INDIGENOUS LIFE COURSES,
RACIALIZED GENDERED LIFE SCRIPTS, AND
CULTURAL IDENTITIES OF RESISTANCE AND RESILIENCE

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research project was to understand the cultural identity of young Indigenous adults living between on-reserve, off-reserve rural settings, and the city. The secondary research question examined the gendered experiences of family, school, and work in this process. I interviewed men and women, 16 from the city of Edmonton, and 15 living in Wabasca, Alberta. This study uses my brand of Indigenous Sociology, in which I combine Cree Indigenous research methodologies, Indigenous feminism, and a life course approach. As background, I lay out the complex geographic, demographic, historical and colonial context of the migration experiences, and show that Indigenous peoples continue to live under a colonial regime that geographically and racially divides us.

Findings from interviews reveal cultural identity is based on family relations. Key themes explored are: the child as central to family and community; family as central to building healthy relations and cultural identity; and positive and negative understandings of community. I explore a theory on bouncing among family relations and locations, while balancing family, school and work. One of the key findings of this study is how extended family networks provide for moral support, financial support, and childcare support for those that choose to complete an education and become steadily employed. I present Indigenous models of family as a form of resistance and resilience to colonialism, and that healthy family relations are built in different locations.

I present the interview findings on school and work choices. I outline the colonial structures of education which impact access to schooling and funding, which are divided along geographic and racial lines. I examine specific factors that acted as barriers and facilitators to achievements in school and work. I finish by explaining that community members must contend with racialized gendered life scripts along their life courses. Specifically, Indigenous women

must contend with life scripts that expect a fate of early childbearing and poverty. Indigenous men contend with a life script that expects them to drop out of high school and enter unskilled jobs in the oil industry. To challenge these life scripts Indigenous men and women demonstrate their agency by making choices for education, and choices to find skilled jobs.

I conclude by stating that Indigenous men and women develop an identity based on their resistance and resilience against racist and gendered structural institutions in school and work. I suggest that social policies for Indigenous peoples on education, training, and employment must incorporate an Indigenous model of lifelong learning to combat racialized gendered life scripts. This will allow for a holistic approach where relations to family and community are integral to learning, and Indigenous understandings of the life course can be easily integrated.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 MY STORY

My name is Angele Alook, I am a member of Bigstone Cree Nation, and I am the daughter of Donald and Bertha Alook from Wabasca-Desmarais. My family is from the Wabasca-Desmarais area in Northern Alberta, and they are members of the community in which I have conducted research. I have come to realise that family and a sense of community has formed a great deal of my identity and what it means to be Cree. I speak the Cree language, but I struggle at times to maintain my language in a colonized English speaking Canada. I usually only speak Cree with my family members and those I feel comfortable with in my community. I am proud to know my language because it is a very descriptive language and it allows me to see the world in a very colourful manner. I am a Treaty Indian with Indian Status under Treaty 8. This has given me the privilege of Treaty Rights such as education and healthcare, and this status also gives me a false sense of security in my identity as an Aboriginal person because according to the *Indian Act* I am considered an Indian. Yet I am a Treaty Indian of mixed heritage; my mother tells me stories of her grandmother being a blue-eyed Catholic woman, as well as telling me stories of my father's mother who was a proud Metis woman. At the same time, I know stories of my father's father who was a Cree Treaty Indian who spent most of his life living on the land as a hunter and trapper.

I grew up in Wabasca on Reserve 166D of Bigstone Cree Nation, in the part of the reserve we refer to as Muskoteek. When I was 17 years old I left my community to go to high school in Edmonton. Once I graduated I went to the University of Alberta to pursue a Bachelor of Arts. Immediately afterword I returned to complete my Masters of Arts. Finally I moved to Toronto to pursue my PhD studies at York University in the Department of Sociology. After I

completed my coursework for my PhD program, I returned to Edmonton. Throughout this journey I have always felt a sense of home on the 'rez' in Wabasca. Although I am a self-proclaimed urbanite and feel at home in the city, the only place I feel true belonging is on Reserve 166D. I have had quite a journey in my educational experiences and these experiences of leaving my community have influenced my research with my community. My sense of home and belonging has influenced the following research; I have many relations in my home community with whom I shared similar journeys. I feel especially close to those kin that had left the community of Wabasca to pursue education in the city, and then remained in the city as it provided for more options in their careers. For example, I interviewed a healthcare worker who realised he could have found work back home in Wabasca, but the career opportunities available in a large hospital in the city were more exciting and allowed for more variety in work and advancement, so he choose to work in the city. I realised this wasn't the experience of everyone in the community, so I interviewed those that left the community of Wabasca and those that stayed. We all had different journeys, but a similarity most of us shared were that at some point we had all had to make a decision about whether to live in Wabasca or live outside the community for school and work. How this decision is made has been central to my research project.

Another aspect of personal significance that came out while interviewing community members was the importance of being a parent and the work-life balance of raising a family, and intertwined in this was the balance required to stay connected to community and extended family. This came as a surprise but I felt it helped me relate better to community members in this study, because about two thirds of them also had a young family. While doing this research project I continued to work part-time in order to provide for my family and care for my children.

I found I related quite well to the life stories of many of the community members in this study; many of them had young families and had to struggle between caring for their families, pursuing an education and working. For example, one married female community member had two children while pursuing a Bachelors of Education degree, and part of her story was how her parents and siblings helped a great deal with childcare needs in order for her to do well in school. Even when she became an educator, family continued to help with childcare in order for her to do well in her career. I related to her story of work-life balance, and having a supportive family, since not only has my husband helped me with childcare, but my three brothers and parents helped me a great deal financially and with moral support. As I interviewed and dealt with my own challenges of being a working parent, I came to realise an important theme of this project was how children are central to our community. I noticed how the Cree extended family tradition of caring for the child was practiced, in which childcare is provided by parents, aunties, uncles and grandparents. And in extension, how these cultural practices prevailed as a mechanism to support parents who were working in jobs and careers in a demanding capitalist society.

Something else that impacted me personally and came out while conducting this research were the marked class differences in the community. While doing this research I came to realize that I differed from some community members because of the privilege I had in being university educated. This personal history of mine allowed me to relate to some of the community members that had a similar story. Due to our educational attainment we returned to the community with a western education and middle-class understanding of meritocracy, in which we valued career progression and felt we had 'earned' where we are in life. I came to realise that although I had received funding from the First Nation to pay for my tuition and living expenses for part of my university education, a great deal of my success was dependant on the fact that my family valued

education and I was raised in a fairly middle-class home. As a child I didn't experience poverty, and I was able to complete my degrees because of the financial assistance and moral support from my family.

I interviewed one community member that also had a university degree, and he came from a similar family that helped support him through university. The investment his family put into his education paid off in the end, as he was now a recognized leader in the community and his field of work. But there was another community member I had interviewed who was now a truck driver in the oil industry, and I felt his story differed significantly from mine. He had not completed high school; instead he quit when he was about 16 years old to start work in the oilfield, which was a common pattern I had observed. While I interviewed this community member I felt uncomfortable, because prior to the interview I had that explained this research was for my PhD and we had discussed my career aspirations in academia, and my plans for the research. I had gone to high school with this community member and we were from the same religious community. I felt terrible when he spoke of how he wished he had completed high school and I felt this was a direct contrast to our prior conversation in which I discussed my educational and career achievements. At that moment I realized I did not want to be one of those academics that harvests an Indigenous community for knowledge and never returns. I felt a moral obligation to give back to the community. However, as I left his home, I reflected on the conversation we had in which he had described the efforts he made in order to purchase his new home in the municipality and how he was able to do this working in the oil industry. In fact, I had left a few interviews, walking away from beautiful new homes, with new trucks, boats, snowmobiles and ATV's in the front yard.

Living in Alberta there is often a stark contrast between those who work in the oil industry and those who work outside the oil industry. Those in the oil industry can earn large amounts of money in short periods of time, often going to work camps where they work up to 12 hours per day, working up to 24 days in a row (with 4 days off in between shifts) and their earning power is noticeable. In the minds of many Albertans, there is a stereotypical oil industry worker: he owns a new home, a big fancy new truck, pulls an RV, vacations in Las Vegas, and spends his 'days off' shopping in the city. Given my career choice as a public servant and academic, although I may hold middle class knowledge-based jobs, I will most likely never attain the amount of material wealth an oil industry worker can earn in such short periods of time.

So at times my class made me feel different. I sometimes felt privileged due to my education. And at times because I did not work in the oil industry, I felt like an outsider who could not relate to their material wealth. That being said, most of my close family relatives also worked in the oil industry as heavy equipment operators, truck drivers and contractors. At times my education, class, and occupation made me an outsider, and at times I was an insider. So class differences became personally significant as I continued my research and began to realise class differences were quite apparent in the community.

My research was with the Aboriginal community from the Wabasca Alberta area, which is in the traditional territory of Bigstone Cree Nation and the local Metis Nation. I choose to research young adults of the community for a couple reasons. First, I was interested in their migration experiences between the rural community and urban areas, and how this movement influences their understanding of Aboriginal identity. I am proud of where I come from and I believe that this research can benefit the community by revealing the diversity of the community

and how this diversity brings strength to our community. Secondly, I did this research because I would like to reveal the ongoing struggles of the young working individuals and families in my community. These struggles include: leaving the community to pursue a post-secondary education away from one's family; living in the city to work while trying to maintain a sense of Aboriginal culture; choosing to stay in the community and pursue distance education while trying to maintain a family; working long gruelling hours in the oil industry and trying to live locally; trying to stay positive in a northern community especially since drugs and alcoholism have affected our community; and trying to keep our language in a community increasingly being influenced by economic globalization. I wanted to do this research because my family and community have supported me throughout most of my post-secondary education. I want to give back to the community by using my skills as a social scientist to do research that can benefit the community.

1.2 THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The primary research question of my project was: How does the migration process between the reserve and urban areas affect the cultural identity formation of young Aboriginal adults? I asked this question in the context of secondary research questions about gender differences experienced in this process, and in the context of the choices that young Aboriginal adults have to make in terms of education and entering the labour market at this stage in their lives.

A qualitative study which takes the time to understand the cultural identity of young Aboriginal adults and their life experiences is more useful than statistics when it comes to developing programs and policies that cater to this cohort. Differences in educational attainment, location, and gender are facts that are better understood through interviews about individual life

stories that take into account the diverse experiences of young Aboriginal adults, instead of explaining them away as negative statistics representing the marginal.

The question of cultural identity also involves questions of community and family. When a person leaves the reserve to live in the city s/he is most likely taking his/her partner and children with them. Even if they are single and moving to the city they are often leaving their extended family (parents, grandparents, siblings) behind. In the city, there are networks of family from the reserve and on the reserve there is a large network of relatives that comprises the community. The community members discussed with me this phenomenon of moving between family members, between the reserve and the city. So the questions of cultural identity include a component of understanding concepts of family and community.

Questions of ethnic identity are particularly interesting for this community because Wabasca consists of reserve land, a municipal district with Anglo-Canadians, and a large Metis community. There is a great deal of intermarriage between the groups. There is also the reality that once community members live in the city they may marry outside of the Aboriginal community. This has implications for understanding Cree identity, in the constant pulling apart that is manifested between those Cree people designated as "Metis" and those Cree people designated as "Indians". Through this research I deconstruct and examine the language of race imposed by the colonizer government, which divides Aboriginal people into "Indians", "Metis", "First Nations" and even the term "Aboriginal" to understand how members of the community define their identities as a colonized people. The government has created this discourse of Status Indian, Non-Status Indian, Metis, or First Nations, and I examine how this discourse is used in the community and the meanings community members attach to these terms. Location, cultural

identity, ethnic identity, family and community are all central concepts that are explored in this research.

For this research I was interested in the migration experiences of young Aboriginal adults, I understand that people have many different reasons for living in the city or on the reserve, but for this particular cohort, making decisions about schooling and work are important issues that young adults have to deal with at this stage in their lives. Therefore while I was trying to gain an understanding of the complex nature of the identity of young adults from a migratory Aboriginal community, along the way I gained an understanding of the mundane, practical reasons why they live on reserve or in the city. The reality is that people leave the reserve for educational or economic reasons. In this research, my micro questions of self-identity revealed some of the macro-social and macro-economic realities of Aboriginal communities. The community members suggested that educating our youth and providing them with skills for the workplace would improve the lives of our people and our community. One community member also suggested that for those young people that leave the community to get educated in the city, incentives need to be created to come back to the reserve, and while they are away they should be supported to stay connected to their cultural background and community. Another community member highlighted that the First Nation is trying to create programs so that community members can gain skilled trades experience on-reserve, so they don't have to leave the community. Thus, community members live in the city for school and work that isn't available on reserve.

