1989, 195). According to one Canadian psychologist, "One of the major developmental tasks facing these children is the integration of diverse and often conflicting sources of information into a unified sense of self" (Corenblum 1996, 83). The question we are faced with is how among urban Aboriginal youth identity evolves and what they perceive to be the key elements that coalesce during identity formation.

The conclusions generated by the majority of the studies reviewed to this point are discouraging in the sense that no taxonomy exists by which to evaluate effectively what components combine to establish Aboriginal identity. Furthermore, the conclusions of the aforementioned studies are generally limited. Even more disappointing is that the conclusions produced in these studies have been gleaned from tests that were created in the sterile confines of the university; more accurately, they have been developed without the influence of Indigenous methodologies. We must recognize that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal world views are divergent and that Aboriginal youth view their surrounding environment differently from their non-Aboriginal counterparts which can directly influence researchers' findings.

In all, the tests generated by western-trained scholars do have something to offer, but should be employed minimally among Aboriginal youth. A comparative research format was not deemed the best approach for available research demonstrates that children of minority groups tend to generate favourable viewpoints of children from majority groups. These studies represent important first steps to better understanding what informs Aboriginal youth identity construction. The goal now is to generate responses regarding what urban Aboriginal youth believe is integral to their positive identity formation, how these variables came to be, in addition to methods of how to effectively promote and retain these constituents.

According to Newhouse (2000, 2002), two factors that will have a profound effect upon Aboriginal societies is the reinforcement of Aboriginal identities and the evolution of an Aboriginal consciousness that is able to withstand the forces of urbanization and assimilation (405). In short, this project will seek to elaborate upon the experiences of Aboriginal youth in Winnipeg concerning influences upon their identity and cultural development. There is a paucity of literature in the field. We do recognize that identity is a composite of factors such as race, gender, class, education, religion, and region and thereby difficult to define according to existing studies (Dukes and Martinez 1997, Grandbois and Schadt 1994, Krotz 1980, McCaskill 1981, Peroff 1997, Peters 2000) which in turn results in identities constantly fragmenting, reforming, and changing over time (Hall 1996). Cultural identity is not static and needs to be treated accordingly (Weaver 2001, 244).

1.5   Methodology

Following a preliminary literature review which indicated minimal secondary sources to draw from, the research team agreed that the model best suited for this project was the discussion circle: a research method that is holistic and exploratory in nature and can incorporate a variety of data collection techniques. It was concluded that the findings from the discussion circles

would be triangulated against data collected from open-ended interviews, general discussions, academic literature, and available case studies to enhance reliability.

Our primary concern was to ensure validity, which is the measure by which the participants can identify with the findings. Validity is deemed integral to the success of such studies. To guarantee internal validity, two Aboriginal researchers who had past experience working with urban Aboriginal youth were employed to guide the creation, development, and implementation of the project. The primary training method utilized to prepare the research assistants was Participatory Action Research (PAR) which entails the researchers entering the community as part of a broader research initiative for the purposes of collecting data, encouraging academics and participants to become partners in the research by empowering disenfranchised people. The strengths of all involved are drawn upon resulting in community involvement from problem definition through research design and data interpretation (Simpson 1998). In sum, by focusing efforts on community involvement, PAR seeks to transform the researcher/subject paradigm by including the research participants in the overall decision-making process. This allows community concerns to prevail.

Data collection proceeded in three stages. First, a questionnaire was delivered to 106 urban Aboriginal youth (53 male/53 female) in Winnipeg between 15-24 years of age (APPENDIX A). The questionnaires were designed and delivered by the two Aboriginal researchers in concert with the project manager. The goal was to have the respondents qualify (from an Aboriginal perspective) what variables they believe most influenced their identity development. These data were then compiled, reviewed and the major trends and themes extrapolated. The themes and trends then provided the research team with the insight required to develop the discussion circle question booklets, which contained a total of 27 questions/areas that we wished to investigate further (APPENDIX B). The data generated by the questionnaires was not utilized for comparative purposes in our analyses due to the small sample size, which was deemed insufficient to be considered representative. The questionnaire was nevertheless an effective tool that provided the research team with insight regarding what issues would require further investigation in the discussion circles.

The second phase of the data collection involved conducting personal interviews with 30 volunteers from whom 20 participants were selected to take part in two discussion circles. Each interview was conducted according to a pre-determined script. In all, 11 males and 9 females aged 15-24 who self-identified as Metis, Inuit, or Indian were chosen to participate. After the discussion circle groups were chosen, a brief follow-up interview was conducted with each participant at which time their rights and responsibilities were outlined. This was done to build trust and to collect basic data such as participant's age, home and school situation, parental status, to name a few fields of inquiry. Copies of the discussion circle question booklets were distributed prior to the groups meeting to better prepare the participants for the forthcoming exchange of ideas. Volunteers who were under the age of 18 were required to obtain permission from their parent or legal guardian to participate (APPENDIX C).

The discussion circles represented the final stage of the data gathering phase and followed a general format whereby the researchers posed questions from the booklet, which was used by the researchers contained the major themes and questions we sought to investigate. Each person who

took part in the discussion groups was provided with a $50 honorarium as an expression of our appreciation for the time they provided and in honour of the knowledge they made available to us.

1.6   Participant Profile

To ensure a representative sample of youth, the Aboriginal researchers invited a number of local organizations to participate in selecting appropriate volunteers to answer our questionnaire and take part in the discussion circles. These organizations included the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, the Manitoba Metis Federation, and the Louis Riel Institute, all of which have youth committees. The Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg, which is a political body that investigates issues affecting Urban Aboriginal people, was contacted as was Otetoma, a program operated through Partners for Careers, an umbrella organization focussed on mentoring young women living in the city who are starting life skills training, seeking their GED, and in search of employment.

We approached officials from Gordon Bell High School, which has a large number of Aboriginal youth attending from reserves, Mamawai and its partnering organizations YM/YWCA, and Children of the Earth School, all of which took part. All of the organizations approached offered their assistance in seeking out youth they believed would have something to contribute to the study. However, a recent study conducted by University of Winnipeg professor Jim Silver *et al* (2002) investigating education and Aboriginal youth in Winnipeg involved many of the same organizations we approached; further, many of the same issues we sought to expand upon appeared to overlap with the Silver *et al* study; hence organizational representatives appeared at times perplexed by our queries.
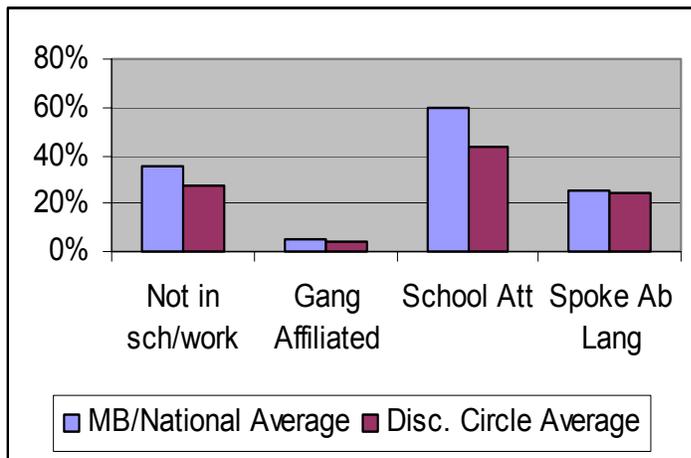
Following a protracted selection process, the research team organized a group of what we came to characterize as 'opinion leaders', or, more accurately, a group of 20 youth we considered to be representative of the views of the wider Aboriginal youth population in Winnipeg. The basis for this conclusion is rested upon how accurately our sample group demographics correspond to the available statistical data that details Aboriginal youth employment rates, school attendance, living arrangements, labour market participation, and conflict with the law.

Of the 20 participants selected, 15 self-identified as Aboriginal, four as Metis and one as Inuit. No one claimed specific identifiers such as a Status Indian or Bill C-31 status, for example. Twelve of the Aboriginal participants were students, with six females and six males regularly attending school. The Inuit participant did not attend school nor did he work whereas two of the Metis participants were full-time students. Of the remaining eight participants not attending

school, one was employed and four were actively seeking employment. The remaining two (one male, one female) indicated they were focussed on the needs of their children.
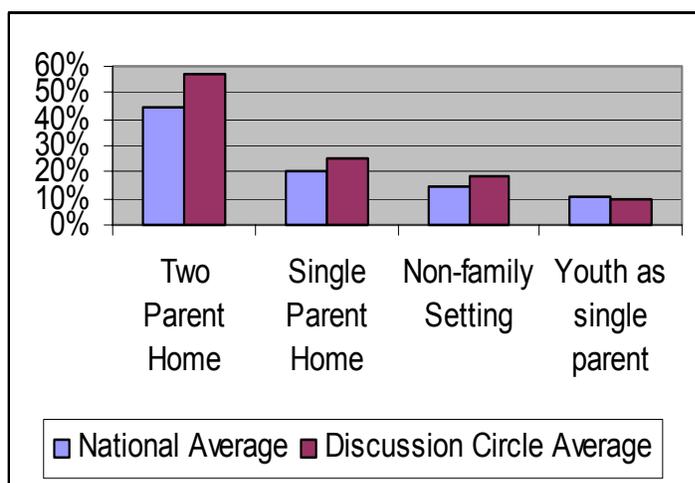
Manitoba currently has the lowest rate of school attendance among Aboriginal youth in Canada at 44.1 per cent. Nine of the 15 Aboriginal (non Inuit or Metis) participants representing 60 per cent of the focus group attended school on either a full- or part-time basis, a rate slightly higher than the provincial average. Half of the four Metis respondents regularly attended school, a rate that was slightly higher than the provincial Metis average of 48 per cent. Three of the participants were parents: two males, aged 16 and 20, and one female aged 20. One of the males (24) attended school; the female and other male (16) did not. Two of the parents (10%) head up single-family homes, a rate which corresponds to the Winnipeg average of 10.7 per cent for Aboriginal youth single parents (Manitoba 2003). One male (5%) is an at-risk youth who has spent time in local gangs and has on more than one occasion been incarcerated. This corresponds to the 3.4 per cent of Aboriginal youth who are currently members of Winnipeg gangs (for above statistics see Manitoba 2003).