One unique aspect for the community of Wabasca is that it is situated in the heart of the oil industry. While this means that there are opportunities to stay on-reserve to work in the oil industry, understanding the local economy may reveal some interesting insights around

Aboriginal identity, a connection to our traditional land and the implications of the oil industry's presence in the region. Another economic issue that came up for those that live on-reserve or in the city, is that there is not enough adequate housing despite efforts to build several housing units on-reserve in the past few years and despite the off-reserve housing programs provided by the First Nations, the rural municipality, and the city.

This concern for educating and employing young Aboriginal people is very close to my heart because of my own professional work experience. My first job was running a summer student employment program for Bigstone Cree Nation which employed high school and post-secondary students in Wabasca. In the three years that I ran this program I realized the importance of encouraging our youth to dream big and I saw their sense of pride when they were employed and did a good job. Later on I worked as a Funding Officer for the federal government in which I worked with First Nations communities on funding issues. This experience made me realise the importance of having a skilled First Nations workforce in order to have a well-managed and healthy community. Still later, my experience as a Human Resources professional in the federal government made me recognise that although there is a willing Aboriginal workforce, they are often not skilled or educated enough to fill the quotas of Aboriginal hiring initiatives, let alone fill the higher level positions that organizations require. So this has drawn me to the same conclusion as some community members; that we need a skilled and educated and committed and visionary Aboriginal workforce in order to have some sense of self-determination as a people. This need to educate, develop skills and employ our young people is a complex issue that has been shaped by processes of colonialism that have left our people robbed of our traditional land base and marginalized in the labour force. In many respects however, the capitalist oil industry that has moved into our community has limited our economic decisions and

sustainability to the whims of companies that are only profit seeking. I will discuss this further in my chapter on school-to-work transitions, and how the oil industry limits employment options for the region, and brings with it multiple social problems, health problems and damage to our environment.

The format of the dissertation is as follows:

- Chapter Two: This chapter prepares the study to examine Indigenous migration experiences and cultural identity. There is a review of the demographics of Canada's diverse Indigenous peoples, and a literature review on Indigenous cultural identity. Indigenous Feminism is introduced in the context of examining how colonialism has broken down the traditional Indigenous family. The life course approach is presented as a lens to examine gender and race. I close by presenting my brand of Indigenous Sociology that follows my grandmother's cultural teachings on making moose hide.

- Chapter Three: This chapter goes through my process of developing and using a Cree Indigenous research methodology. I present the Cree concepts used in this methodology; acimowin interviews (Cree storytelling); and kahkiyweyak niwakohmanak (we are all relations), a relational approach to research. I present the research question, and the methods of networking to find community members to participate in the study. I conclude by questioning whether my use of Cree concepts was Indigenous enough.

- Chapter Four: In this chapter I lay out the complex geographic, demographic, historical and colonial context of the migration between the on-reserve and rural community of Wabasca, and the city of Edmonton. I go into detail on the history of Treaty and Scrip, which racially and geographically divided a community. I highlight the demographics of the Indigenous presence in Edmonton. Overall, I attempt to show how Indigenous

peoples continue to live under a colonial regime that divides us geographically and racially, whether we are on-reserve, off-reserve or in the city.

- Chapter Five: The focus of this chapter is on the findings from interviews. Specifically, how cultural identity comes down to family relations and connections to community, and the ways relationships shaped choices in family, school, and work. Key themes explored are: the child as central Indigenous family and community; family as central to building healthy relations and cultural identity; how there are different understandings of community, from positive experiences of caring, sharing and reciprocity, to negative experiences of unhealthy relations; bouncing among family and locations, while balancing family, school and work. I present Indigenous models of family as a form of resistance and resilience to colonialism, and how healthy family relations are built on-reserve, off-reserve and in the city.

- Chapter Six: This chapter presents the interview findings on the school and work life choices made by community members along their life courses. I outline the colonial structures of education which impact access to schooling and funding, which are divided along geographic and racial lines. I discuss the choices community members made in schooling, and in work. I discuss how childbearing choices impact choices in school and work. I focus on the agency community members had in their life courses and their resiliency when faced with marginalization in the education system and labour market. I examine specific factors that acted as barriers and factors that facilitated their achievements in school and work. I finish by showing the racialized gendered life scripts which Indigenous men and women must contend with in the contexts of these structures and choices along their life courses.

- Chapter Seven: I conclude by stating that Indigenous men and women develop an identity based on their resistance and resilience against racist and gendered structural institutions in school and work. I suggest that social policies for Indigenous peoples on education, training, and employment must incorporate an Indigenous model of life long learning. A life long learning model will help Indigenous peoples combat racialized gendered life scripts that marginalize them in school and work. This allows for a holistic approach where relations to family and community are integral to learning, and Indigenous understandings of the life course can be easily integrated.

Chapter Two: Preparing to Study Indigenous Migration and Identity

In this chapter I will discuss the sociological and theoretical literature relevant to this research project. I begin by discussing Aboriginal peoples in Canada, as a fast growing young culturally diverse population, which is very mobile between urban and rural/reserve areas. I review the literature on Indigenous cultural identity to examine the way in which Indigenous peoples must negotiate and maintain cultural identities as they move between the city and their traditional territories in rural/reserve areas. I then introduce Indigenous Feminism, which provides the theoretical context for examining the relationship between the colonial state and patriarchy. This Indigenous feminist approach will be reviewed by discussing the pre-colonial Indigenous family, which ends with a discussion on the breakdown of Indigenous families through colonization. Reviewing this history shows the destructive impact colonialism and patriarchy play in breaking down Indigenous families and Indigenous womanhood. Next I introduce the life course approach, its central themes, and how race and gender can be simultaneously analyzed through this approach. Here I make a strong case for using this approach to examine Indigenous life stories within this framework. Finally, I end by articulating an Indigenous Sociology, which I develop by combining an Indigenous feminist approach with the life course approach, using a metaphor from my grandmother's approach of combining Indigenous tools and mainstream western tools for making moose hides and moccasins. It is this lens that I use in the remainder of the dissertation.

2.1 CANADIAN INDIGENOUS PEOPLES: A YOUNG MOBILE DIVERSE POPULATION

The Aboriginal peoples of Canada are a fast growing young population that are highly mobile and very culturally diverse. Between 2006 and 2011, the Aboriginal population in Canada increased by 20.1%, compared with 5.2% for the non-Aboriginal population in the same

period (Statistics Canada 2014: 8). In particular, during this period the First Nations population has increased by 22.9% and the Metis population has increased by 16.3% (Statistics Canada 2014: 8). This has been an ongoing trend in the past few census periods. Between 1996 and 2006, the Aboriginal population "grew by 45%, nearly six times faster than the 8% rate of increase for the non-Aboriginal population" (Statistics Canada 2008: 6).

The Aboriginal population in Canada is a young population. In 2011, over one-quarter (28%) of the Aboriginal population was under the age of 14, and 18.2% was between the ages of 15 to 24 (Statistics Canada 2014: 15). In comparison, the non-Aboriginal population had 16.5% children under the age of 14, and a 12.9% youth population between the ages of 15 to 24 (Statistics Canada 2014: 15). The 2006 census confirmed the Aboriginal population as having a larger proportion of children and youth compared to the non-Aboriginal population (Statistics Canada 2008). This means the Aboriginal population primarily consists of children and youth.

In 2006, the Aboriginal population was noted as becoming increasingly urban, with 54% of Aboriginal people in Canada living in urban areas; this was up from 50% in 1996 (Statistics Canada 2008: 6). As Aboriginal people become more urban, questions of race, identity and migration experiences become more important. However, in 2011 nearly one-half (49.3%) of First Nations people with registered Indian Status still lived on an Indian reserve or Indian settlement (Statistics Canada 2014: 11). In 2011 in Alberta, 47.3% of First Nations people with registered Indian Status lived on reserve, with 52.7% living off reserve (Statistics Canada 2014: 10). Therefore, although Aboriginal people in general are becoming increasingly urban there are still a large proportion of First Nations people living on reserve.

As a large cohort of urban Aboriginal youth ages, they will be "entering higher levels of schooling and entering into the labour force in order to successfully compete in a diverse

metropolitan economy" (Siggner and Costa 2005: 6). Understanding the concerns of this large

cohort of Aboriginal youth will be important knowledge for the self-determination of Aboriginal

communities in urban and reserve areas.

Since my research took place in Alberta, there are some interesting and unique statistics

of the Aboriginal labour force in Western Canada. The Aboriginal population in Western Canada

has higher employment rates, improving educational levels and an increasing contribution of the

young labour force (Statistics Canada 2007). According to the 2005 Labour Force Survey[1]

conducted on off-reserve Aboriginal people in Western Canada, Aboriginal people are in a

unique position because we have the potential to make contributions to the economy like no

other population in the region based on our sheer numbers. The employment gap in Western

Canada is narrowing, with the Aboriginal employment rate at "58% in 2005, up from 54% in

2001" (Statistics Canada 2007: 15). In Western Canada, Canadians are "increasingly likely to

have university degrees- 18% in 2005 versus 15% in 2001", and the same principle applies to the

Aboriginal population in this region (Statistics Canada 2007: 15). During the same period

Aboriginal people living off reserve in Western Canada increased in university educational

attainment from 5% of all Aboriginal people in 2001 to 7% in 2005 (Statistics Canada 2007: 15).

Among those Aboriginal people off reserve who held university degrees, Aboriginal employment

rates surpassed those of non-Aboriginal population in 2005 – 84% compared with 77%"

(Statistics Canada 2007: 17). The effect of postsecondary education on employment is

particularly strong for Aboriginal women. With a university education Aboriginal women had an

employment rate of 85% compared to university educated non-Aboriginal women who had an

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[1] The 2005 Labour Force Survey conducted on off-reserve Aboriginal people in Western Canada includes data from
Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia.

employment rate of 74% in 2005 (Statistics Canada 2007: 15). Postsecondary education has proven to be very beneficial for Aboriginal people off reserve in Western Canada.

In 2005, almost one-quarter of the Aboriginal labour force in Western Canada was aged 15 to 24 (Statistics Canada 2007: 18). Interestingly enough, "the 2005 participation rate for Aboriginal men (82%) was slightly higher than for non-Aboriginal men (81%)" (Statistics Canada 2007: 18). Unfortunately, compared to non-Aboriginal women, Aboriginal women at the same time "continued to have a much lower labour force participation (65% versus 77%) – partly because young Aboriginal women are more likely to be out of the labour force for personal or family reasons" (Statistics Canada 2007: 18). Despite the comparatively high participation rate among Aboriginal youth, half were found in "sales and service jobs", and "trades, transport and equipment operators jobs" (Statistics Canada 2007: 18). Currently Aboriginal people are segmented to lower status occupations in the labour force. Unfortunately, the lag behind in educational attainment means that professions, which require postsecondary education or a skilled trade, are not as accessible to Aboriginal people who are ready to work.

Another unique characteristic of the Aboriginal population that needs to be taken into consideration is the high rate of mobility between the city and the reserve. Although many researchers have noted the growth of migration from the reserve to cities, the mobility between reserves and cities has affected the accuracy of these calculations. The size of inflow compared to the size of outflow of Aboriginal people from urban areas has been referred to as the "churn effect" (Siggner and Costa 2005: 6). In fact, "13% to 23% of Aboriginal people in western Canadian Metropolitan Areas (CMA) have moved into their CMA over the five year period from 1996 to 2001, while 11% to 20% have moved out" (Siggner and Costa 2005: 15). Compared to non-Aboriginal people, Aboriginal people have a higher degree of mobility within cities, as well

16

as in and out of cities (Siggner and Costa 2005; Skelton 2002: CMHC 1996). In fact, in his study on the mobility of single Aboriginal mothers in Winnipeg, Skelton referred to the mobility within the city and occasional migration to the reserve as "chronic mobility" (Skelton 2002). The participants in Skelton's study had within the last two years moved "at least three times and most have moved six to seven times" (Skelton 2002: 137).

Sociological terminology such as "churn effect" and "chronic mobility", make the mobility of Aboriginal people sound like a social problem that needs to be resolved. Through this research I examine this mobility in the context of how families sustain themselves in such change. Researchers need to listen and understand young Aboriginal adults; a great deal of research has quantified the growth and movement of the Aboriginal population in Canada but the process of identity formation and the experiences of migration have been largely been ignored. Further, there is a dearth of literature on the loss of Indigenous cultural identities, and how urbanization further impacts this loss in identity. My research is more concerned in how Indigenous cultural identities are negotiated and maintained within the migration between traditional Indigenous territories located in rural/reserve areas and urban centres. In the following section, I will review the current literature that examines Indigenous cultural identity in rural/reserve areas and in urban centres.

2.2 THE LITERATURE ON INDIGENOUS CULTURAL IDENTITY

In this project I attempt to understand the cultural identities of young Indigenous adults traditionally from the Wabasca area, whether they identify as Metis, Cree, Indian, Aboriginal, Indigenous, Nehiyaw (the Cree word meaning Cree person), or a combination of these identities. This cultural identity is understood within the context of the colonial history that persists on reserve, within the context of Canadian multiculturalism in urban centres, and within the modern

migration experiences of Indigenous youth. Anti-racist discourse within Canada has critiqued how multiculturalism is ineffective in confronting racism and that it actually contributes to the racialization of ethnic minorities (Abu-Laban and Gabriel 2002; Bannerji 2000). Although the multiculturalism policy only accounts for the experiences of ethnic minorities, which by definition does not include Aboriginal peoples, it is important to keep in mind the neo-liberal discourse of diversity that exists in major Canadian urban centres where Aboriginal people live. According to Bonita Lawrence, Indigenous identities have to be negotiated within modern life, and are greatly influenced by location and connections with the Indigenous community (Lawrence 2004). Therefore, studying the process of Indigenous migration and how cultural identities are formed in this context is an important contribution to the Indigenous literature.

There are diverse experiences of colonialism across Canada's geographic landscape among Indigenous peoples, resulting in a great deal of differences among Indigenous people. As some Indigenous scholars point out, even the attempt of the *Indian Act* to differentiate between 'halfbreeds' and 'Indians' falls short in representing the diversity of differences among Indigenous people (Lawrence 2004: Mawani 2002). There is a diversity of geographic experiences among Indigenous people, whether one lives on the reserve or in the city, or whether one lives on a reserve on the east coast or a reserve on the west coast. It is particularly interesting how geography is tied to identity when one considers how those from 'the rez' are sometimes considered more 'Indian' than those from the city.

In recent years researchers have begun to explore how urban Aboriginals negotiate their identities within the city and how their presence within the city crosses the colonial boundaries that have been set by the state; this type of research has been innovative in theorizing the diverse understandings of Aboriginal identities in modern North America (Davis-Jackson 2002;

Lawrence 2004; Skelton 2002; Wilson and Peters 2005). Research on the experiences of migration between the reserve and the city has also begun exploring the complexities involved in the understanding of home and belonging for Indigenous people. For the single Indigenous mothers who experienced chronic mobility in Skelton's study, their "residence in Winnipeg appeared a staging point, while 'home' was on the reservation up North" (Skelton 2002: 140). These migrants living in the city understand home as both their residence in the city and their belonging to a community on the reserve. In their study of Anishnabek migration to urban centres in Ontario, Wilson and Peters demonstrate that "urban First Nations migrants' accounts of Indigenous attachment to land disrupt the dichotomous space of differences that are the legacy of colonialism in Canada" (Wilson and Peters 2005: 410). Despite leaving their designated space of the reserve to live in the city, these Anishnabek individuals form identities that still have attachments to traditional lands, while being successfully integrated into city life.

But these types of complex ideas of home, belonging and cultural identity are not just experienced by those Indigenous people who live in the city. Indigenous people living in society's designated space for them- the reservation- also experience these types of fluid cultural identities. In her ethnographic research of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, Circe Sturm observed that many Cherokees believed that raising a child in a "small-scale traditional Cherokee community is central to the development of a distinctly Cherokee cultural outlook and social identity" (Sturm 2002: 134). In this case, Cherokee identity is greatly influenced by raising a child in a specific location, namely the reserve. Throughout her book Sturm makes references to how belonging to the community of the Cherokee Nation strongly influences ones "Indian-ness". Overall, Sturm observes how "Cherokees use five indices of identity- phenotype, social behaviour, language, religion, and residence- to define the racial and social boundaries of their

community and to socially classify other Cherokees into categories of identity other than just Cherokee or Indian" (Sturm 2002: 136). Even on the reserve there is a diverse population of Indigenous cultural identities defined by various markers.

This study is of Indigenous people from a specific Northern Alberta community, and how their movement between the reserve/rural community and the city affects their cultural identity. The literature noted above focuses either on Indigenous identities formed in the context of the city or literature that focuses on Indigenous identities that are formed in the context of the reserve, my research focuses on identities that are formed in both spaces and in-between both spaces through discussions with young Indigenous adults on their experiences of these journeys and movements.

In understanding my own cultural identity, as an Indigenous person who migrated from my First Nations community to the city, I was greatly influenced by the work of Stuart Hall. He suggests we consider identity as "a production, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (Hall 1990: 222). This understanding of identity allowed me to understand the process of my own migration experience, from growing up on a reserve in Northern Alberta, to leaving the reserve when I was a teenager to go to high school in Edmonton, moving home to the reserve every spring, to leaving my community to pursue graduate school in Toronto, and moving back to Edmonton where I am raising mixed race children among my siblings. Through these migrations my own cultural identity became a process, as a way of becoming and being, as an experience of a female Treaty Indian with a Métis cultural background.

As a child growing up on reserve I came to realize there were different types of people in my world Nehiyaw (Cree), Apihtokosan (Métis) and Moniyaw (White). My community

consisted of reserve land where Treaty Indian Nehiyaw like my family could live, and the municipal district where mostly Apihtokosan and Moniyaw lived along the lake. Despite being aware of these three groups in my community, I knew deep down inside that being Apihotokosan and Nehiyaw were closely tied identities because we shared many relations in the community, we had a similar history of our land being taken from us by the white settlers, and our peoples were divided by racial identities imposed upon us by a colonial nation state. Growing up in my community I knew we had a shared history of colonization, and we shared the same ancestors because my grandfather told me stories about the past when we could hunt freely on the land. This identity of being a Nehiyaw that I learned while growing up on reserve was the shared identity Hall speaks of, "a sort of collective 'one true self'" based on a similar history that grounds us in our past (Hall 1990: 223). Growing up I had a sense of shared identity. I grew up in a community of aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins, and my parents and siblings. Being part of this collective was what made my identity; going to church every Sunday and singing Cree hymns, going to funeral wakes all night with my parents, visiting relatives constantly, and playing outside with my numerous cousins. Everywhere I went I could not escape my community, I could not escape who I was. Despite the essentialized nature of this type of shared cultural identity, there are times when I know that if I am anything, I am a Nehiyaw from the Bigstone Cree Nation and my people have hunted and fished along the Wabasca Lakes as long as anyone can remember.

The second type of cultural identity Hall discusses "is a matter of 'becoming' as well as 'being", it comes from a specific history, it is "subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power", it is not fixed to an "essentialized past" (Hall 1990: 225). I began to understand this cultural identity when I left my reserve as a teenager to get a high school education in Edmonton.

I experienced a sense of rupture to the solid shared identity of being Nehiyaw when I moved to the city and discovered a more fluid understanding of my identity. At this time I moved between an identity as a Treaty Indian, a Nehiyaw, a Metis with mixed race heritage, and what this meant while living in an urban centre.

As Hall explains, the first understanding of cultural identity gives "us some grounding in some continuity with the past", a shared identity (Hall 1990: 227). The second understanding of identity, speaking from the position of as an Afro-Caribbean academic Hall suggests, "reminds us that what we share is precisely the experience of a profound discontinuity; peoples dragged into slavery, transportation, colonization, migration, came predominantly from Africa" (Hall 1990: 227). Moving to the city and raising my family among a community of Indigenous people from diverse backgrounds from various geographic locations (urban areas, First Nations reserves, Metis settlements, rural areas) and various cultural backgrounds (Cree, Metis, Blackfoot, mixed-race) reminds me that we came from diverse experiences of colonialism. For myself, marrying into an Afro-Caribbean family and raising mixed race children between my home reserve and the city, has allowed me to understand my own cultural identity as a profoundly discontinuous as I attempt to negotiate between these different cultural spaces and geographic spaces of Indigenous identity.

2.3 INDIGENOUS FEMINISM AND THE PRE-COLONIAL INDIGENOUS FAMILY

To begin understanding this very complicated history of family and to better understand the families in my community, we need to go back to pre-contact and pre-capitalist Indigenous understandings of family and womanhood. There has been an emerging literature by Indigenous women scholars and writers discussing the pre-contact/pre-capitalist roles of Aboriginal men and

women. In some of this writing, Indigenous women are working hard to try to infuse Indigenous

women's stories, traditional roles and histories into the Indigenous knowledge base. In some of

the writing Indigenous women are starting to call themselves feminists and call for an activism to

fight the patriarchal systems that have been thrust upon our communities by colonialism. The

work I am doing here is an Indigenous feminism, in which I am attempting to understand the

gender relations in our community, and to deconstruct and dismantle the patriarchy that has

created a great deal of inequality for the women and children in our communities. In the

following, Green explains what is meant by an Aboriginal feminism:

> Aboriginal feminism brings together the two critiques, feminism and anticolonialism, to
> show how Aboriginal peoples, and in particular Aboriginal women, are affected by
> colonialism and patriarchy. It takes account of how both racism and sexism fuse when
> brought to bear on Aboriginal women. While colonial oppression is identified, so too is
> oppression of women by Indigenous men and Indigenous governance practices…
>
> And now to what Aboriginal feminism is not; it is not man-hating ideology, nor a
> unilateral rejection of cultures, traditions or personal and political relationships with men.
> It is not a subordinate form of other feminisms, nor is it a political stalking horse by
> colonial ideologies" (Green 2007: 23 - 26)

As outlined by Green, my intent here is to examine how colonialism and patriarchy have ruined

gender relations in my community, and how they act as ideological forces to continue to

marginalize Indigenous men and women. Colonial and patriarchal forces marginalize our women

by defining them as the lesser gender, and they marginalize our men by outlining unattainable

hegemonic masculinities. As Green explains, a lot of energy in Indigenous feminism has been

directed at the "imposition of imperialism, colonialism, racism and sexism from the dominating

societies, Aboriginal feminism has also illuminated power abuses within Aboriginal

communities, organizations and families" (Green 2007: 30). It is these power abuses, which I

would like to expand on throughout this work. In the following, I review pre-contact Indigenous

gender relations and families, and how colonialism and patriarchy have broken down our traditionally balanced communities.

There is a general understanding that pre-contact gender roles were much more egalitarian and balanced then the system of patriarchy introduced into our societies by colonialism and capitalism. Indigenous women were not confined to the private domestic role that European women were confined to in a patriarchal system. Leigh explains, "In a society based around hunting rather than a wage economy, the distinction between work and home was less pronounced; domestic roles carried a different significance" (Leigh 2009: 74). However it should be noted that not all Indigenous cultures are homogenous; there are many variations to the roles of men and women in these societies. The Iroquois are recognized as a traditionally matrilineal society headed by clan mothers that held a great deal of political and spiritual power. Matrilineal meaning that the bloodline was traditionally traced by the mother's line. In Cree culture men did most of the hunting while women did most of the dividing of the meat and gathering of herbs and roots; roles were therefore different but were equally respected. So although not all Indigenous cultures were overtly matriarchal, the roles of men and women were held sacred and valued. In the following quotation, Baines and Freeman discuss the various gender relations within Indigenous societies:

> Pre-European native societies ranged from patrilineal, patriarchal groups, such as the Blackfoot Confederacy in what is now western Canada, to matrilineal societies such as the Haudenosaunee Confederacy in what is now central Canada (Krull 2006a). Although gendered divisions of labour were present in both types of Aboriginal society, neither gender was restricted from performing other kind of work, nor was all work seen as essential to the functioning of society (Bourgeault 1988) (Baines and Freeman 2011: 73).