Forty per cent of the participants were unemployed, which corresponds with 1996 census figures which indicated that 37.5 per cent of Aboriginal youth were neither in school nor employed that year. Six of the remaining 10 who were not in school or seeking employment (60%) were either unemployed or actively seeking work. In all, 1996 census figures indicate that 27.4 per cent of Manitoba Aboriginal youth were neither attending school nor looking for work, which corresponds to our participant sample of 35 per cent (7 out of 20) who were either out of work, not attending school, nor actively seeking employment. This "youth at risk" group is larger in Manitoba than in any other province (for above statistics see Manitoba 2003).

More specifically, seventeen of the twenty participants were urban Aboriginal youth although five stated that they were originally from a reserve community, which they claimed to visit once or twice a year. Those five considered their tenure in Winnipeg sufficient to be considered firmly entrenched in the urban setting. Nine (45%) lived with both their parents, four (20%) lived with a single parent or close family member (uncle/auntie or grandparent), three (15%) lived in a non-family setting, while four (20%) of the youth lived on their own or with a spouse. These numbers are consistent with national averages. For example, nationally 57 per cent of Aboriginal youth lived in two parent families, 25 per cent lived in a single parent family, and 18 per cent in non-family settings (for above statistics see Manitoba 2003).

The participants were chosen due to their extended residence in an urban environment and the accompanying life experience. All but three lived in the city for an extended period of time, went to school in Winnipeg, or had families of their own in the urban setting. The three who did not

have extensive experience living in the city were chosen to provide a differing viewpoint that provided a reserve-based perspective of what it was like to live in Winnipeg that the other 17 did not possess. Finally, 5 (25%) of the twenty respondents spoke an Aboriginal language, which corresponds with the national average of 24 per cent who reported they had enough knowledge of an Aboriginal language to carry on a conversation (Statistics Canada 2003c, 8).

Team interaction with the participants combined with the above statistical comparison leads us to conclude that the youth selected to participate provided us with more than a representative sample, rather they formed two discussion circles of opinion leaders whose views represent the larger Winnipeg Aboriginal population. In all, the two groups were composed of Aboriginal youth from different age and gender groups, including those who are in school and those who are not, those who are employed, underemployed and unemployed, as well as those who are culturally engaged and those who are not.

Of final note, the youth researchers and the project manager attempted to engage additional at-risk youth: youth living in downtown Winnipeg, and those youth with gender issues. Even with $50 honorarium we were unable to persuade youth from any of these categories to take part in the discussion circles, although many did participate in the questionnaire phase of the project.

1.6.1 Capacity Building

The researchers were considered equal partners in research design, development, data accumulation and analyses, and development of final conclusions and each researcher was required to take a proactive role in the overall process. Training sessions were held and team members were introduced to concepts such as quantitative/qualitative data gathering techniques, ethics, parental consent, interview techniques and data analyses designed specifically to make them aware of the variables that require consideration in such projects. This is required when utilizing PAR for the researcher experience is built into the overall research design and helps to inform the general process: this in turn results in a more comprehensive approach to data gathering and data analysis. By the time of the interview and discussion circle stage, the researchers had played a role in all aspects of the project and were confident interviewing the participants. The researchers were observed by senior project staff throughout, but it was ultimately their responsibility to conduct and guide the interview and discussion circle processes. The researchers then submitted final comments and conclusions, including recommendations, to the primary researcher, thus permitting the inclusion of a multitude of opinions and ideas in the final report.

1.7 Assumptions

In research projects of this scope and magnitude, research teams must determine in advance existing preconceptions and assumptions. This is done so that all team members enter into the data collection stage of like mind and with the understanding that the interpretation of such issues as identity construction and the influence of the city upon one's identity can directly influence both the creation of research tools and data analyses. Team discussions indicated that there were two primary assumptions that required formal investigation: 1) the concept of land and its significance to identity development and whether this plays a role in an urban setting;

and, 2) the process of cultural adaptation. It was during team meetings that these concepts were broached. Prior to proceeding, these two fundamental components inherent to Aboriginal culture and the development of our arguments must be explored: adaptation; and, land as a referent point, facilitator of cultural awareness and identity development.

1.7.1   Land

Much of the discussion centering on Aboriginal peoples in urban environments focuses primarily on territorial dispossession and how the urban environment is not conducive to living what the 'experts' suggest is an authentic Aboriginal lifestyle. Urban centers such as Winnipeg were often settled by Europeans for reasons directly related to the significance of those sites to trade, political meetings, for collecting medicines and other valuable resources, or for their importance as conduits to primary travel routes. In the case of Winnipeg, The Forks Plaza located at the confluence of The Red and Assiniboine Rivers, was utilized by Native groups for more than 9,000 years prior to the arrival of La Verendrye some 250 years ago (Hilderman & Thomas 1998, 198).

According to Aboriginal worldviews and political philosophies, land is the key referent point (e.g. Deloria 1973, Little Bear 1996). The land is where the repetitive cycles of creation occur, where the stories are told, where songs are sung. Aboriginal people and history, and by association their identity, cannot be separated from the land simply because Aboriginal people cannot be separated from their territories (Little Bear 1996). This results in the existence of Aboriginal history, both philosophically and physically, which in turn directly influences identity. The stories are used as thematic devices that do not deal specifically with each event that went into the creation of that history. Instead the stories occur across a familiar landscape and combine to form history that is catalogued and recounted in oral narratives: the effect upon identity development is all-inclusive and -representative.

The land is the mother and has the power to always care for the people within the territory and the stories that emanate from the land define all relationships. The stories and the land are inseparable from and specific to a particular people, either as the people "interact with one another from a shared knowledge base or with groups (or individuals) with a different knowledge base and history" (Sarris 1993, 47). Vine Deloria describes this philosophy as 'sacred geography', that is to say, "every location within their original homeland has a multitude of stories that recount the migrations, revelations, and particular historical incidents that cumulatively produce a tribe in its current conditions" (Deloria 1973, 122). Sakej Youngblood Henderson has further developed this theory framing it in terms of ecological context, or how one's surroundings influence directly how that person's worldview and identity develops (2000, 248-278).

The common thread in each of these arguments is that the sense of place from which identity is determined flows from the land base (or environment) a person is part of. Both Deloria and Henderson are concerned with the traditional land base and its role in identity formation. However, in this contemporary period where close to one-half of all Aboriginal people live in an urban environment, alteration of our approach is required when investigating the construction of Aboriginal identity. We must begin to embrace the notion that the urban land base is simply a

traditional territory covered in concrete and that it is a place of power that identity emerges, aesthetic modifications notwithstanding.

Oral tradition and, to a lesser extent contemporary written works, are currently being adapted to incorporate new urban influences and youth are being made more aware of the differences inherent in living in an urban environment as opposed to the reserve. Nevertheless, one key question that consistently re-emerged during this project centered upon whether an urban Aboriginal person was occupying a traditional territory, and if so, did these traditional territories continue to influence identity formation? Recognizing that the urban environment influences identity development, one must also bear in mind that living in the city is not comparable to being separated from traditional territories – they are often one and the same.

1.7.2 Adaptation

A contemporary debate engaging many scholars concerns Aboriginal peoples' use of technology and how this compromises identity, both cultural and personal. The first preconception we must challenge is that Aboriginal identity is in no way specifically tied to the romantic notion of 'living close to the land'. That is not to say that traditional concepts about identity that flow from traditional territories are not to be found within contemporary urban Aboriginal youth's notions of identity. What we are concerned with engaging are the processes that are influencing a new and unique urban Aboriginal identity that is currently emerging, how the youth see this identity developing, and what resources should be directed to social programs for the purposes of promoting positive identity construction and culture retention.

Aboriginal societies in Canada were highly adaptive as evidenced in the transference and adaptation of foreign technologies into existing regional economic and political systems. J.R. Miller (1992) demonstrated the ease at which Aboriginal societies worked in conjunction with European traders and adopted the most advantageous aspects of intercultural trade and merging this with traditional notions of commerce. The Iroquoian-speaking peoples of southern Ontario/upstate New York learned how to cultivate maize that had been brought north from the Mexico region (Dickason 1992). The Blackfoot traded obsidian with various groups located as far away as Florida (Bryan 1991). And the Cree migrated from Manitoba into the prairie's more arid regions and effectively adapted buffalo hunting into their economy (Milloy 1988). In all, adaptation has been a hallmark of Aboriginal culture and a process that did not presuppose blind adherence to tradition when the situation called for a more flexible approach.

The process of adaptation is predicated upon the notion of a constant changing reality. By recognizing that culture and, by association, identities are apt to change, adaptation of various cultural processes into the continuing evolution of one society ensures its survival. Accordingly that very society may bear little resemblance to its centuries-old precursor.

We must recognize forces that have traditionally played an integral role in the evolution of Aboriginal identity. In considering the factors influencing the development of Aboriginal youth identity in the urban centres, suddenly we are faced with a unique situation where for the first time a generation of Aboriginal youth are constructing their identity almost exclusively within the city of Winnipeg. At the same time, the processes influencing identity development prior to

the period of significant Aboriginal urban migration are still at play, the social, economic, political and geographic variables have just changed. Nevertheless, we need to still consider that urban Aboriginal youth identity development is influenced by the ecological context and the ongoing processes of adaptation.