> Kim Anderson explains, "Our cultures promoted womanhood as a sacred identity, an

identity that existed within a complex system of relations of societies that were based on

balance" (Anderson 2000: 57). In her work, Anderson addresses how the work women did in their communities was valued. Women held economic power in the distribution of community resources, they played a role as decision makers in political matters key to community survival, and the spiritual roles women held were linked to childbirth, creation, health and well-being (Anderson 2000). Overall, women's roles were not deemed less than men. In fact, the spiritual and political knowledge that female elders held in many communities was valued very highly. Anderson discusses a land-based gender division of labour, in which men "worked outside the community as hunters and warriors and women within, in areas of childcare, agriculture, food preparation and housing" (Anderson 2000:59). Although there were recognized separate spheres of work for men and women, they "were not restricted in engaging in each other's work if necessary" (Anderson 2000: 59). As Leigh explains, these differences in the spheres of labour are described as "different-but-equal" divisions of labour (Leigh 2009: 74).

One area of contention within Indigenous feminism is how balanced and egalitarian traditional societies actually were in practice. In her discussion on Indigenous feminism, St. Denis discusses how Indigenous women did not suffer under "male domination" in traditional societies (St. Denis 2007). In fact she highlights that, "Some Aboriginal women claim that Aboriginal cultures do not have a history of unequal gender relations; in fact it is argued, Aboriginal women occupy or occupied positions of authority, autonomy and high status in their communities" (St. Denis 2007: 37). In contrast, St. Denis also suggests that despite the claims made about "the elevated status Aboriginal women occupy in Aboriginal cultures" we cannot assume that marginalization and oppression within our communities did not exist in the past (St. Denis 2007:45). She cites Metis scholar Emma LaRocque who said:

We cannot assume that all Aboriginal traditions universally respected and honoured women… It should not be assumed, even in those original societies that were structured along matriarchal lines, the matriarchies necessarily prevented men from oppressing women. There are indications of male violence and sexism in some Aboriginal societies prior to European contact and certainly after contact (Emma LaRocque in St. Denis 2007: 45)

However matrilineal, matriarchal or patriarchal different Indigenous societies may have been, Indigenous understanding of gender relations differed vastly in comparison to European notions of gender. In European and white settler societies, women suffered under male domination and were relegated to the 'domestic sphere' of caregiving and the home, while men held more power by participating in politics and paid work (Dua 1999).

Early mainstream white feminists "argued that the gender division of labour within the family, which delegated to women unpaid motherwork and domestic work, created power differences as unpaid domestic work made women dependent on male wages" (Dua 1999: 239). In this brand of socialist feminism, it was explained that European women worked in the devalued private sphere of mothering and the home, while white men worked in the public sphere of paid work (Dua 1999: 239). Dua explains that the Canadian white settler nation building project relied on white women working in the home to reproduce a white nation while their men pursued paid work (Dua 1999). In contrast, traditional Indigenous economies and societies were based more on egalitarian and reciprocal relationships between the genders. As St. Denis notes, "Living off the land does tend to encourage greater flexibility in gender/labour roles" (St Denis 2007: 55). However, Indigenous women's roles "became more restricted with the arrival of European missionaries, "explorers" and fur traders" (St. Denis 2007:55). With colonization, Indigenous families experienced more gendered divisions of labour more similar to white settler society gender relations. For example, the fur trade increased Indigenous men's

participation in paid labour, and women were left to take care of the children and home demands (St. Denis 2007:55).

Indigenous understandings of gender relations can be expanded upon by understanding marital relations between women and men in Indigenous cultures. Anderson describes the many different traditions of Indigenous marriages; some societies had arranged marriages, some were polygamous, some expected lifelong unions, while some viewed divorce or separation as an accepted part of life (Anderson 2000: 79). My own grandparents had a somewhat arranged marriage. My grandmother was Metis and my grandfather's family heard she was very skilled with moose hides and trapping; the families felt she would be a helpful partner to my grandfather who was a Cree trapper, so they were introduced. They married and eventually had several children; such a union was based on the respected role and skills my grandmother had in hunting and trapping. There are other less rigid traditions in Cree culture; for example, it was understood that the woman and her children owned the tepee and all the belongings in it, so that if a separation occurred, the husband was expected to leave the tepee. Cree cultures are understood as primarily matrilineal and matriarchal insofar as major economic and family decisions were part of the woman's decision-making power.

Marriage in Indigenous cultures was not understood as a woman's life sentence of servitude to the male and to the family. Instead, women and men had autonomy; they lived together in a system of balance and reciprocity. Anderson states that, regardless of the differences in marriage, "Native women typically had power, respect, and recognition within their families. As a part of a family unit, a Native woman was interdependent, yet in many nations her autonomy as an individual in this unit was respected" (Anderson 2000: 79). From

these unions of balance and notions of autonomy, families of balance were created. I appreciate how Das Gupta describes pre-colonial Indigenous communities as:

> …well-developed, highly organized, and stable formations of Native societies, including family formations. Families varied in lineage and locality, but they were extended, and women and men related to each other with reciprocity and sharing. Such family structures were supported by an economic infrastructure that was itself based on reciprocity, sharing, and production for subsistence for the community (Das Gupta 2000: 150).

It is refreshing to know our traditional family formations were not defined by violence and poverty as many living in the colonial spaces of Canada's reservations have come to believe. Rather, Indigenous families were organized by systems of balance, reciprocity and sharing. A key aspect of this balance is that central to Indigenous families and societies are the children. In pre-colonial Indigenous societies, children were understood as autonomous spiritual beings, and they were not disciplined punitively. Indigenous children were valued as sacred gifts from the Creator, who were to be taught and nurtured by parents, elders and large extended families. Rules and hierarchy did not define an Indigenous childhood, instead children were taught lessons of respect through the stories of their parents and elders:

> Elders were transmitters of knowledge… Children learned through storytelling, through example, and by participation in rituals, festivals, and individual coming-of-age ceremonies… Through story, children were taught how to live correctly, how not to offend spirits, and how to contribute, to the community's physical survival (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2012:8)

Pre-colonial Indigenous societies had healthy family units based on balance, reciprocity, sharing, and caring. I am not trying to paint a picture of a utopian society, but the main point I am trying to make here is that Indigenous peoples had a system to maintain healthy balanced families. As Blackstock and Trocme so poignantly point out, "Aboriginal people have lived on these lands known as Canada for over 10, 500 years, raising over 525 generations of children" before the colonial Canadian child welfare system imposed upon our peoples (Blackstock and Trocme

2005: 14). During this time Aboriginal children's "emotional, physical, cognitive and spiritual ways of knowing and being guided the resilient development of hundreds of generations of Aboriginal children who were healthy, proud, contributing members of society, living safely at home in their communities" (Blackstock and Trocme 2005: 14).

If my own childhood is any reflection of traditional practices, I remember being told some of these stories and lessons from my parents and grandparents. Cree is a very crude descriptive literal language at times, and sometimes the lessons in Cree were too real to bear hearing. For example the story of the *wîhtikow* would often frighten me, wîhtikow literally translates meaning "person who eats too much" and refers to a cannibal in Cree storytelling. It was the story of a grotesque man who was overcome with a gluttonous evil spirit, and he first ate his own lips, then ate his whole family, then ravaged villages with his cannibalism and hunger. My family even extended upon this legend by saying my grandfather had killed a *wîhtikow* once by decapitating him and putting separate parts of his body around the local Wabasca Lakes and Sandy Lake in Alberta. As children we were told also that if we whistle at the Northern lights, spirits would come down from the sky and dance around us, so we had to be careful not to summon the spirits. These types of stories and lessons spoke of the crude realities of living on the land, and while living in and respecting a spiritual world.

The Indigenous family had balance in a spiritual, economic, and a political sense. Children had a role of learning, mothers and fathers had autonomous relationships, and grandparents passed down knowledge. In the following section I will discuss the way in which the once healthy balanced families of our communities were intentionally broken down by our colonial oppressors.

2.4 THE BREAKDOWN OF INDIGENOUS FAMILIES THROUGH COLONIALISM

The breakdown of Indigenous families was an intentional outcome of colonialism. There were three main colonial tools to achieve this breakdown: the church and state's introduction of residential schools; the child welfare system's taking of Indigenous children from Indigenous families and placement into white homes; and the gendered discrimination of the *Indian Act*.

As Anderson explains, in order for colonialism and the near genocide of Indigenous cultures to be effective, the role of Indigenous women had to be reduced to below that of men:

> The Europeans who first arrived in Canada were shocked by the position of Aboriginal women in their respective societies. It was not long before they realized that, in order to dominate the land and the people that were occupying it, they needed to disempower the women. Indigenous systems that allocated power to women were incompatible with the kind of colonial power dynamics that would be necessary to maintain colonial power. (Anderson 2000: 58)

Our colonizers felt it was imperative that Indigenous women were disempowered; the system of patriarchy and system of colonialism went hand in hand. Once a system of balance and egalitarian gender roles in Indigenous communities, a system of imbalance was abruptly imposed which tipped the scales to disempower Indigenous women. Women's powerful roles in the economy, politics, and spirituality of the community were taken away by the colonial rule of church and state. As a Cree speaking person, my understanding is that our world is made up of spiritual animate beings and inanimate objects. I see the colonization of our people and disempowerment of our women happening through the taking away of women's spiritual roles; once they disempowered women's spirits, they brought imbalance to our people:

> As the church replaced Native spirituality and became a powerful agent in Indigenous communities, Native women's loss of both political and spiritual authority was achieved. The political power held by the church made no room for women, and the missionaries

sought to impose an order that would augment the priests' power and put white men in charge of authority. To accomplish this, church and state worked together until they had established local political hierarchies that explicitly excluded women and that were empowered to uphold Catholic notions of patriarchy. (Anderson 2000: 78)

Nothing seems more pervasive in the colonial project of cultural genocide than the residential school system implemented by the church and state in Canada. Our colonizers were intent on destroying Indigenous societies by de-culturizing Indigenous children; their attempts to kill the Indian in the child resulted in destroying the balance of the Indigenous family. In the following quote, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission explains the purpose of this oppressive system in Canadian residential schools.

Residential schools disrupted families and communities. They prevented elders from teaching children long-valued cultural and spiritual traditions and practices. They helped kill languages. These were not side effects of a well-intentioned system: the purpose of the residential school system was to separate children from the influences of their parents and their community, so as to destroy their culture. The impact was devastating. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission 2012: 1)

By taking Indigenous children from their parents, the residential school committed cultural genocide, stripping our languages, cultures, ceremonies and spirituality from our people. The colonizer attempted to take our humanity away from us by killing our culture and spirituality, and forcing upon us oppressive ideologies, what Janice Acoose refers to as a "white-eurocanadian-christian-patriarchy" and what St. Denis refers to as "western patriarchy" (Acoose 1995; St. Denis 2007). Children were separated from their parents, so they could no longer learn the stories and cultural traditions of their elders. In addition to the loss of Indigenous cultural practices and languages, these children were taken from the loving arms of their large extended families, and isolated in cold institutions where they were often subjected to years of physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect and spiritual abuse. Blackstock and Trocme explain this experience:

The conditions at the schools were abysmal because they were built of the cheapest possible materials, run by untrained staff, and often overcrowded due to government financial inducements to increase enrolment. Sexual and physical abuses were prevalent, as were preventable deaths from disease. (Blackstock and Trocme 2005: 15)

According to Blackstock and Trocme, Indigenous parents did not want to voluntarily send their children to residential schools which were often distant from families, so the "Government of Canada amended the *Indian Act* to force Indian parents to send their child(ren) aged 5-15 years to the schools" (Blackstock and Trocme 2005: 15). As penalty for not complying with this legislation poor Indigenous parents faced the prospect of incarceration or fines which they could not afford and/or incarceration for failure to pay fines (Blackstock and Trocme 2005: 15).

For almost two centuries, these schools ran across Canada, where generations of Indigenous children attended, resulting in intergenerational trauma, cultural loss, and devastation. When these children from the residential schools came to raise their own children and start their own families, "they often used harsh, punitive methods that masked their good intentions" and their children "did not understand why their parents behaved as they did, and were sometimes resentful, further damaging familial relations" (Das Gupta 2000: 151). What is more oppressive to a culture and a people, then taking the ability to parent away from parents? Our once balanced ways of teaching children through stories, and a spirituality connected to the balance of mother earth was replaced with Christian patriarchy, in which children were taught they needed to be punished for their sinful heathen nature. Mothers could not be mothers and fathers could not be fathers, after their experiences in the schools.