PART TWO

2.1   Findings

The following discussion sets the stage for our analysis in part three by presenting the participants responses according to the questions posed to during the discussion circles. The youth were forthcoming and provided the research team with their perspectives on identity construction and culture retention that by all accounts appeared to be well-informed, perceptive and critically focussed. And, in keeping with the mandate of this project, which was to present an Aboriginal perspective of the issues, three of the sections will present the beliefs and feelings of the participants as we begin to formally evaluate the collected data. The final question regarding the resilience of Aboriginal identity will be dealt with in the analysis section that follows.

2.2   What influences are the youth drawing upon in the development and continuation of their personal identity?

There are a number of influences the youth draw upon in the development of their identity that includes family, friends, teachers, and elders, yet during the discussion groups it became clear that the majority of the participants regularly engaged family members to discuss history or when they had questions that were cultural in nature. **Half of the respondents claimed that they remained in close contact with one or more of their grandparents, who were also cited as important contacts when it came to passing on cultural teachings**. For instance, one 17-year-old female would approach her parents and her grandma when she had questions concerning identity while a 16-year-old male cited his father and grandfather as strongly influencing his identity.

> **"I personally do not know anybody. My grandma passed away. She is the only one I know who can talk about stuff. We have elders come in to out school and talk to us. They share their life experiences and stuff like that. My family does not know about it."** *19-year-old female*

In many ways this group of urban Aboriginal youth is alone and represent the first generation to develop their sense of self almost exclusively within an urban context. **The dialogue during both discussion circles illustrated that the youth were frustrated at not having anyone to speak with who had experience with the urban acculturation process**. There was one instance in which a 19-year-old female participant, whose grandmother recently passed away, expressed concern that she was no longer available to help pass-on the teachings through oral tradition and that this aspect of her own identity could be forever lost. She told the discussion circle, "I personally do not know anybody. My grandma passed away. She is the only one I know who can talk about stuff. We have elders come in to out school and talk to us. They share their life experiences and stuff like that. My family does not know about it."

All of the youth listed their peers as influencing their identity development in significant ways, although the participants did not claim close friendships with individuals who were not Aboriginal. Nonetheless, the majority of the youth expressed a desire to interact with people of other cultures but were frustrated with their past attempts and experiences to do so. As explained by a 17-year-old female, "I used to work at Wendy's and there were Asian people that worked there and I felt out of place because they always seemed much older than me. It was

harder to try to talk with them." Similar conclusions were reached by a 24-year-old male: "Where I go to school it is pretty multi cultural and I find it hard to communicate with them. I am not comfortable being with them but I find it hard to communicate. They are not strangers to me; I have been going to school with them for a while. I guess it is just that . . . there are differences that prevent me from dealing with them."

It appears that these opinion leaders view parents and friends as the primary sources drawn upon in their identity development. When we asked if there were any other sources the respondents considered equally valuable i.e. school teachers, journalists, or politicians, the respondents agreed unanimously that their family and peers were the main personal influences.

2.3   Do the youth have resources in the city or beyond the urban setting that they draw upon to aid in the development of their identity?

The discussion circles yielded fascinating results. For example, **the respondents maintained there are sufficient inner-city resources available to aid in their identity development, yet they also suggested a number of times more programs were currently required for cultural maintenance**. Notwithstanding the sometimes contradictory nature of the commentary, the city was viewed by all but three of the youth as the site that had the most to offer them in regards to identity construction. **Programs, workshops, and the large urban Aboriginal population was perceived as culturally-intact were all presented as major influences positively impacting upon their identity**.

> **"The biggest thing for me would be actually going back home, like in order for me to go back home I would have to develop a new identity and learn who I am and where I am from. I am already adapted to the lifestyle I have, here in the city. For me, the hardest thing would be going back home and to realize who I am."** *24-year-old male*

By comparison, **reserves on the whole were considered a potentially negative influence or were generally viewed as places where alcoholism was rampant and violence the norm**. One quarter of the participants claimed that they visit a reserve community at least once a year, most often to see where their parents or grandparents once lived or in certain cases continue to reside. Each of the five participants who migrated with their family from the reserve to the city (three quite recently) were aware of the dynamics associated with the reserve environment. **Both discussion circles focussed prominently on three ideas: 1) the perceived lack of Aboriginal identity on reserve; and, 2) the negative influence formal politics is having upon those communities, and by association 3) how people comprehend their role in the community**.

A small number of the respondents described the reserve as "messy" and "depressing, where there was plenty of alcohol abuse, people collecting welfare, lots of negativity." **The majority of respondents failed to recognize the reserve as a repository of culture able to further aid their identity development even though they simultaneously claimed elders who lived on-reserve as true cultural teachers**. In fact, suicide, crime, solvent and drug abuse were the root causes of the poor quality of reserve life and reasons why it negatively influenced identity development. It became clear during the discussion circles that **17 of the youth believed their sense of identity profited by living in the city because of the availability of social programs**.

The number of peers available to socially interact with was also viewed as a key reason to stay in the city.

"We need better leaders to talk to us. I never voted or anything because I don't really care because I don't think my one vote would make a difference." *19-year-old female*

During this stage of the dialogue that the participants confirmed that, in their opinion, urban Aboriginal identity was unique and markedly different from a reserve identity. One 24-year-old male youth stated: "I can be Aboriginal and live here in the city because I have lived here for the majority of my life. The biggest thing for me would be actually going back home, like in order for me to go back home I would have to develop a new identity and learn who I am and where I am from. I am already adapted to the lifestyle I have, here in the city. For me, the hardest thing would be going back home and to realize who I am."

It appears as though the above speaker equates living in the city as being denied the chance to understand who he is within his "traditional" landscape. Although, from his general commentary, his self-identity does not appear to be damaged by living in the city: it is just different. **The participants stated**: **1) that the reserve was a site where cultural knowledge could be obtained from elders to aid in identity development; however**, **2) the city was where the programs and workshops were located which provide the knowledge required to aid them in their day-to-day activities**.

2.3.1. Vilification of Politics

The respondents viewed politics as a mechanism that permitted placement of family into high paying jobs; as a way of obtaining local influence in order to generate and sustain personal political and economic agendas; or, as a means to avoid taking a 'real job'. This generated the most vociferous response we encountered during the two discussion circles. **The opinion leaders were not very positive about politics in the urban setting and all were unanimous in their vilification of both politics and politicians, principally because they do not believe there are effective candidates to represent their interests as Aboriginal people**.

Each participant articulated that they would not vote in formal elections on or off reserve due to what they perceive to be a lack of qualified candidates and current political leaders who are unable to relate to their needs. This position is echoed by a 19-year-old female who claimed "We need better leaders to talk to us. I never voted or anything because I don't really care because I don't think my one vote would make a difference." Supporting this position was a 24-year-old male who pointed out, "It is difficult to communicate with the leaders because they don't understand. I don't know any councillors." **Of the youth who were legally permitted to vote, all stated that they would not cast a ballot in the upcoming municipal election or future federal elections**. Even in those cases where an Aboriginal candidate was running for office the participants were still not convinced that the candidates would be able to effectively represent their interests.

It appears that this group of opinion leaders does not view the reserve as a repository of culture that in any way could positively influence their identity formation although the elders who live there would be able to assist them. **Most of the respondents rarely left the city to participate**

in cultural events, although the majority did not claim lack of funds to be the reason. If they did leave the city to take part in a powwow, for example, it was because this also gave them the chance visit family members who may live on a reserve. With the exception of powwows and other events that are pan-Indian in scope, on-reserve participation in cultural activities was limited to males who took part in fishing and hunting trips, or who visited the reserves for employment opportunities rather than cultural reasons.

2.3.2 Non-traditional Resources Aiding Identity Construction

It was apparent during the discussion circles that the resources the youth draw upon to aid in their identity development and culture retention originate primarily in the city. **These resources were quite varied and included the Internet, academic and non-fiction books, magazines and newspapers, movies, television and radio. The Internet was mentioned by 13 of the youth as a primary resource they regularly employ to find out information about Aboriginal culture and history. Chat lines were also quite popular and permitted youth from various reaches of the city (and beyond) to engage in discussion and debate**. The chat lines allowed those who may be uncomfortable leaving their physical environment to network with other Aboriginal youth who may be in similar situations.

> The "media sells products, not identity." *17-year-old female*
>
> "Media and magazines can . . . influence yourself and not your Aboriginal identity." *19-year-old male*
>
> "The Winnipeg Sun – you hardly ever see an article on Aboriginals. The only articles that are in the Sun are the ten most wanted. They never publish accomplishments." *24-year-old male*

The youth did not consider mainstream movies, television, and radio as educational media to employ for identity development, but books (fiction and non-fiction), mainstream newspapers and the Aboriginal press, and movies that contained significant Aboriginal content were regularly accessed to guide the participants' education about contemporary and historical issues. Titles such as *April Raintree* by Beatrice Culleton and Gordon Sinclair's expose onto the shooting of J.J. Harper, *Cowboys and Indians,* were cited as influential as was academic material focussing on contemporary Aboriginal issues. One participant cited short stories about Aboriginal legends that teach cultural lessons as an important resource that served her identity development. **However, for educating themselves about cross-cultural relations in Canada, the participants employed material that could be considered quite disturbing even if it did convey an accurate depiction of events i.e. the reality of the situation**. For instance, *Conspiracy of Silence* by Lisa Priest, which outlined in detail the investigation into the 1971 murder of Helen Betty Osborne that uncovered a town conspiracy to 'cover-up' the killing was another of the resources listed. The participants were evenly split between those who read positive and uplifting material about cross-cultural events and those who consumed books and stories that were negative in scope, albeit materials that portray what could be loosely described as the Canadian Aboriginal experience. **A significant portion of participants spoke consistently of "white guys driving around drunk looking for Native women" and about an Aboriginal child "being taken away from her parents because of drinking."**

In one case, a 19-year-old female stated that the websites she visits contain "every newspaper article about Aboriginals" and that she does in fact read each one. The respondents indicated also that Eminem and Shania Twain are artists they regularly listen to, although a clear distinction was made between the attractive aspects of popular culture and what resources they considered to positively aid in their identity development. **The 20 participants demonstrated an awareness that suggests they are able to clearly delineate between what sources of information are most beneficial to their sense of self and what information they encounter that has little probative value in relation to their identity development**.

> **The 20 participants demonstrated an awareness that suggests they are able to clearly delineate between what sources of information are most beneficial to their sense of self and what information they encounter that has little probative value in relation to their identity development.**

According to one 17-year-old male, the "media sells products, not identity", a position supported by a 21-year-old female who stated that media stereotypes proliferate within Hollywood productions and that one has to be aware of such negative portrayals. Further to this point, a 19-year-old male stated that the "Media and magazines can . . . influence yourself and not your Aboriginal identity." **The youth are cognizant of the role the media plays by consistently portraying Aboriginal culture negatively**. In one discussion, **some of the participants indicated that they did not relate to popular culture icons, even when they were Tina Keeper or Adam Beach, as readily as they did to culture groups such as the Maori and Africans due to their shared colonial heritage. Another cultural group the youth were able to identify with was the Afghanis**.

More specifically, one 19-year-old female clearly identified with African celebrations and saw a parallel with her own traditions. A 20-year-old female considered the Africans to have been "picked on" similarly to Aboriginal people in Canada. Two youth cited the Afghanis as a cultural group they could relate to since they too are currently being "picked on" by U.S. President George Bush. One youth, a 24-year-old male, summed up his feelings succinctly: "The similarity that I find, say, with the Afghanistan's [sic], I see the negativity portrayed in the news and newspapers. It is the same thing with the Natives. The Winnipeg Sun – you hardly ever see an article on Aboriginals. The only articles that are in the Sun are the ten most wanted. They never publish accomplishments."

It appears that urban Aboriginal youth are not regularly accessing resource materials that focus more on historical or traditional ways of life. This group of opinion leaders is consistently and decisively gravitating more toward information about Aboriginal issues in urban centers, current events affecting Aboriginal people in Canada, movies and television shows that are more documentary-oriented and focussing on recent issues in an attempt to configure their identity to the urban environment.

2.4   How do youth retain their identity in an urban environment?

We asked the question, "Can Aboriginal identity flourish in an urban environment?" All of the participants unanimously responded yes, albeit with certain caveats attached. For instance, all of the respondents indicated that racism is at times an impediment to positive

identity development and that there was currently a lack of programs available to facilitate a positive sense of self. All of the respondents were however optimistic that Aboriginal identity was able to survive within the urban environment. All participants with the exception of one cited having in place personal support systems that centred on family extended to peers that continued to influence their identity development.

The participants were almost evenly split between those who equated Aboriginal culture with what they could call traditional pursuits (smudging, dancing, and attending powwows) and those who associated culture retention and identity development with attending university or becoming involved with programs designed to assist urban Aboriginal youth. One 24-year-old male claimed that urban Aboriginal identity is directly linked with "displaying the abilities and potential of Native youth and assist mainstream society in its understanding of Aboriginal culture." Identity to this participant was closely associated with being a positive role model for Aboriginal youth and non-Aboriginal people. The reason straightforward**: the youth believe that they are best suited to assist non-Aboriginal society in better understanding urban Aboriginal people**. All participants agreed with this general conclusion and stated that they also wanted to become role models whether it was to assist their children's progress or to better guide cross- and multi-cultural interaction.

> **"You always have your identity. You don't take that out of your pocket and put it down and say, 'I am not going to be Aboriginal today'."** *16-year-old male*
>
> **"Just because I live in a different environment, it doesn't change how I am."** *16-year-old male*
>
> When asked, **"Does how people view you influence your identity?** a representative of one discussion circle group said **"No, because we don't care what they say."**

Our opinion leaders also indicated that Aboriginal youth in Winnipeg tend to associate closely with one another and rarely interact with non-Aboriginal youth. As one 17-year-old male confessed, "I find that there is a lot of ethnocentrism in different cultures. They believe their culture is better because of this and I find that in the different ones. That is why it is hard for people to try and get along with other people and for them to understand where they are coming from." The respondents perceived other culture groups as also establishing and maintaining cliques much to their exclusion ("We always have our own little crews"). Accordingly, **the majority of the respondents when not in school remained at home with friends and family or became involved with social groups that are focussed on the needs of Aboriginal youth**. In all, it appears as though Aboriginal youth in Winnipeg are quite insular.

Racism influences how the respondents choose to negotiate non-Aboriginal society. **More than 90 per cent of the questionnaire respondents indicated that racism was an issue they believed influenced their sense of self and each of the 20 discussion circle participants indicated that they had at one time witnessed directly an overtly racist act or heard first-hand commentary that was racist in scope**. Personal experiences with racism in public places compelled most of the participants to remain at home rather than to venture out to visit friends and family. The majority of the respondents claimed also to regularly avoid typical 'hangout' places such as shopping malls, movie theatres, cafes, and bars.

> *"I was thinking the only society I am in the main-stream is the Aboriginal society because of what they have given me. I lived here all my life; it's like an urban reserve. I guess it's the same thing, like even the reserves. You get so many forms of racism, like in public places. It is hard to feel comfortable with the environment when I know there is racism." 24-year-old male*

Curiously even though the youth indicated previously that there are currently sufficient programs in place to aid their identity construction, respondents from both discussion circles also made reference to the lack of programs available in Winnipeg, generating somewhat conflicting opinions. When we asked what sort of activities they would like to see implemented, most indicated a desire to see sport-related activities established. The second discussion circle was most vocal as the participants asked for "more sports like tether ball", "more hockey", and "volleyball". The first focus group was more concerned with implementing what one 16-year-old male described as "youth initiatives, single father programs, parenting courses, more help in parenting training" while others sought "work experience" to aid in finding permanent employment and "more youth meeting places for after school." The respondents discussed the advantages of such organizations which could assist them in their social development.

One 19-year-old female proposed the establishment of a youth program that was to be run by Aboriginal youth, a suggestion everyone agreed with: "I heard about this (project) through my cousin, through email. I would not be doing a lot of the things I am doing. I wouldn't be her talking to all you guys like this before but this brought something out in me." **Participants in both discussion groups indicated that they had Internet access or a close acquaintance online that would allow them computer access. Respondents also stated that email and/or a website would be an effective tool to promote youth programs in Winnipeg.**

The opinion leaders indicate that Aboriginal youth appear to separate the events they participate in into two categories: traditional Aboriginal pursuits that may influence identity; and, those they consider specifically aid identity construction in the urban setting. Both categories are important yet are compartmentalized by the youth indicating a possible rural/urban schism. Both categories are interrelated yet they are also distinctive pieces of a larger puzzle. It is our conclusion that **identity appears to be informed by their perception of what Aboriginal culture represents which is then adapted to suit their ever changing urban needs as these youth reinvent themselves to better negotiate that environment**.

PART THREE

3.1 Discussion and Analysis

Metis scholar Olive Patricia Dickason (1992) wrote of Aboriginal identity, "If any one theme can be traced back throughout the history of Canada's Amerindians, it is the persistence of their identity" (419). Yet concepts of identity and identity-construction are abstract, difficult to define, and complicated to deconstruct for ease of understanding. Investigations into such issues are methodologically formidable which may explain why the literature on Aboriginal identity is meagre albeit slowly expanding. Even more sparse is the literature which investigates the issue of urban Aboriginal youth identity formation and its varied exigencies.

Interest in Canadian Aboriginal youth identity was sparked in 1996 following the release of the final report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), which indicated that during "the Commission's hearings, Aboriginal youth spoke more often about culture and identity than about anything else in the Commission's mandate. The research studies and youth circles sponsored by the Commission revealed these themes as well. No matter where the community, no matter who the speaker, Aboriginal youth spoke with a single voice about what culture means to them and about its place in the healing process" (record 19969). With the existing demographics listed in Part One that indicate an additional 21,295 Manitoba Aboriginal children are currently under the age of 14 and will be developing their identity almost exclusively in an urban environment, the commissioners' suggestion regarding the need to investigate identity construction among urban Aboriginal youth seems warranted.

At the same time, the commissioners also argued that Aboriginal youth "are somewhat wary of government-designed solutions, even those of Aboriginal governments," even though project participants appear to be rather accepting of government-created programs and at many times during the discussion circles suggested that additional programs be established to aid them in their identity development (RCAP 1996, record 19947). The respondents suggested that Aboriginal social services and Aboriginal youth organizations were cultural resources they regularly engage. Sports and films (in addition to books) were also listed as important. Surprisingly Aboriginal celebrations, music, and theatre were all mentioned in passing as was contact with elders. Friendship centers were not listed at all during the discussion circles. In all, increased access to youth programs and services was considered to be the best method to support identity development and culture retention. But what exactly is urban Aboriginal identity and how are Aboriginal youth constructing that identity?

3.2 Theoretical Perspective

There are three facets of identity – self-identification, community identification, and external identification. Cultural identity is defined as an identity that "gives the individual a sense of a common past and of a shared destiny" (Green 1995, 7). Self-perception is a key component of identity. For some, expression of Aboriginal identity may involve little more than personal belief about heritage (Peroff 1997). There is some level of choice involved with accepting an Aboriginal identity that can also be influenced by factors such as physical appearance or social, economic, or political forces (Mihesuah 1998). A racially charged environment, for instance,

may make self-identifying as Aboriginal problematic. Community identity is attached to a sense of shared history as Aboriginal people and a link to sacred traditions and territories (Peroff 1997). The sense of self-identity is so integrally linked to attaining membership within a community that people often define themselves by where they live in the city rather than by cultural affiliation. In certain cases, cultural identity is maintained in relation to the identities of neighbouring communities. Identity is often legally defined. Finally, external identification is defined by a non-Aboriginal perspective and leads to questions regarding who has the right, legal or otherwise, to determine who is an Aboriginal person (Durham 1993). This in turn raises questions regarding the influence of socio-political policies on identity, how legislation affects self-identity, or how economics influence identity construction.