The residential school system came into place in the late 19th century. It was a massive undertaking by the church and state, to build missionary type schools across Canada, to steal our

children, and force them to enter the residential school system, where they had to be clothed, fed and taught. In fact many governmental reports and church reports throughout the existence of the residential school system spoke to the inability of the church and government to run such a massive colonial project (Truth and Reconciliation Commission 2012). There were major shortcomings in the management of the residential school system and the mistreatment of Indigenous children was a constant critique of the system by the colonizers themselves (Truth and Reconciliation Commission 2012). But the colonial project carried on in the belief that destroying the Indian was a necessary project in order to assimilate and civilize the 'savage'. In the following Anderson describes the extent of this huge colonial project:

> By the 1940's, half the Indian student population was enrolled in the seventy-six residential schools across the country, and some communities had all their children forcibly removed at once. Many spent their entire childhood and never came back. Some died, and many of the children that did come back home had lost their ability to communicate with their own people. (Anderson 2003: 175).

From the inception of the system until the last residential school closed in 1996, Indigenous parents and communities fought to close these evil institutions. Public outcries to improve the educational system available to Indigenous children and allegations of systemic abuse began to emerge to finally close the doors. However, just as these doors began to close, Indigenous parents began to be pathologized as unfit parents. Their years of abuse in residential school had begun to manifest in unhealthy parenting practices. And a new system of taking away Indigenous children was created. In the following Baines and Freeman describe this systemic scoop of Indigenous children:

> Problems such as the poverty, abuse of alcohol, and drugs, violence, neglect grew rapidly and, in what became known as the Sixties Scoop, child welfare agencies began apprehending Native children in unprecedented numbers, fostering, adopting them out to families to non-Native families, thereby expanding the number of Native children

growing up outside Native influence and care (Milloy 1999). White society adopted the image of Native women as neglectful and addicted – rather than as nurturers and defenders of the community – Aboriginal families as pathologically flawed" (Weaver and White 1997). (Baines and Freeman 2011: 75).

The effects in Indigenous communities were substantial. This scoop of Indigenous children touched almost every extended family or clan, "Only 1 percent of all children in care were Native in 1959, but by the end of the 1960's, 30 to 40 percent of all legal wards were Aboriginal children, even though they formed less than 4 percent of the national population (Anderson 2003: 176). This continued where in a 1979 national report on adoption and welfare showed "20 percent of children in foster care were Native, while only 6 percent of the Canadian population were Native" (Hudson & McKenzie 1981 in Das Gupta 2000: 155). Between 1960 and 1990 over 11, 000 Indian Status children were adopted, often outside of their home province and sometimes outside of Canada (Blackstock and Trocme 2005).

As many parents in Indigenous communities were not considered to be fit parents, and there was a lack of foster homes in Indigenous communities, most children ended up in white homes outside of their communities and away from their families. Das Gupta described "the non-Native child-welfare system as an agent of colonization of Native peoples" (Das Gupta 2009: 155). As these children, were being scooped from Indigenous communities, sometimes by the bus load, "there was very little effort by child welfare authorities to address structural risk factors such as multi-generational trauma, poverty, unemployment and sub-standard housing conditions which were resulting in disproportionate rates of child abuse and neglect" (Blackstock and Trocme 2005: 16) . The residential school system and colonization of Indigenous peoples resulted in our peoples living in poverty, unable to adequately provide for our children. And, based on these sub-standard living conditions created by colonization, a colonial child welfare system deemed it best to take our children away again. Once again, Indigenous children were

taken away from their parents, grandparents, extended families, cultures and languages. And often times whole families were broken apart in which siblings were separated and raised by different white families; in this way all family connections were broken.

According to Blackstock and Trocme, it is estimated that there are three times more Aboriginal children in child welfare care today than at the height of residential schools operations in the 1940's (Blackstock and Trocme 2005: 13). In their ground-breaking research Trocme, Knoke and Blackstock examined child welfare data from 1998-2003 specific to the experiences of Metis, First Nations and Inuit children. The Canadian Incidence Study on Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS) examined the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in Canada's child welfare system (Blackstock and Trocme 2005; Trocme, Knoke, and Blackstock 2004). In this analysis they found that "Aboriginal children are nearly twice as likely to be placed in out-of-home care" compared to non-Aboriginal children (Trocme, Knoke, and Blackstock 2004). And the reasons Aboriginal children are being placed in the care of the state is primarily due to the marginalization their parents face.

> Compared to Caucasian families, Aboriginal families have statistically significantly less stable housing, greater dependence on social assistance, younger parents, more parents who were maltreated as children, and higher rates of alcohol and drug abuse. They are more likely to be investigated for neglect or emotional maltreatment. (Trocme, Knoke, and Blackstock 2004: 596).

Aboriginal children are more likely to be taken by child welfare and put in out-of-home placements, based on the fact that they come from poor families where the head of the household is likely a young single mother who herself experienced maltreatment as a child (Trocme, Knoke, and Blackstock 2004). In addition, this research showed that "Aboriginal children were less likely than non-Aboriginal children to be reported to child welfare authorities for physical, sexual and emotional abuse, and exposure to domestic violence, but were twice as likely to be

reported for neglect" (Blackstock 2007:75). Therefore, as a colonial agent the Canadian child welfare system will gladly oblige to continue the status quo of intergenerational broken Indigenous families which beget further broken families. In the following I will discuss the ways in which another colonial tool of the state, specifically the *Indian Act* worked to break apart Indigenous families and communities.

Throughout the history of colonialism in Canada, the Indian Act has broken families apart due to gender discrimination and perceived racial differences between Indigenous peoples based on the racist legislation. Lawrence (2004) has examined how the *Indian Act* has been based on gender discrimination and how in turn the *Indian Act* has divided families and communities based on 'Indians' and 'Non-Indians'. During the fur trade and early contact between Indigenous peoples and European explorers, there were intermarriages between Indigenous women and European men, creating mixed-blood children and communities. Often times these marriages were formed as alliances between Indigenous communities and Europeans. But once the colonial administration began keeping track of Indians, and once the white settler project started full force, these mixed marriages and mixed-blood children came under attack. Throughout the colonial encounter Indianness was gendered in various ways, as colonial government negotiated with only men, which essentially cut out Indigenous women from political activities, devalued mixed marriages, and removed Native women's mixed-blood children from white society. According to Lawrence, the existence of white settler societies is "predicated on maintaining racial apartheid, on emphasizing racial difference, both white superiority and Native inferiority" (Lawrence 2004: 48). In order to distinguish between white settler society and Indigenous societies those defined as mixed blood had to be regulated, and

laws were created to divide society into the three groupings of white settlers, Indians, and mixed-blood 'Non-Indians'.

As mentioned earlier, in many Indigenous societies women's roles in the political, spiritual, economic and social realms were regarded as equally important as the roles held by men, but under the *Indian Act* women were placed in a subordinate position and their Indigenous identity was regulated by their gender. Indianness was first defined in gendered terms in the *Indian Act* of 1850, "so that Indian status depended either on Indian descent or marriage to a male Indian" (Lawrence 2004: 50). In 1869 under the *Gradual Enfranchisement Act*, "not only were wives removed from inheritance rights and automatically enfranchised with their husbands, but Section 6 began a process of escalating gender discrimination that would not be definitively changed until 1985" (Lawrence 2004: 50). According to Lawrence, the 1869 legislation had two primary goals under the colonial administration, "to remove as many individuals as possible from Indianness and, as part of this process, to enforce Indianness as solely a state of "racial purity" by removing those children as "half-breed" from Indian communities" (Lawrence 2004: 51). This legislation furthered gender divisions by enabling the children of white women and Indian men to stay in Indigenous communities, while the children of Indian women and white men were defined as "half-breed" and not allowed to stay, all because of the patriarchal understanding of family under the colonial administration (Lawrence 2004: 52). Later changes made to the *Indian Act* made it so that Indian descent flowed directly from the male line and Indian women who "married out" were further penalized (Lawrence 2004). As a result of marrying non-Indian men, Indian women who were forced from their communities experienced considerable financial loss, personal loss and cultural losses.

Under the 1985 *Indian Act*, referred to as Bill C-31, it seemed that Native women momentarily achieved some justice and those who previously lost Indian status based on gender discrimination could be reinstated. But when examined closely this legislation actually makes it easier for both men and women to lose Indian status; thus gender discrimination has not been completely removed with this legislation. According to Lawrence, Bill C-31 "embodied three fundamental principles: (1) the removal of gender-based discrimination; (2) the restoration of status and membership rights to eligible individuals; and (3) the recognition of band control over membership" (Lawrence 2004: 64).

Women no longer lose their Indian status for marrying out but "all Native people now face certain restrictions on their ability to pass status on to their children", which is known as the slow "bleeding off" of Indian status (Lawrence 2004: 64). Although women who previously lost their status based on gender discrimination can be reinstated, they can only pass their status on to their children; their grandchildren will lose their status, which is known as the "second generation cut-off" (Lawrence 2004: 64). As well, some Indian women who are reinstated only get "partial status", restricting whether status can be passed onto her children. And some women can only pass status onto their children if they marry someone with Indian status (Lawrence 2004: 65). So although Indigenous women can be reinstated they continue to be discriminated against by the fact that their reinstatement limits how they can pass Indian status onto their children. The consequences of Bill C-31 are numerous, but to many this is just another way to regulate Indigenous identity through colonial legalistic jargon. It continues the legacy of gender discrimination that early versions of the *Indian Act* embodied and its represents the slow "bleeding off" of those with Indian status.

So far I have examined those that the *Indian Act* defines as Indian, but another category

this legislation regulates is those defined as non-Indian, those known as "Metis" or "mixed-

blood" or what earlier versions of the legislation crudely called "half-breeds". Lawrence points

out the fact that whole Indigenous communities were never even given the opportunity to receive

status. The way in which certain communities did not receive status varied in eastern Canada and

western Canada:

> The 1876 *Indian Act* contained a new way of limiting the number of communities
> acknowledged as Indian in eastern Canada. This legislation narrowed federal recognition
> of Indianness to those Native people who already lived in recognized reserves or
> belonged to recognized Indian bands…
>
> In western Canada, however, communities of Non-Status Native people have been
> created by another process- by arbitrarily externalizing Indianness an entire category of
> Indigenous people, designated as "half-breeds" and now called "Metis (Lawrence 2004:
> 83).

Today many of those who were previously left out of the Indian Act now define

themselves as "mixed-blood" or "Metis". According to Lawrence, "Individuals who claim a

historic Metis heritage in western Canada make a strong distinction between being *Metis* and

being *mixed-blood*" (Lawrence 2004: 84). In this context, mixed-blood refers to individuals who

are the products of recent intermarriages, while Metis refers to those who can trace their

descendants to historic mixed-blood communities. As well, mixed-blood can be understood as

the category which defines non-status Indians in Canada (Lawrence 2004: 86). Lawrence states

that like "the category "Indian", which homogenizes the identities of dozens of distinct

Indigenous nations in Canada, the category of "Metis" currently encapsulates not only the

different historical experiences of being mixed blood that existed under the fur trade but also the

tremendous differences that exist among *contemporary* Metis" (Lawrence 2004: 84). The

complexity of understanding Metis and mixed-blood Indigenous identity in contemporary

Canadian society is specific to the different experiences of those individuals who define themselves by these categories. Metis and mixed-blood Indigenous identity have inevitably been influenced by the fact that many Native peoples have been denied the opportunity to receive status by being defined as "half-breed", by losing status previously through scrip or enfranchisement, or by the gendered discrimination that Native women experienced by marrying non-Native men.

However, according to Lawrence, women who lost their Indian status most frequently discussed the "personal and cultural losses" they experienced. The worst violence for these women was that their children were cut off from any cultural knowledge through being alienated from their own societies. The personal and cultural losses included:

> …being unable to participate with family and relatives in the life of their former communities, being rejected by their communities, being culturally different and often socially rejected within white society, being unable to access cultural programs for their children, and finally not even being able to be buried with other family members on the reserve. (Lawrence 2004: 55).