With these assumptions in mind, the researchers began to witness the emergence of seemingly contradictory data following the two discussion circles: the respondents appeared to be separating their lived personal urban identity from their heritage i.e. where they believed they came from culturally. In other words, even though Aboriginal culture was considered by the youth to be a guiding force in relation to identity construction, there was also a sense from the respondents that they did not belong to this culture; hence it was not part of their identity. This was an important starting point.

In *Rethinking Ethnicity*, Richard Jenkins (1997) provides an overview of the ethnicity theories that have undergirded social anthropology for the last five decades and provides the conceptual framework for this section. Drawing significantly from classical theorists such Max Weber as well as Frederik Barth, Jenkins states that "although the basic social anthropological model of ethnicity . . . is the best way to understand ethnicity, its potential has been neither fully explored nor adequately understood" (1997, 3). Jenkins proposes a set of ideas for rectifying this discrepancy and proceeded to devise four propositions as the basis for his model of ethnicity which we have largely adopted for our purposes.

He writes that ethnicity is about recognition of cultural difference and that "identity is always a dialectic between similarity and difference; that ethnicity is centrally concerned with culture -- shared meaning -- but it is also rooted in, and to a considerable extent the outcome of, social interaction; that ethnicity is no more fixed or unchanging than the culture of which it is a component or the situations in which it is produced and reproduced; and that ethnicity as a social identity is collective and individual, externalized in social interaction and internalized in personal self-identification" (1997, 13-14).

Jenkins, in his first proposition, makes the point that we should not study a minority group without also studying the majority. For our purposes we define this as recognition of group differences, or "the boundaries of identification and differentiation between ethnic collectivities" (1997, 12). Although we are interested in cultural differentiation through boundary construction whereby ethnic groups establish an "us" vs. "them" dichotomy, we are not willing to accept that this is all there is to ethnicity. We recognize that the processes that establish internal similarity are as relevant to understanding ethnicity as the ones that generate a sense of difference in relation to the "other." Internal boundary making is especially relevant to understanding how urban Aboriginal youth in Winnipeg construct a collective identity and that there can be more than one ethnicity operating within groups that claim a common cultural heritage.

Jenkins' second proposition is based on the belief that a common ancestry does not cause people to recognize themselves as members of an ethnic group; rather, acting together in the pursuit of collective interests encourages ethnic identification. We find this proposition to be somewhat flawed in relation to the discussion circle results, although the third proposition regarding the situational variability of ethnicity for urban Aboriginal people has changed over time and does appear applicable. Jenkins' point that ethnicity must be understood as both nominal and virtual, in that there is a label, urban Aboriginal youth, as well as an experience of being an urban Aboriginal youth that has "consequences of name and label" which also requires attention (1997, 41).

Finally, Jenkins' fourth proposition about the focus of social interaction in the production of shared meaning is crucial for "social identity is never unilateral" and is subject to "change and transformation" This interaction occurs between the external world of differences and the inner world of the socially constructed sense of 'self'. As such, identity is a product of both 'sameness', in the sense of 'this is my culture and these are my people', and the world of differences 'I am not of these groups'. This is why Jenkins is able correctly to claim that the distinction between 'personal identity' and 'social identity' is a false one. Personal identity *is* social identity.

3.3   Findings

The age 15-24 is an important stage in a person's identity formation. It is during this time that the individual begins to distance him or herself from initial teachings and patterns of beliefs about themselves as they begin to consciously invent their identity to better correspond to their surrounding environment. From a western sociological perspective, this age group is in turmoil as individuals attempt to determine what influences should be integrated into their identity construction. From an indigenous perspective, this time in life is also considered a tumultuous period where indecision and confusion reign supreme (Mosher 1999). Both perspectives are clear in that this period of life is when a person's identity begins to formally develop.

But unlike times past, this current generation of Aboriginal youth in Manitoba who call the city home are developing their identity almost exclusively within the urban environment, namely Winnipeg. The influence of multi-culturalism is pronounced and inundates the young with multiple cultural characteristics from which they can begin to construct their identity. This also has the effect of further muddying the waters when it comes time to determine what cultural influences should be adopted and whether they play a role in the representation of self. So in many ways this generation of urban Aboriginal youth is very much breaking new ground as far as identity development is concerned.

Developmental psychology confirms that by the time a person grows to adulthood their sense of who they are is already formed and that age is a factor influencing identity construction. The majority of the respondents were at an age that has been characterized as the stage "identity versus confusion" (Erickson 1968) when a youth begins to locate his or her place in the social environment (Parham 1989). This period is a time of rapid change in physical, cognitive, and social growth (Bryde 1972, Erickson 1963, 1968, Muus 1988, Smith 1991, Sprinthall 1988).

During the discussion circles, it was clear that the younger participants were clearly less focussed on complex issues such as racism and more concerned with spending time with friends or playing on the Internet. The older participants were more concerned with elaborate issues: for instance, one 19-year-old was regularly reading the *Globe and Mail* and furthering her personal education about urban Aboriginal issues while a 24-year-old male father was concerned with completing his university education to find a better job to improve his family's way of life. The older the respondent the more in depth the answers tended to be and it was clear that the lived experience of those participants clearly helped to inform those opinions. The older participants also had a stronger sense of identity because as identity formation occurs over time, a strong identity may increase with age (Dukes and Martinez 1997). Beyond our ability to indicate clearly that age is a significant factor influencing the one's sense of self, what are Aboriginal youth drawing upon during identity construction?

According to Wiggins (1997), a member of the Cowlitz tribe in Washington State who as a youth felt displaced within an urban environment and was for a period unable to fully accept his heritage, a common theme in the expanding literature on urban Aboriginal youth indicates that "The urban Indian experience and eventual contact with norms of traditional Indian culture produced an integration of mainstream standards and traditional values." Furthermore, "The new experiences and the reorganization of certain values resulted in a syncretic process for leaving the shadows behind and producing new meaning and purpose for meeting the contingencies of daily life. In all, the "newly expanded operating culture contributed to a changed personal identity with the interweaving of different cultural elements" (167). Although speaking about personal experience, Wiggins clearly elucidates the process urban Aboriginal youth in Winnipeg are currently engaged in as they construct and re-construct their identity is an attempt to better negotiate their environment.

In relation to Jenkins' proposition that we should not study a minority group without also studying the majority, Wiggins confirmed that non-Aboriginal influences sway one's sense of identity. Youth are cognizant that their sense of identity is directly influenced by their environment. The discussion circle respondents further indicated that their sense of identity is affected directly by how well they are able to negotiate the urban environment and its majority non-Aboriginal population. In most cases, however, issues such as racism dominated the discussion. For instance, if the RCAP findings are any indication, the majority of Aboriginal people in Canada regularly experience racist attitudes or have during their lifetime encountered racism at work, in public places, or within the Canadian media. Our opinion leaders stated that racism had a negative impact on their identity formation thus suggesting that a question remains in whether or not a "safe place" exists for them within Canadian society.

The reaction to racism is largely manifest in the lack of desire displayed by the participants to promote cultural interaction with majority non-Aboriginal society, which is not strictly confined to 'white people'. The respondents tend to maintain close ties with family and friends who are also Aboriginal much to the exclusion of all other ethnic groups. In many cases, the majority of Aboriginal youth attempting to negotiate non-Aboriginal society do not have in place the appropriate skills required to buffer such cruelty and do recognize their limitations. It was suggested that racism workshops be established to aid the youth in better dealing with racism in Winnipeg which would fortify their self-esteem (see recommendation 9).

Notwithstanding the potential effect outside influences may have upon Aboriginal identity development, the respondents are not regularly engaging non-Aboriginal society. Although due in part to the fear of exposure to racism which is a protective mechanism, the issue at hand is far more dynamic and cannot be framed simply as a tactic of avoidance. The participants indicated that they felt more at ease around other Aboriginal people, who provide the youth with a secure foundation from which identity can develop. This process is closely associated with Jenkins' idea that the focus of social interaction in the production of shared meaning is crucial for "social identity is never unilateral" and is subject to change and transformation." This interaction occurs between the external world of differences and the inner world of the socially constructed sense of 'self' in which the concept of continuity comes into play whereby identities are a matter of routine interpretations of social reality. Family and a consistent peer group afford Aboriginal youth the stability that ensures continuity or identity and culture.

The issue of identity and cultural continuity as it relates to urban Aboriginal youth identity development is of critical importance not only for policy makers but for other academics. We found that acculturation as a mediating factor in the process of identity development was not a significant factor. In fact, our findings indicate that these participants isolate themselves to avoid assimilation. Avoiding assimilation is considered by the respondents as essential for both cultural maintenance and the protection of Aboriginal identity. This position is supported by leading Aboriginal education specialist Eber Hampton (1994, 40), who states: "The nurturing effect of a place for Natives is not an isolating or segregating process, instead it frees people to be themselves and to make their contribution to non-Native society." The implicit viewpoint is that until Aboriginal people are comfortable with their own identity they will choose to remain isolated until which time they are secure in venturing into non-Aboriginal society.

The concept of social power is significant and develops as each individual becomes the 'other for the other'. The concepts of continuity and social power are evident in the participants' responses in that they regularly mention friends and family, stressing that familiarity permits personal empowerment to occur within the larger group. The resulting social process of individual identity formation takes place between the idea of 'self' and the idea of the 'collective'. The youth are fully aware that they are culturally Aboriginal and that their cultural ideas as taught to them by parents and peers who continue to act as a guide in day-to-day activities. Aboriginal culture as they understand it is far removed both temporally and geographically from their current environment. That is to say, the reserve is where the youth believe 'Aboriginal culture' is rooted, and more specifically with the elders, and where the collective history of a people can be accessed. This should not be mistaken as an issue of lifestyle versus culture for if Henderson's theory holds true, then one's ecological context, which in this case is the city, will directly influence one's sense of identity without hampering your cultural foundations, a position supported by Jenkins.