Through the legislation of the Indian Act and its various versions over time, women and their children were defined in their relation to Indian men. In essence, the *Indian Act* defined a family's racial identity and whether a family fit under *Indian Act* legislation and policies through the father. If an Indigenous woman married an Indian man she and her children could have Indian status. If she did not marry an Indian man (either non-status Indian or white or other race) she along with her children lost Indian status. This had major repercussions for the life of that woman and her children. If they lost Indian status, they could no longer live on reserve with family and they no longer benefited from Treaties that promised provisions such as housing, healthcare benefits and education funding. If a woman and her children, gained (or kept) Indian status by marrying an Indian status man, or was reinstated her status through Bill C-31, then this

family could live on reserve and would fall under the promised provisions of the Treaty agreements. However, the benefit of not falling under the *Indian Act* meant you were not considered a 'ward of the state' and in many cases you would not fall under the legislation's gendered discrimination. As well, if your family is not 'Indian' you might benefit from provincially funded social programs such as housing, education and employment programs, which fare better than chronically under-funded federally programs run under the *Indian Act*. But this also means that you live in white spaces of society where your access to these provincially funded programs may be limited based on racial discrimination. So it seems the *Indian Act* has made it difficult for families to fare well since its premise is based on racially and sexually discriminating against anyone of Indigenous decent.

To conclude my discussion on the breakdown of Indigenous families due to the colonial project, I draw on the work of Enakshii Dua. Dua's historical analysis of the colonial nation-building project shows how state policies resulted in different familial relations among white settler society, and people of color. Within white settler society, white women were encouraged to procreate and work within the domestic sphere within the nuclear family in order to build a white nation. Indigenous, Asian-Canadian and Caribbean communities were subject to state policies, which "acted to destroy, prevent, or disrupt the ability of people of color to participate in family relations" (Dua 1999: 247). For the most part Asian-Canadians and Caribbean individuals could not immigrate as families. Instead they immigrated as individuals as workers to build the nation or as childcare providers to raise the children of white women. Immigration policies over time ensured that ethnic minorities could not immigrate with their wives and children so they wouldn't be encouraged to settle in Canada or build families here. European colonizers purposely sought to destroy Indigenous gender, sexual and familial relations, by

replacing an egalitarian system with a colonial hierarchical and patriarchal system (Dua 1999: 243). As a part of the politics of racial purity, to keep the Indian separate from the white settler, residential schools and child welfare agencies were used to "forcibly separate" Indigenous children from their parents (Dua 1999: 243). In the following Dua explains this state of affairs:

> …women of color do experience the family in very different ways than women of European descent. This difference can be summed up quite simply: while the Canadian state has acted in ways to ensure the participation of white women in nuclear family relations, the state has acted to restrict women of colour's ability to participate in familial relations. (Dua 1999: 247)

As a part of the white settler nation-building project Indigenous peoples "did not have the right to live in a family context and the right to have the "family" form of their choice" (Dua 1999: 244). Indigenous ways of family and community formations which were based on balanced egalitarian relations, among large extended family networks did not fit well into the nation building project which only intended on white women having children and raising nuclear families. In the following section I will begin to focus on discussing contemporary Indigenous understanding of family and gender relations, and how the life course approach can be used to examine Indigenous life stories.

2.5 USING A LIFE COURSE APPROACH FOR INDIGENOUS STORIES

To explain how I will incorporate a life course approach, I will begin in the only way I know which is with a story; this is an extension of my method of 'acimowin,' Indigenous storytelling. It was a sunny summer day in West Edmonton at a quiet park. I was attending a children's birthday party, and I was sitting around with two other mothers from my community. All three of us had left our community up north as teenagers to go to school in the city. All three of us had completed our post-secondary education and were all working in our chosen fields. We all had young children under the age of 5. I realized all these similarities all at once, that our choice to pursue an education in our teens and early twenties had resulted in us finally experiencing motherhood in our early thirties. All three of us only had one child each. The trajectory of our life courses had been shaped by our decisions to pursue careers and to wait to have children at a time when we felt secure in our jobs and our relationships.
As I realised we were all in our early thirties and each only had one child, I decided to strike up a conversation. I said, "You know what my mother recently told me, she said that

because of my age and my focus on my work, I need to come to terms with the fact that I may only have one child in my lifetime. Do you think that's true?" One of the mothers replied, "I don't think that's true; you can have one more child. Women are having children into their late thirties, even forties, and I want to have another kid". I replied, "Yeah, I guess you're right, my mom also said that Native women in our community have always had healthy pregnancies into their late thirties, so she said I might have a chance". The second mother didn't really provide an opinion either way, but then we started discussing the costs of children. We both had our children in daycare, which is costly without subsidy, and both of our children were in extracurricular activities that added to expenses. Neither of us received subsidies for childcare because of our household incomes, so we paid full childcare fees. We discussed if I was to add another child to that equation, my daycare fees would increase substantially. Although my daughter was of the age this year where she would transition from daycare to out-of-school care, which is less costly. But the costs of my daughter's extracurricular activities were to double this year. These were things I had to take into consideration. So if I choose to have a child this year, it might make sense financially, although I was still early in my career as an academic, and I had discussed with family that I might have to wait even longer, given my career choice.

So there you have it- educated working Indigenous women trying to calculate when it was best to have a second child. As I thought about this conversation, I thought of my relatives from the community that had their children in their late teens and early twenties; they didn't have these types of conversations. I understood they had different, difficult conversations, about the struggle of having children at a young age, and often times being lone parents with limited income. One of my close female relatives, for example, had her children by her mid-twenties and she completed her university degree in her early thirties. She is now a mother with kids in high school and college, and she can focus on her busy career in Indigenous organizations. I sometimes wonder what would have happened if I had married young like this close relative and had children at a younger age, how this would have affected the current decisions I have to make in regards to having children and my focus on career progression. But it seems that in our community, motherhood is accepted no matter the age. There doesn't seem to be as much stigma attached to when a woman has children, since children are seen as a blessing from the Creator.

I begin by discussing my own decisions in career and motherhood to exemplify how a life course approach can be used in this study. The life course approach is not widely used in studies with Aboriginal peoples, but there it offers much to understanding the lived experiences of how race, gender, and class impact important life events and how structural inequalities (i.e. the colonial regime of the *Indian Act* and racism) affect people throughout their lives. A life course approach captures all the complexities of the lives of the community members interviewed. It works well with Indigenous ways of being; it goes well with the holistic approach of viewing ourselves in terms of our mental, physical, spiritual and emotional selves. A life

course approach also helps to understand how members of my community had agency in making life decisions that impacted their life course. A life course lens helps clarify how community members had understood specific racialized gendered life scripts and how they made decisions on how to avoid these life scripts or created their own variations on these life scripts. In the following section, I discuss the basic premises of life course approach as an analytic tool, how it is in this study, and special provisions for refitting this approach for research done within an Indigenous community.

2.6 CENTRAL THEMES OF LIFE COURSE APPROACH

I would like to begin by discussing some of the central themes in using a life course approach that have been outlined by other researchers in sociology and how I will incorporate this approach into this study. Heinz and Kruger suggest that as an academic discipline, sociology is divided into a variety of areas of specialization, such as sociology of the family, sociology of stratification, sociology of work, race relations, etc. (Heinz and Kruger 2001). One of the useful qualities of life course approach as a perspective is that it "crosses the boundaries of these special fields and suggests ways of conceptual and methodological rapprochement and integration" (Heinz and Kruger 2001: 30).

The life course approach also assumes "life as it is lived by us all, in sequence one year after another", and in which realms of activities such as family, work, society, politics, globalization, in 'lives lived' are "not as separate, but all impinging together on lives" (McDaniel and Bernard 2011: S2). Therefore, one of the benefits of using a life course approach as many attest is that 'lives lived' can be examined from different sociological specializations across the life course and these different realms of life can be examined together (Elder 1994; Kruger and Baldus 1999; Heinz and Kruger 2001; Cooke and Gazso 2009; McDaniel and Bernard 2011).

Another important analytic quality of life course approach is that it allows for an analysis of the 'macro' realms of society (institutions, social policy, colonialism, the labour market, and history) and the 'micro' realms of society (family life, work life, individual choices), which is useful for qualitative studies such as this, which examine gender relations.

There are central themes within life course approach that have been set out by researchers who utilize this perspective. Elder suggests that the life course approach has four central themes: "the interplay of human lives and historical time, the timing of lives, linked or interdependent lives, and human agency in choice making" (Elder 1994: 5). I also appreciate how McDaniel and Bernard explain the life course approach, especially since their approach is meant to be applied as a lens in which to examine Canadian social policy. According to McDaniel and Bernard, the "life course perspective consists of four basic principles: (1) that our daily experiences form a trajectory that begins at birth and stretches to death; (2) that life-course patterns unfold in a multiplicity of interconnected realms; (3) that social bonds form throughout our lives that affect our own life course and that of others; and (4) that a variety of local and national contexts shape life courses, and are shaped by them" (McDaniel and Bernard 2011: S2). In the following I explain further what is meant by these themes in more detail and how it can be applied to understand the life courses of Indigenous peoples.

The interplay of human lives and historical time, takes "the form of a cohort affect in which social change differentiates the life patterns of successive cohorts" (Elder 1994: 5). One major example of cohort effect is how our grandparents attended residential school, which has affected future generations in a negative way. The cohort I interviewed had not attended residential school; however, they faced a different systemic racism in the secondary and post-secondary school system. A more positive example of the interplay of human lives and historical

time is how there is a growing momentum among Indigenous peoples to use education as a means to self-determination and to benefit current and future generations.

Elder explains the timing of lives in the following:

> The social meanings of age deserve special mention because they have brought a temporal, age-graded perspective to social roles and events. Social timing refers to the incidence, duration, and sequence of roles, and to relevant expectations and beliefs based on age. (Elder 1994: 6)

An example of this is early childbearing for Indigenous women, and how the timing of having children as a teenager or young adult can affect future educational or occupational choices. Another example is how completing a post-secondary education earlier in life can have huge financial gains across the life span and can result in higher incomes.

Linked lives refer to how "lives are typically embedded in social relationships with kin and family across the life span" (Elder 1994: 6). For example, in this research project I found grandparents helped with childcare to support their adult children attain a post-secondary education. Or, for example, adult siblings shared childcare responsibilities to support educational or occupational pursuits. Another more negative example of linked lives is how the intergenerational trauma of abuse suffered by residential school survivors is passed on to their children and grandchildren through unhealthy practices of abuse, addictions, and violence. McDaniel and Bernard go further to explain that each life "is powerfully shaped by what is going on in linked lives, those of one's contemporaries as well as those of earlier generations", which rings true in these examples (McDaniel and Bernard 2011: S6).

Human agency refers to how individuals relate to the broader context of society by individual choices. "Within the constraints of their world, people are planful and make choices among options that construct social life" (Elder 1994: 6). It is the examination of these planful life choices that allows us to understand what a certain cohort values and how people create

meaning within their individual lives. One of the most powerful aspects of this research project was the amount of agency community members had in caring for their families, pursuing an education, pursuing a career and making choices to maintain cultural identities despite colonial structures which often marginalize Indigenous men and women. This was best exemplified by several of the Indigenous women I interviewed who were young mothers that had pursued a post-secondary education despite all odds against them, and how family support networks enabled these women's choice to be successful in the labour market.

Within these central themes, the human life course is understood by "age-graded trajectories such as work careers and family pathways, that are subject to changing conditions and future options, and to short-term transitions ranging from leaving school to retirement" (Elder 1994:5). These transitions are "embedded in trajectories that give them distinctive form and meaning" (Elder 1994:5). One aspect of life course that I find problematic as an Indigenous scholar is the term 'trajectory', as I feel it is close to sociological discourse that defines the marginalization of Indigenous peoples as a social problem. It can imply that Indigenous people are meant to follow life courses of unsuccessful trajectories defined by marginalization. My concern here with the term 'trajectory' is with how some research doesn't consider the stigma that can arise when particular life course trajectories are attributed to Aboriginal peoples. I am therefore cautious when using the term trajectory, not as a predictor as to why Indigenous peoples are somehow meant to be marginalized by their own doing. Instead I understand trajectory as a way to understand how certain events in individual lives might result in other events. Therefore, for the most part I will be referring to 'pathways' Indigenous people take along their life course journey. When I think of pathways and journeys, I like to think of my ancestors who were hunters, and how they had the privilege of understanding their ecological

landscape, and how they had to overcome obstacles in their paths. Part of the story of the pathways taken by those interviewed in this study was the agency they had, which I believe is part of the self-determination of an Indigenous community, and part of our story of resistance and resilience. I also use this term 'pathways' which is used in the work of Taylor, Friedel, and Edge, whose study looks at the "political, social, and economic influences on First Nation and Metis youth's attitudes toward further learning and higher levels of education" in Alberta's oil sands region (Taylor, Friedel, and Edge 2009: vi). In this work they "explore some of the institutional and policy structures that support or hinder the ability of First Nation and Metis youth to find pathways leading to sustained employment with decent pay, good working conditions and career potential" (Taylor, Friedel, and Edge 2009: vi). In a similar sense I examine how the institutions and colonial history influence the pathways of Indigenous men and women in this study and how they choose whether or not to follow racialized gendered life scripts.

McDaniel and Bernard describe life course as explained through path dependency, gravity and shocks. Path dependency is described by research that has shown that those "who make later life transitions with better preparation and resources, experience less subsequent life adversity" (McDaniel and Bernard 2011: S3). For example, a study by Cooke and McWhirter indicated that major life transitions occurred earlier with Aboriginal people with negative outcomes for health and income, transitions such as marital and union formation, child-bearing, and transitions from school to work (Cooke and McWhirter 2011). According to McDaniel and Bernard, timing of major life transitions has an impact on path dependency. Again as I am not comfortable with the term 'trajectory', I am not comfortable with the term 'path dependency' as it has similar implications of limiting Indigenous people to be dependent on a predictable path of

marginality, which doesn't allow for Indigenous politics of self-determination, which strive to move away from this marginalization. Path dependency may work as a concept in large-scale quantitative studies that try to map out government policy by using early life events and transitions to predict future outcomes. But in this qualitative study, I wish to understand the pathways Indigenous men and women take along their life course, and how they have a great deal of agency through the support of family and community to avoid path dependency outcomes. The concept of path dependent disregards the agency of Indigenous men and women, which rise above historical forms of oppression and colonization.

However, I do find McDaniel and Bernard's concepts of gravity and shocks to be useful in explaining how marginalization can negatively affect a life course. Inequalities experienced early in life such as child poverty can act like "the force of gravity in pulling down individual efforts to make life transitions that could be beneficial" (McDaniel and Bernard 2011: S4). Life events that could result in inequality are described as "shocks" from which inequalities can multiply over one's life (McDaniel and Bernard 2011: S4). An example of a shock could be a major health problem that could potentially create a large amount of debt, but in Canada this can be insulated by access to health care through the universal health care system (McDaniel and Bernard 2011: S4). But if there are no buffers to these shocks, for example as we see in our communities' such as when dealing with community violence and poverty, these shocks can create more inequalities over time. Each shock makes it harder to bounce back when you constantly face such adversity. This concept of gravity and shocks can be used to explain some of the inequalities faced by those interviewed in this study. Next I will discuss how the life course perspective has been used by scholars to examine how race and gender impact the pathways of individual "lived lives".

2.7 GENDERED AND RACIALIZED LIFE COURSES

The life course perspective allows us to look at lives from the perspective of life scripts, which are defined by normative stages and transitions over the life course that are accepted by society and supported by social institutions (McDaniel and Bernard 2011: S5). For example, Kruger and Baldus looked at "the structural and normative impact of the family and the labour market on male and female life course" in German society (Kruger and Baldus 1999: 356). They found that there are different models of life courses for men and women. Men for the most part followed a normative life course that transitioned from education-employment-retirement; however women's life courses did not fit neatly into this script (Kruger and Baldus 1999). Women's life courses were impacted by family life, and they found childbirth was not the only family interruption in a women's work life. For example, ongoing child care or caring for elderly parents or caring for sick family members affected women's transitions from education to employment to family then back to employment (Kruger and Baldus 1999). Kruger and Baldus also found that women in more male dominated professions followed the education-employment-retirement script more closely. It should be noted that Kruger and Baldus looked at the life courses of men and women in Germany in their 50's and 60's, which is an "extreme variant of institutionally regulated life course politics" based on the very formalized training requirements of specific jobs and stratification of these jobs (Kruger and Baldus 1999: 356). Life course researchers recognize that there are nationally specific life course patterns, which are based on the institutions and social policies that differ based on nation-state. Heinz and Kruger state that: "Institutions not only reproduce the social structures of society, but they carry with them the incorporated norms" and they have the potential to structure individual life courses and individual decision making (Heinz and Kruger 2001:33).

In Canadian society, the ideal romanticized Western life course is one in which you complete a high school diploma by age 18, you enter a post-secondary education and within about 4.5 years you complete a degree (the Canada Student Loan program and Registered Education Savings Plans are for the most part based on this normative life script). Then after completing your schooling you enter a career. At that point you may enter an intimate partnership either by marriage or common-law. You then have about 2 children, which may interrupt your participation in the workforce, especially if you are a woman (Maternity and Parental Unemployment Insurance, the Universal Child Tax Benefit, and Child Tax Credit are designed to benefit working Canadian families along this normative family formation). Around this time you buy a house. Over the next 30 years you participate in the workforce, during which time you obtain financial stability and steadily move upward in your career. Until you retire around age 65 (the Canada Pension Plan is designed along the premise, that you retire at this age). However once you retire, you may casually return to the workforce to supplement your pension. If along the way you are unable to work, you may collect unemployment insurance if you are eligible, or you get another student loan to complete more training, or if you are injured at work you may be eligible for workers compensation.

This is the ideal Canadian normative life course which is expected of Canadians and supported by social policies on education, training, and employment. In reality, most people don't follow this life script exactly. However that does not stop policy makers from designing social programs based on this very white, male, middle class life course. Of course, this ideal life course makes the assumption that there are female caregivers at home who are dedicated to ensuring our children can carry out this life course. According to McDaniel and Bernard the

timing of life course events are more fluid then normative Canadian ideals would have us believe:

> …individuals regularly, and increasingly, violate age and sequential norms (Elder and O'Rand 1995). They return to school after having worked or combine work and education. They return to live with parents after having been employed and/or forming a union or having a child. They marry or form a union after the birth of a child(ren), or they move on to another union or to lone parenthood. They retire more than once and "de-retire," or return to work after retirement (Schellenberg, Turcotte, and Bali 2005). Biographical time no longer is, to the extent that it ever was, the unfolding of age-defined stages according to scripts. Timing changes and sequences are fluid (McDaniel 2001). (McDaniel and Bernard 2011: S5)

Canadians increasingly "violate age and sequential norms"; especially Aboriginal peoples who tend to go through transitions earlier than non-Aboriginals, e.g. childbearing, or leaving school early, or entering the workforce at a younger age. There needs to be a greater understanding of the life scripts of Aboriginal peoples in order for social policies to meet the needs of those to who tend to violate these age-defined stages.

Cooke and Gazso describe life course "not as a singular theory but an analytic perspective that can incorporate insights from various theoretical approaches" (2009: 358). This would include theoretical perspectives such as "critical and structural perspectives on the role of state programs in reproducing gender, class, race/ethnicity, or age relations, and [which] provide a framework by which these effects can be examined at either the aggregate or individual level" (Cooke and Gazso 2009: 358). This research project began with a research question to understand cultural identity formation among men and women who lived in a Northern Alberta Indigenous community and those that left to the city of Edmonton. This research is concerned about following an Indigenous feminist perspective to understand gender relations, and how life courses are gendered. I am also concerned about overarching colonial structures such as the *Indian Act* and the programs funded under this legislation which creates specific educational and

employment policies for Indigenous people based on their location (on-reserve, off-reserve or urban), their racial status (Indian Status, Non-Status Indian, Metis, etc.), and based on their family status (i.e. whether they have children or not). In this research I examine how Indigenous working families face racism in their daily lived experiences once they enter primarily white institutions such as secondary schools, post-secondary schools, and white collar and blue collar professions in the labour market. Therefore, the life course lens fits well with this analysis of race, gender, class and understanding how cultural identity is formed or changes across the life course.

In their paper on social assistance use in Canada, Cooke and Gazso argue that "life course perspective offers a stronger and more nuanced interpretation of individual's experiences with social assistance than the more one-sided views offered by structural or rational choice approaches" (Cooke and Gazso 2009: 352). Policies such as welfare-to-work programs and employability programs "are fundamentally shaped by social structures, including gender, social class, race/ethnicity, and age" (Cooke and Gazso 2009: 355). However, life course perspective has the advantage of examining social assistance use by "recognizing and incorporating these social structures of inequality as well as individual agency, into a framework for analysis" (Cooke and Gazso 2009: 355). Through their research Cooke and Gazso were able to demonstrate how women's "ongoing responsibility for childrearing makes it far more likely that they will be lone parents than will men, and therefore more likely to need social assistance" (Cooke and Gazso 2009: 367). Individual structured choices were examined taking into consideration human capital in the context of previous experiences and resources available to these lone mothers (Cooke and Gazso 2009). This research exemplifies how race, class, and

gender can structure social policy, and how life course approach allows for a framework to examine these inequalities and the resources available to make individual choices.

There are only a handful of studies on Aboriginal people in Canada using a life course perspective. Cooke and McWhirter even go on to say that there have been "no serious attempts to apply life-course approach to Aboriginal research in Australia, the United States or New Zealand" (Cooke and McWhirter 2011: S21). The reason I believe that there have been no serious attempts to use life course perspective in Indigenous research is because most large scale life course research is based on quantitative research using longitudinal data. Not only is there a lack of this type of reliable data, but I believe this type of research would have a potential to map out marginalized Indigenous life course trajectories. This type of quantitative work would have a tendency to focus on the pathologizing 'social problems' in Indigenous communities such as low employment rates, low educational attainment, high rates of early childbearing, and high rates of violence and poverty. By pathologizing the life courses of Indigenous peoples, these types of studies would focus on the deficits in our communities and not the richness of family and relationships in our communities. However, my research project is based on qualitative Indigenous research methodologies with a focus on breaking down gendered and racialized stereotypical life course trajectories, and highlighting the agency, resistance and resilience apparent in individual choices made by young Aboriginal adults.

Indeed, in their research Cooke and Gazso, showed how qualitative data was able to enrich their "understandings of the ways in which women choose to begin or to stop receiving welfare in the context of their education and work, health, and family trajectories, and interrelationships with the lives of others such as family members and former spouses" (Cooke

and Gazso 2009: 367). Through qualitative data they were able to get a richer story as to why lone female parents made certain choices regarding social assistance.

When I begin this research I did not begin with a life course approach in mind, but as I spent months reading (and re-reading) the transcripts of 31 interviews, I began writing out chronologies of major events in community members lives, especially since there was a great deal of mobility between the city and Wabasca, and mobility within the city itself. As well, I began to recognize certain patterns in choices they made in their individual lives especially since many choose to stay or leave Wabasca based on school and work choices, or made choices based on family and community connections. Cooke and Gazso contend that "even data collected without the life course perspective explicitly in mind can be analyzed to answer questions derived from such a perspective, and that results of many seemingly "static" cross-sectional retrospective quantitative and qualitative studies can be interpreted in a way sensitive to its dynamic approach" (Cooke and Gazso 2009: 359). In my methodology of acimowin, my intention was to follow an Indigenous oral tradition by gathering life stories, but it was in understanding the complexities of choices and available resources to make these choices across the life, that I came to see that life course analysis would help in understanding these life stories. In the following I will discuss the few studies that have used a life course approach in understanding Indigenous life courses.

Cooke and McWhirter's study was based on quantitative data from the Aboriginal Peoples Survey in which they "interpreted through a life-course lens to predict "well-being" of those aged 50 or older and living off-reserve in 2001" (Cooke and McWhirter 2001: S22). This study was informative in terms of special considerations for using life course perspective on research in Aboriginal communities. Cooke and McWhirter recognize that "there are important

and unique considerations in applying life-course approach to Aboriginal inequality in Canada, in addition to the evidence that Aboriginal lives differ from those of other Canadians in terms of the time and experience of various events and transitions" (Cooke and McWhirter 2011: S16). As well it must be recognized that "Aboriginal people have been subject to different policies from the rest of the Canadian population, with potential implications for life-course patterns", these are colonial policies under the *Indian Act* (Cooke and McWhirter 2011: S16).