Participants suggested that culture resides with the elders, back on the reserves. In certain cases, this knowledge also rested with parents and friends. It appears that family and friends are and will continue to be a grounding influence for urban Aboriginal youth according to discussion circle responses. The home environment is where children first learn the values that direct their personal growth (Erickson 1968). These values are then modified during adolescence as young

people strive to create an identity while also attempting to conform to the norms of peer groups (Parham 1989, 195). Since living in the urban environment requires of youth "the integration of diverse and often conflicting sources of information into a unified sense of self" (Corenblum 1996, 83) it should not surprising that the participants retain close ties to family and peers.

Available statistics suggest this trend will not soon abate. For instance, nationally 57 per cent of Aboriginal youth live in two parent families and 25 per cent live in a single parent family (Manitoba 2003). The statistics for Aboriginal youth living in single parent families is 10 per cent higher than the national average for non-Aboriginal families (Department of Justice 2000, 2). In all, contemporary Aboriginal youth identity is influenced by the lived experience of those youth who recognize that their culture, even if it is derived from historical times, is always a part of them. Identity is also closely associated with how successfully the Aboriginal youth are able to function within the urban environment which in turn generates positive self-esteem. Or, as stated succinctly by the RCAP, "Aboriginal cultural identity is not a single element. It is a complex of features that together shapes how a person thinks about herself or himself as an Aboriginal person." In all, the age 15-24 is a period that due to the multiple influences and constantly changing dynamics is a potentially confusing period for urban Aboriginal youth.

Identity according to Jenkins must also be understood as both a label as well as a lived experience of being an urban Aboriginal youth. For example, the participants represent a generation of youth that has had unprecedented access to urban cultural programs. Racism is also endemic in this setting yet these difficulties can often be assuaged by the nurturing effects of friends and family and the availability of social programs and we start to see the emergence of an Aboriginal identity that is specific to the urban environment and quite distinctive from the reserve. Further this identity is influenced by programs (cultural or otherwise) that allow the youth to socialize with one another which results in the reinforcement of an individual and collective sense of self.

The participants are interested in cultural teachings and recognize the importance of what the elders and old people have to say about history. They are clearly adapting these teachings to better correspond with the environment they live in. The participants raise their children and attend school, they occasionally hang out at the mall with friends or they invite those friends to come over to visit at their home. These data suggest that identity is not so much overtly cultural as it is about skin colour and the person's place within the society they currently live i.e. Winnipeg or a separate society within the larger culture. This experience parallels Jenkins third proposition which indicates that urban Aboriginal identity is both a label and a lived experience. For example, the respondents indicated that the labelling meant little to them, because as explained by one 16-year-old male, "You always have your identity. You don't take that out of your pocket and put it down and say, 'I am not going to be Aboriginal today'." This proposition is incredibly problematic for the youth in a number of ways. Racism appears to be the most pronounced influence that encourages Aboriginal youth to isolate themselves from mainstream society. In turn, Aboriginal youth remain closely linked with family and peers groups as their identity develops.

At the same time, the respondents are required to deal with these various forces as their identity develops. Something as simple as being labelled 'urban Indian' generates internal conflict,

especially when traditional teachings speak so highly of the land, hunting and fishing, ceremony, in general all activities that were previously experienced beyond the city's confines. In sum, the respondents lived experience contradicts much of what they've been taught about Aboriginal people and their culture. In addition to the omnipresent theme of assimilation in Canadian society, the youth are faced with an uphill battle when it comes time to fully reconcile their identity with their environment. The dynamics of urban Aboriginal youth identity are varied and have the potential to damage a person psychologically. According to Nieto (1992), "the positive sense of self-identification challenges the messages and models of an essentially assimilationist society, it creates its own internal conflicts."

Due to the scope of the project, our discussion circles were unfortunately limited to 20 participants none of whom was fully able to fully express how being male or female impacts upon personal identity development making it difficult to discern specifically whether gender significantly influenced identity construction. At no time did the discussion venture into the area of male/female ideas of identity construction despite repeated attempts by the research team to tease these ideas from the participants. Nevertheless, since cultural identity "implies both that such an identity is actually part of an Aboriginal person's current self-perception, and that it has its roots in Aboriginal experience," and that male and female experiences do in fact tend to vary, it is reasonable to conclude that gender does in fact play a significant role in the construction of one's identity (Berry 1996). However, the current lack of academic literature in this area of study indicates that additional research is required.

Another area of study that has been all but ignored in the academic literature pertains to the influence of mobility upon urban Aboriginal identity construction. The majority of respondents indicated that the lack of mobility does influence their identity development primarily due to the fact that it is costly to maintain a Winnipeg bus pass. For instance, high school students must pay $1.45 per trip or $42.35 for a monthly pass. The cost per trip for non-high school students is $1.75 or $65.45 for a monthly pass whereas post secondary students are required to pay $52.35 for a monthly pass (City of Winnipeg 2003). The cost can be prohibitive for Aboriginal youth wishing to take part in cultural events or attend workshops in Winnipeg. For example, "over the period of 1985-1995, the average individual income of non-Aboriginal Canadians increased to $19,831 (1986 constant dollars), compared with $13,020 for Aboriginal Canadians as a whole, $13,995 for Métis, $12,268 for Inuit, $13,830 for status Indians off-reserve, and $10,528 for status Indians living on-reserve" (Report of the Working Group on Aboriginal Participation in the Economy 2001, 6). One is thus able to conclude that owning a vehicle is oftentimes unaffordable and that valuable disposable income cannot be funnelled into public transit passes or for superfluous travel. The time involved to travel to such events was a concern also expressed by the participants. It is important to note that this perceived lack of monetary resources did not appear to hinder the youth from seeking out those sources they considered integral to their identity development.

Of all of Jenkins' ideas, the second proposition that suggests a common ancestry does not cause people to recognize themselves as members of an ethnic group is wholly irreconcilable within our theoretical framework, although his position regarding the importance of acting together in the pursuit of collective interests encourages ethnic identification appears apposite. In fact, the first part of this proposition contradicts the discussion circle results. For example, during a protracted discussion regarding the critical urban social support was to their positive identity

formation, the respondents indicated that being First Nations, Metis, or Inuit permitted the youth to specifically define their cultural heritage. Individuals from various cultural backgrounds i.e. Dakota, Ojibwa, and Dene, all attended cultural events and took part in these events together. Community continues to play an important role although these dynamics have changed somewhat.

Cultural affiliation is important and the respondents were quick to indicate whether they were Metis, Inuit or Indian, Ojibwa, Cree, or Dakota. Yet the participants also associated common ancestry, which in this case is identifying as an Aboriginal person rather than as a member of a specific nation such as Cree, as enough to identify with. And at the same time the respondents are working together according to collective interests which are encouraging ethnic identification. Are urban Aboriginal youth becoming an all-inclusive, homogeneous category that denies personal identity? If we subscribe to Jenkins' conclusion that personal identity is social identity, we may be witnessing the evolution of a new and unique Aboriginal group. More research is required to flesh out many of these ideas.

3.4   Conclusion

Today there are multiple issues that directly impact identity in the urban environment. Respondents clearly differentiated between reserve and urban Aboriginal identity even though the roots of this identity could be traced back to older times when grandparents were living beyond the urban environment. Whereas the community i.e. the small band once provided the social influence within the overall ecological context that in turn influenced identity construction, the city is the community from which a unique urban Aboriginal consciousness is now developing (for this discussion see Newhouse 2002, 2000).

Jenkins suggests four points in relation to studying identity construction. First, we should not study a minority group without also studying the majority, something we were unable to accomplish due to time limitations. Research to supplement our findings is required. Two, he suggests that we must recognize that a common ancestry does not cause people to recognize themselves as members of an ethnic group; rather, acting together in the pursuit of collective interests encourages ethnic identification. This is the one proposition that we do not fully agree with. Three, that ethnicity must be understood as both nominal and virtual. Finally the focus of social interaction in the production of shared meaning is crucial for "social identity is never unilateral" and is subject to change and transformation." We are able to conclude based upon our research that an urban Aboriginal youth culture is emerging and will ultimately metamorphose into a unique urban Aboriginal culture as these individuals become adults, have families, and become further entrenched in the urban environment. It is important to begin addressing the needs of Aboriginal people for their 'urbanization' is no longer an anticipated process but in fact a staid reality.

In general, gender and status do not appear to influence the youth in terms of their desire to either participate or actually take part in culturally-based events. What does at time hinder participation is a lack of mobility as suggested, but the respondents were more concerned with the time it takes to travel to inner-city events as opposed to not being able to attend due to distance. The duration of one's residence in the city had the greatest impact and it was these

youth who lived in an urban environment for the majority of their life who tended to view the reserve in a less than positive light. The youth who recently relocated to the city from the reserve lamented their not being back on the reserve where it was quieter, less polluted and less dangerous. For those raised in an urban environment, contact with the reserve is not viewed as requisite to taking part in cultural activities. For those who wish to be living back on the reserve, it appears that they do not want participate in urban cultural events due to a perceived lack of authenticity.

What we were able to determine was the opinion leaders recognize a unique urban Aboriginal cultural identity is currently forming but that there is a general lack of available resources to aid in this identity construction. And despite warnings concerning the psychological impact urban identity formation is exacting upon the participants, these youth also viewed themselves as occupying an enviable position in that they are able to function and work within the urban environment and still maintain connection to their Aboriginal culture and heritage without assimilating into mainstream Canadian society. Nevertheless there is an urgent need to address the fact that an urban Aboriginal consciousness is developing among these opinion leaders and how to generate and direct the appropriate resources to the development and continuation of programs the opinion leaders believe would facilitate positive identity development.

PART 4

4.1 Recommendations

How can governments support the development of aboriginal youth culture and identity in urban environments? Taking a somewhat unique approach, the following section lists what actions the project participants believed should be taken to aid in their identity development in Winnipeg. The Aboriginal youth who participated in this project were explicit regarding what actions should be taken to ensure their improved access to programs and resources that were cultural in scope and would also aid in their identity development and culture retention. The recommendations listed below were derived from these discussions with the youth and represent, in condensed form, what steps they believed should be taken. The recommendations are not listed in any particular order of importance.

The recommendations are two-fold: they are aimed at youth who may be culturally engaged or involved in programs to aid in their identity development; and they take into consideration those youth who are in the throes of identity development or whose identity is fully developed and who may be in need of programs that are sensitive to their needs at this stage in their personal development.

Recommendation 1

Provide funding and training to facilitate peer-to-peer counselling.

A major theme to emerge from this project was the strength pf the participants as cultural mediators and the role they must continue to play in the maintenance of their identity. The participants felt that only youth have the ability to understand how another youth feels, what issues they are dealing with and how to resolve problems within the urban environment. In essence, empathy for another is a major force that, if properly nurtured, could guide Aboriginal youth in the formation of their identity but could also better facilitate their interaction with members of non-Aboriginal society.

Working within a group of youth with similar interests who are of comparable age encourages a group dynamic that fosters a comfort level. Promotion of positive self-esteem can then occur which if capitalized upon can help ease the integration of Aboriginal youth into mainstream Canadian society without their having to contend with feelings of assimilation or inadequacy.

A number of steps could be taken to provide funding to youth-oriented programs and to train youth to act as counsellors for those who are only comfortable speaking with someone who is Aboriginal and closer to their own age.

Actions:
- Working in partnership with existing organizations that have an Aboriginal youth mandate to develop peer to peer training programs;

- Develop marketing and initiatives to build awareness of opportunities for Aboriginal youth to participate

Recommendation 2

Efforts should be made by governments and other funding bodies to address barriers, like transportation, to allow youth greater access to cultural events and programs.

There are two issues at work here: 1) Access to cultural programs is impeded by lack of transportation; and, 2) The high imprisonment rate among Aboriginal peoples affects cultural participation.

Most of the youth indicated their displeasure at how long it takes them to travel to access the available programs. This clearly indicates that existing cultural programs would likely experience increased participation as Aboriginal youth would be able to more easily travel to the teachers and cultural people.

Oftentimes, inmates are people who could be important cultural resources for the youth involved. Further, youth could also be incarcerated or in similar situations where they may not have access to their culture; hence, this shuttle service could be utilized to facilitate the interaction required to support continued cultural education notwithstanding distance or the fact that someone may be currently incarcerated.

Recommendation 3

Provide block funding in the form of grants to allow families to take the required time off to work with their children to promote cultural activities.

The majority of the project participants cited family members as important cultural resources. They further explained that they would like to spend more time with family taking part in culturally-specific events such as powwows. There was also the expressed interest to take additional time and get away as a family from the city, but not necessarily for a trip to the reserve. The lack of hunting and fishing in the city was mentioned as an activity many did miss and this could be facilitated through grants provided to families that would allow the time required to participate in such activities. Although not specifically described as impediments to cultural participation beyond the city of Winnipeg, prohibitive costs were also listed by the respondents as obstacles to identity construction.

Family interaction was suggested by the majority of participants as a foundational component in the development of their identity and maintenance of culture. Those who did not have this anchor in place expressed regret and stated that in fact they were for the most part lost without that connection to their ancestry. A family grant such as the one being proposed could be viewed as a cultural vacation fund that is available to those

families who want to participate in activities with family members for the purposes of culture retention.

Recommendation 4

A coordinated effort is needed by governments and service providers to determine and employ communication tools that are consistent with the realities of urban Aboriginal youth.

As most of the participants have access to the Internet as students and others admitted to owning computers and 'surfing the Net', the establishment of a Winnipeg specific Aboriginal youth network is recommended. Available at this site would be postings indicating where and when events are being held in addition to instructions on how to get to the venues.

Since communication and marketing (or the lack thereof) was cited during the discussion groups as something the participants would like to improve, the suggested website should be designed to act as a billboard for the exchange of ideas and commentary and a chat room component should be included to allow those who are engaged with the Internet to exchange ideas and to network with one another. This would provide Aboriginal youth the ability to engage electronically with other urban youth, exchanges that could eventually lead to one-on-one contact.

For example, the participants believed that accessible story books for their children containing traditional stories and/or books available in school and public libraries would assist them with learning about their own culture. Contemporary media such as newspapers, books, the Internet, television and radio are all regularly employed as educational tools that aid in identity construction. The respondents are also aware that far too many negative stories about Aboriginal people and the accompanying issues can be harmful to one's sense of self. If positive stories of Aboriginal people are available, they would reinforce among Aboriginal youth that positive events do occur which is empowering.

Actions:
- Marketing existing programs for publishing and writing within Canadian Heritage
- Enhance funding of Canada Council Aboriginal Arts programs for emerging playwrights, screenwriters and storytellers
- Create awareness of existing programs by marketing to the communities

Recommendation 5

Promote an all youth culture day that would allow youth of all culture groups to engage one another in a neutral space.

During the discussion circles, a number of participants elaborated upon their dealings with people of other cultural groups and most agreed that events such as being recommended allowed for group interaction to take place that most advantageous to all. The proposed event would permit youth from various culture groups (Chinese, Anglo, Ukrainian) to come together and exchange ideas and become knowledgeable of the other, another area Aboriginal youth believe work should be conducted.

The proposed event could be planned at any time during the year, although when school is in session would be the best time. This would ensure good participation since youth would be available to attend. The proposed website could be utilized to promote this event; knowledge of the event would quickly spread. This event would be similar to Folklorama although not as tourism focussed. The youth believed that if they could demonstrate their own culture it would aid in the elimination of racism, not just towards them, but other minority groups as well.

Recommendation 6

Establish a cultural camp (open to youth of all ethnicities) that would allow cross-cultural interaction to occur while instilling the continued importance of the more traditional lifestyle.

Following up on a RCAP suggestion first produced in 1996, one youth suggested that a cultural camp run by Aboriginal people that was also open to youth of all cultures be established. The goal is to not only impress upon Aboriginal youth some of the older ways, and the camp could also be used as a mechanism to promote cross-cultural dialogue and understanding. The cultural camp would present older aspects of Aboriginal culture while also presenting some of the more traditional components as relevant to contemporary urban Aboriginal youth.

Recommendation 7

Steps are needed to ensure culturally relevant programs are available to urban Aboriginal youth.

The Aboriginal youth almost unanimously stated that there was a need for additional programs. The most popular programs had to do with sports, although there were three youth who desired more culturally focussed programs be established which focussed on dancing, singing, and drumming. One 17 year old male stated he wanted access to his language and that an appropriate program be established. The youth discussed several existing programs that were not being effectively promoted. Some youth in the group had access to the information about these programs although the majority did not.

The marketing of programs was a topic of discussion amongst the research participants. Increased marketing would lead to greater program accessibility. As well, those who devise said programs must also be aware that there are Aboriginal youth located throughout the city of Winnipeg and that there is a need to hold programs and events in

various reaches of the city. Travel is expensive and time consuming, and if you live nearby the University of Manitoba getting to Thunderbird House is a prolonged procedure.

Recommendation 8

Support the increased participation of urban Aboriginal youth in anti-racism initiatives.

As demonstrated by this study urban Aboriginal people are forced to contend with racism, and whereas Aboriginal adults may be somewhat better situated to absorb and deal with this abuse, Aboriginal youth oftentimes do no have the appropriate skills required to buffer such cruelty.

Actions:
- Market existing programs and conferences
- Outreach to Aboriginal organizations that have not previously participated in racism initiatives and conferences

Recommendation 9

Structure a central inter-governmental agency that is able to co-ordinate all mentoring and cultural programs geared for Aboriginal people so there is more inter-organization communication.

The major complaint by youth participants focussed on the fact that many different agencies develop programs without effectively promoting their availability. There is overlap in what is being offered: the money wasted here could be better utilized for additional programs.

Actions:
- Develop an inter-government committee that is in contact with the major Aboriginal organizations in Winnipeg.
- Development of a website to promote organizations and activities within the organizations.

APPENDIX A

<p align="center">Aboriginal Identity in Winnipeg
Questionnaire</p>

PART A

1.   Age ___

2.   Male   ☐   Female ☐   Other ☐

3.   What is your cultural/ethnic affiliation:

First Nation (Status)	☐	Inuit	☐	
First Nation (Non-Status)	☐	Metis	☐	

PART B

1.   Please indicate which of the following categories best represent your current situation (choose more than one if applicable):

Student	☐	With Partner	☐
Employed (Full time)	☐	Married	☐
Employed (Part Time)	☐	Divorced	☐
Unemployed	☐	Single Parent	☐
Single	☐		

2.   Please indicate where you live:

By Myself	☐	With Friends	☐
With Parents	☐	At School	☐
W/ Guardian	☐	Other:	

3.   How long have you lived in Winnipeg:

1 year	☐	6-9 years	☐
2-3 years	☐	10-15 years	☐
4-5 years	☐	More than 16 years	☐

4.   How many full time wage earners live in your home? ___

5.   Please estimate how much money your parents or guardians makes in a year.

Less than $7000	☐	$31000 - $35000	☐
$7000 - $10000	☐	$36000 - $40000	☐
$11000 - 15000	☐	$41000 - $45000	☐
$16000 - $20000	☐	$46000 - $50000	☐
$20000 - $25000	☐	More than $50000	☐
$26000 - $30000	☐	Don't Know	☐

6.   What is the last grade you completed: ____

7.   List the highest level of education your parents completed:

        University   ☐   Vocational training   ☐
        College ☐   Didn't finish school   ☐
        High School   ☐   Didn't attend school   ☐
        Don't know   ☐

8.   Please list the languages that you speak:

9.   What language(s) is spoken at home:

10.   If you are attending school, please indicate what languages are taught in your school:

        English ☐   Dakota   ☐
        French   ☐   Ojibwa   ☐
        Spanish ☐   Dene   ☐
        Chinese ☐   Cree   ☐

11.   Where do you come into contact with people who speak an Aboriginal language:

        Home   ☐   Hospital   ☐
        School   ☐   Church   ☐
        Relatives Homes   ☐   Public Transit   ☐
        Shopping Centre   ☐   Other   ☐
        Work   ☐   Please list:
        Theatres   ☐

12.   Do you have access to someone who can speak or teach an Aboriginal language (teachers,
        family, etc.): YES ☐ NO   ☐

13.   If you answered yes to number 12, please indicate where:

14.   I would participate more if Aboriginal languages where taught in my school rather than an
        outside location: YES ☐   NO ☐

15.   Given the choice, what language would you believe is most important to learn with the
        understanding that you will be looking to advance to college or university or obtain work
        following high school:

        English ☐   Ojibwa   ☐
        French   ☐   Dene   ☐
        Spanish ☐   Dakota   ☐
        Chinese ☐   Cree   ☐

16.   During the last year how often have you visited a reserve community:

Never   ☐   6-9   ☐
1-2   ☐   More than 10   ☐
3-5   ☐

17.   How often do you visit your home community each year if it is not Winnipeg:

Never   ☐   6-9   ☐
1-2   ☐   More than 10   ☐
3-5   ☐

18.   Please indicate which of the following television programs/movies you have seen:

Windtalkers   ☐   The Beachcombers   ☐
Dances with Wolves   ☐   North of 60   ☐
Cooking with the Wolfman   ☐   The Rez   ☐
Northern Exposure   ☐   Dance Me Outside   ☐
Thunderheart   ☐   Other:

19.   What if any of the characters do you identify with and why?

20.   List some of your favourite actors:

21.   Do you know any Aboriginal actors or film makers? List their names:

22.   What music do you most often listen to:

Rap/Hip Hop   ☐   Alternative   ☐
Blues   ☐   Funk   ☐
Country   ☐   Jazz   ☐
Rock   ☐   Electronica/Dance   ☐
Classical   ☐   Other:
Folk   ☐

23.   List some of your favourite musicians:

24.   Do you know any Aboriginal musicians? List their names:

25.   Do you own/have any traditional music at home: YES ☐   NO ☐

26.   If you answered no, could you please tell us why not:

27.   Do you have access to the internet: YES ☐   NO ☐

28.   Do you do traditional crafts and/or activities: YES ☐   NO ☐

29.   If you answered yes to number 28, please list which ones:

30.   Do you play a musical instrument: YES ☐   NO ☐

31.   If yes, what instrument do you play and where did you learn how to play:

32.   List the sports you play:

        Baseball   ☐   Basketball   ☐
        Soccer   ☐   Bowling   ☐
        Hockey ☐   Tennis   ☐
        Football   ☐   Volleyball   ☐
        Lacrosse   ☐   Curling ☐
        Golf   ☐   Running   ☐
        Roller Blade   ☐   Other   ☐

33.   Do you play: On organized teams   ☐   Recreationally ☐

34.   What cultural teachings do you currently participate in (e.g. dancing, beading, singing, etc):

35.   What cultural teachings would you participate in if you had the opportunity (e.g. dancing, beading, singing, etc):

36.   Have you experienced racism.   YES   ☐   NO   ☐

37.   If yes, please indicate where:

Home   ☐   Hospital   ☐
School   ☐   Church   ☐
Relatives Homes   ☐   Public Transit   ☐
Shopping Centre   ☐   Other   ☐
Work   ☐   Please list:
Theatres   ☐

38.   If you feel comfortable doing so, please share a racism story with us:

39.   Do you watch APTN: YES   □   NO   □

40.   Please tell us why or why you do not watch APTN:

41.   Do you read any Aboriginal newspapers or magazines? Please indicate below which
        ones:

PART C

For the following questions circle your answer.

1.   Language is a strong component for learning ones cultural heritage:

        Strongly Agree Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

2.   Language helps to ensure the preservation of ones cultural identity:

        Strongly Agree Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

3.   Elders are historically a key component of passing on the cultural teachings to youth and
        should continue to do so in contemporary education.

        Strongly Agree Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

4.   Having the option to participate in cultural teachings will provide everyone that
        participates an opportunity to learn and gain understanding of the aboriginal culture.

Strongly Agree Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

5.   Learning the roles Aboriginal People played in the development of Canada will enhance appreciation of the history of Canada for Aboriginal youth today.

Strongly Agree Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

6.   Native Studies classes in the curriculum will provide a healthy environment to learn about Aboriginal history.

Strongly Agree Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

7.   Learning about Aboriginal ceremonies (sweatlodge, sharing circles, smudging) and providing opportunities to participate in them would benefit Aboriginal youth in exploring their heritage.

Strongly Agree Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

Urban Aboriginal Youth:
Culture and Identity Formation in Cities
(Discussion Circle Survey)

Part A: Collective Identity

1) Describe to me what identity represents to you.
2) Describe to me your identity?
3) Does your identity change by living in an urban or rural environment?
4) If so how? If not, why?
5) Do you feel that you are a part of mainstream society? Do you identify with it? Do you feel you are an outsider of mainstream society?
6) Can you be Aboriginal and live in the city while still retaining your identity? Explain
7) What effect does living in an urban environment have on your identity?
8) Does visiting a reserve community have an effect your sense of identity? If yes, what is the effect?
9) Do you feel that an Aboriginal identity can flourish in an urban environment? Explain.

Part B: Cultural Identity/Participation in Identity Formation

1) What sorts of activities would you like to see that would help further develop your sense of identity?
2) Do you read books or visit websites with Aboriginal content? How do you feel about them? Have you learned anything of value from them?
3) Do you have someone you can talk to about your cultural history?
3. Are you interested in Aboriginal politics?
4) What kind of Aboriginal events do you attend? Where are they held? Do they reinforce your sense of Aboriginal identity?
5) Have you used the services of any of the aboriginal organizations in Winnipeg? What was helpful?
6) If you go to university or college, do you use the services of the aboriginal centres or aboriginal student advisors, etc? Describe the experiences.
7) If you work, do you work with people from different cultures?

Part C: Identity Construction

1) What facilities/activities are available in town for a person who is Aboriginal that help reinforce your identity as an Aboriginal person?
2) What kinds of activities do you participate in that reinforce your sense of Aboriginal identity?
3) Does how people view you influence your identity? Explain
4) Where **don't** you obtain ideas about your identity as an Aboriginal person? (school, malls).
5) Where do you hang out in your spare time?

6) Are there any other cultural groups besides Aboriginal people that you identify with and why?

7) In terms of your personal identity, what is good about being native in an urban environment? What is bad about it?

8) Do you aspire to be like an Aboriginal role model? Why? What about them would you like to imitate?

9) What sources would you claim most influence your identity as an Aboriginal person (parents, TV)?

10) Can you indicate where false images of Aboriginal people occur that are offensive?

11) Are there moments when you do not admit to being Aboriginal? Does this hurt your identity?

APPENDIX C

Dear Parents or Guardians,

The Department of Culture and Heritage has contracted researchers in Winnipeg to participate in a Youth Roundtable discussion on Urban Aboriginal Youth Identity Formation.

Your son/daughter has been selected to participate, as a Youth Delegate at the Roundtable to be held on February 22nd, 2003. The Roundtable discussions will take place from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Your son/daughter will be provided an honorarium of fifty dollars ($50.00) for attending the full day. A light continental breakfast and lunch will be provided.

Along with this note, there is a copy of a Youth Booklet that we are asking all the youth participating to read, make notes and bring it with them to the Roundtable. The Youth will be discussing ideas and influences on identity and the booklet will assist with that process.

As a result of their age we will require a signature from you indicating your permission for your son/daughter's involvement.

Please sign the enclosed form and have your son/daughter return it with their registration.

Thank you and if you have any questions or concerns feel free to contact Liz Barron at 292-0952 or via email to: liz-barron@shaw.ca

Sincerely

Liz Barron
Project Manager

Parent/Guardian

Youth Name

Address

Address

APPENDIX D

Research Questions/Gaps:

The research project will close gaps in research knowledge on urban Aboriginal youth by answering the following questions:

Identity Formation

*	Which variables (e.g., age, gender, mobility, income, length of time living in the city, regular contact with reserve community, status, availability of urban social support, contact with urban Aboriginal organizations, First Nations, Metis, Inuit) influence identity construction in urban environments and how?

*	How do male and female aboriginal youth differ in their constructions of identity and culture?

*	How important do youth feel language is in the maintenance of cultural identity?

*	How does the experience of racism influence the development of Aboriginal identity and a positive self-concept among youth? What solutions do youth have to effectively address racism?

*	What is the current level of self-esteem on the part of urban Aboriginal youth? What solutions do youth have to enhancing their self-esteem?

Cultural Development

*	Which variables (e.g., age, gender, income, mobility, length of time living in the city, regular contact with reserve community, status, First Nations, Metis, Inuit), influence cultural participation in urban environments and how?

*	Which cultural resources (e.g., aboriginal celebrations, broadcasting, film, theatre, music, sport, friendship centres, contact with Elders, Aboriginal schools, Aboriginal social services, Aboriginal youth organizations) do youth value for their cultural retention needs?

*	What constitutes contemporary Aboriginal culture and identity for youth? How do they feel it differs from 'traditional' forms? Do urban aboriginal youth define their identity differently from their on-reserve counterparts?

*	How can governments support the development of Aboriginal youth culture and identity in urban environments?

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