Although there is limited research on the life courses of Aboriginal peoples, Cooke and McWhirter speak to some of the differences in Aboriginal life courses shown in demographics that aren't necessarily in line with "institutionalized" life course and may interact with policy in such a way that transitions are "poorly supported or have negative implications" (Cooke and McWhirter 2011: S21). For example, there is a high rate of poverty among lone parents and there are higher rates of lone parents in Aboriginal communities. There are high rates of mobility among Aboriginal people, between urban and rural settings, and within urban centres. Social programs don't necessarily support lone parenthood and high mobility, which can negatively impact future transitions and pathways. Aboriginal life courses need to be considered under a unique lens, "Family forms, fertility decisions, and other aspects of life course may be strongly related to cultural norms, while mobility may be related to the unique relationships between Aboriginal people and place" (Cooke and McWhirter 2011: S21). As well, using a life course approach with Aboriginal people "requires understanding Aboriginal conceptions of age and age-graded expectations, in order to highlight how these may conflict with the assumptions inherent in existing policy" (Cooke and McWhirter 2011: S21). Therefore, my research enlightens life course research by incorporating an Indigenous perspective on conceptions of age and family. Aboriginal people in Canada are subject to different policies and legal institutions

than other Canadians, this creates different life courses for Aboriginal peoples. In the following

Cooke and McWhirter explain this further:

> The legacy of colonial institutions, including the *Indian Act*, has meant that Aboriginal people are often exposed to different educational, health, employment, and family policies than are other Canadians. This is perhaps most obvious in the case of Registered Indians or Inuit for whom educational, health, and social services are ultimately provided by the federal government rather than by provincial governments (e.g. Health Canada 2009)…Furthermore, the *Indian Act* established rules that govern other aspects of life, such as the division of matrimonial property after marital dissolutions – rules that have recently changed…The *Indian Act* itself and the complex legal distinctions that it and the C-31 amendment have created between communities and families (Clatworthy 2001) can be thought of as a policy that shapes the lives of Aboriginal peoples. Through the life course concept of "linked lives", these differences in resources and legal status potentially affect not only individuals but also families and communities. (Cooke and McWhirter 2011: S22).

In their research, Cooke and McWhirter found that one of the most negative impacts colonialism

has on the life course of Aboriginal peoples was the attendance of residential schools. The fact

of "having ever attended a residential school had independent and negative effects on men's

education and economic family income after age 50" (Cooke and McWhirter 2011: S25).

Perhaps even more telling is that men who had attended residential school have "significantly

worse self-rated health" than their female counterparts (Cooke and McWhirter 2011: S25).

In their analysis, Cooke and McWhirter also referred to an "accumulation of

disadvantages across the life course", such as poverty, victimization, leaving school early, and

negative health events which adversely affect the life course trajectories of Aboriginal people

(Cooke and McWhirter 2001: S21). However, cross-sectional survey data limits the ability to

investigate many of the questions that life-course perspective seeks to examine. Cooke and

McWhirter were not able to answer key questions such as how "disadvantages may accumulate

across the life course, how the timing of various transitions and experiences affects later

outcomes, and how trajectories in the domains of health, work and education, and family transitions might interact" (Cooke and McWhirter 2011: S25).

Cooke and McWhirter discovered some interesting unique family qualities of Aboriginal people. They found we were more likely to be divorced or separated, and less likely to be married, and the timing of these events did not match that of non-Aboriginals (Cooke and McWhirter 2011: S23). As well they found Aboriginal people were more likely to have more children than non-Aboriginal families (Cooke and McWhirter 2011: S23). This may be in line with Indigenous forms of marriage, which are more autonomous and partners may choose to stay or leave such partnerships. Entering partnerships and having children at an early age may follow the traditional Indigenous understanding which places value on motherhood and parenthood. I believe the study done by Cooke and McWhirter did not incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing and understanding of life transitions, which is central to my research. For example, I believe their lack of understanding of traditional Indigenous families and gender roles, and the respected roles of motherhood were completely ignored. In my Indigenous Feminist approach, I will incorporate a Cree understanding of family and community, in which children and motherhood are central to the community.

The only other research that has attempted to look at Aboriginal life courses is primarily public health and epidemiological studies. In their short article, Estey, Kmetic and Reading highlight how the "importance of intergenerational relationships, community well-being, and holistic understandings of health in Aboriginal communities is complemented by a life course perspective that examines the influence of a combination of biological, social and environmental processes across the life stages – from prenatal life to infancy to the elderly years" (Estey, Kmetic, and Reading 2007: 445). They use life course perspective to understand risk factors in

health across the lifetime in order to improve individual and community health. Similar to how life course approach is used in sociology, epidemiologists can combine various realms of lives lived in order to improve health and this is easily paired with Aboriginal holistic understandings of the self and health. According to Estey, Kmetic and Reading, "Understanding that risk factors develop at different stages of life and impact individual and community health throughout the life cycle and across generations provides the framework for well-rounded and focused research" (Estey, Kmetic and Reading 2007:445). This approach can be used to understand differences in healthy family relations and unhealthy family relations, as a means to improve community health and as a means to self-determination.

In a larger study, Loppie Reading and Wien, use quantitative healthcare data to "provide evidence that not only demonstrate important health disparities within Aboriginal groups and compared to non-Aboriginal people, but also links social determinants, at proximal, intermediate, and distal levels, to health inequities" (Loppie Reading and Wien 2009: 1). They feel a life course approach fits well with Indigenous ideologies that "embrace a holistic concept of health that reflects physical, spiritual, emotional and mental dimensions" (Loppie Reading and Wien 2009: 3). I feel the study done by Loppie Reading and Wien was more of a social determinants of health study and did not fully incorporate a life course method, as too many determinants were discussed, and it was based on different quantitative data sets so individual life courses were not examined.

My research is more informative then previous life course studies because I use Indigenous research methodologies and Indigenous ways of knowing, and especially an Indigenous understanding of family and community. I examine individual life courses within a specific community, which will better demonstrate the interaction between individual choice and

the structural socio-historical influences on lives lived. In future chapters, I discuss the racialized

gendered life scripts of Indigenous men and women, and how members of the community made

choices against these life scripts. In discussing racialized gendered life scripts, I discuss how the

choice to follow Indigenous family forms is an example of resistance and resilience, against

colonialism and patriarchy. Indigenous family and understandings of relations will prove to be

our unique cultural contribution to the success of Indigenous men and women in school and the

labour market.

2.8 DOING INDIGENOUS SOCIOLOGY

I have attempted to discuss how a history of colonialism and patriarchy has broken down

healthy balanced, egalitarian Indigenous family forms and gender relations in our traditional

societies. In addition to an Indigenous feminist approach in understanding Indigenous families, I

discussed how I use a life course approach to understand the life stories of community members

in this study. In the following I will discuss the influence my Kohkom had on me and how her

teachings have allowed me to develop an Indigenous sociology. Through this Indigenous

sociology, I am able to combine Indigenous ways of knowing with sociological ways of

knowing.

As a child I remember spending a lot of time with my maternal Kohkom[2] Mary; most of

what I know about my culture I learned from her and from my parents. As a child, I remember

running around outside playing with my cousins at Kohkom's house. As I got older, she began to

teach me things and there was less playing and more doing, but it all seemed like playing to me.

When I was about 12 years old my Kohkom Mary began teaching me to work on moose hides; I

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[2] I acknowledge here that in Cree Kohkom means 'your grandmother' in the second person and Nohkom means 'my grandmother' in the first person. I was raised using the term Kohkom which is a grammatically incorrect way to refer to my grandmother. If I spoke proper Cree I would have called Kohkom Mary, Nohkom Mary. However because Kohkom is a term of endearment in my community I acknowledge I will not be grammatically correct. I apologize to all my Cree language teachers but I loved my Nohkom Mary as "Kohkom Mary".

am not sure I was very good at it. I remember making a huge hole in one hide and sometimes being too lazy to put in the physically intensive work. I think I was better suited for the meticulous art of bead working flowers onto moose hide. But I loved learning anything from my Kohkom, so I remember trying my hardest to gain her approval. Our days were always filled with different tasks; at the time I didn't realise I was learning traditional skills. In the summer mornings we would go outside and work on the moose hides, and then we would come inside and drink tea while doing beadwork. Sometimes we would go on outings to pick berries or go to the grocery store or go visit other elders. Growing up I always felt like I was doing something or learning something at Kohkom's.

One thing I learned from Kohkom was how to be resourceful, especially when it came to making moose hides. The first thing Kohkom would do when she got a hide was to tie it to a wooden frame, then she would sit on the hide skinning one side with a metal blade and then flip the hide over to skin the other side with a blade made from moose bone. After skinning the hide she would wash the hide in a huge metal basin. She would clean the hide with bars of Sunlight brand laundry soap. Once the hide was cleaned, the water would be strained out. Two people would use two large sticks to twist out the excess water. But if Kohkom had to do it by herself, she would use an old washing machine to strain out the excess water. Then her and Mosom would put the hide on the rafters of the smoke house, and tan the hide using special red wood collected from fallen poplar trees in the bush. She would then take the hide from the smoke house and rub boiled moose brain onto the hide to soften it. Then it would go back into the smoke house. I remember she would be working on a few hides at once, so there was always work to do and things to be taught. Once the hide was complete, she would begin making clothing with it. Most of the time Kohkom made moccasins or mukluks with the moose hides.

Sometimes she had special orders to make gloves or jackets. To make moccasins, she would

normally make Metis floral designs using glass beads and sew together the shoe using waxed

cotton thread. Although Kohkom knew how to sew together a moccasin using moose sinew as

thread and she could make floral designs using dyed porcupine quills, which was considered

more of a Cree traditional way of doing it. Kohkom taught me all of these methods. As I look

back, Kohkom used the materials and tools she had available in order to make moose hides and

to make moccasins. She was resourceful and she would find ways to bring it all together to make

something beautiful. Kohkom made many things from her own hands and resourcefulness, to

keep her family warm.

As I think of bringing together the many stories of those community members I

interviewed, I want to use my Kohkom's method of making moose hides and moccasins as a

metaphor. I will be mainly incorporating Indigenous research methodologies as tools to

understand these stories and bring them together, but I will be resourceful by using some more

mainstream approaches (e.g. life course theory) as tools to tie it all together. I will only use those

tools and approaches that seem appropriate and fit the overall story I am trying to craft. Most of

the materials Kohkom used were Indigenous and came from the moose or the bush, but she also

incorporated some western materials such as the metal blade, the metal washbasin, and Sunlight

soap. The materials Kohkom used may have not all been Indigenous materials, and I am certain

the western materials she used had a direct link to our colonization and were originally materials

provided by the Hudson Bay Company. What makes her moose hides and moccasins Indigenous

in my mind are not just the materials, but her method of being resourceful and practicing her

traditional craft. It is this resourcefulness and the skilfulness in her craft, which I use in my

dissertation. This is an Indigenous sociology. It unfolds in the remaining chapters in the

following way. I use an Indigenous form of storytelling that respects the oral tradition of

acimowin and by following an Indigenous ethical model of respect in my research methodology.

Theoretically, I use an Indigenous feminism that recognizes our unique struggles as women with

a history of colonization and marginalization. In the context of these stories, there are very

modern concerns of working families and the gender roles in a capitalist economy; for this

analysis I combine Indigenous feminism with sociology of family and work, and a life course

approach. Incorporating a life course approach I examine the influences of colonial structures

within the educational system, and capitalist structures within the labour market, as well as the

ways in which the lives of Indigenous men and women are shaped by race, gender, and class. A

life course approach in my Indigenous sociology allows me to examine individual life stories,

while looking at the overall story of the community, and how choices are made within modern

structures of a colonial and capitalist society.

Chapter Three: Using a Cree Indigenous Research Methodology

3.1 MY STORY ON DEVELOPING INDIGENOUS RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

I grew up in Bigstone Cree Nation, I can speak the Cree language, and I identify as a

nehiyaw (a Cree person). My parents taught me to speak Cree, and then while in secondary

school I attended Cree class, then in University I studied Cree language. Today I speak Cree with

my parents and siblings and I try to teach Cree to my children. From my Cree teachers and trying

to teach Cree myself, I feel there are two key concepts to the language, relationships and

humour. From these two key concepts comes storytelling (*acimowin*), and a good story always

consists of funny events or the ironies of life involving relatives, and as members of the

community we are all related somehow. So I will begin my methodology by telling a sad story

full of ironies.

My Mosom (grandfather) passed away on a cold December day; he was involved in a collision on a logging road outside the reserve going to towards Chipewyan. It was very sad for my family because my Kohkom (grandmother) had passed away a few years earlier. My Mosom and Kohkom were together for over 30 years; they raised my mother and her two sisters, but my Mosom also had two sons from a previous relationship. To honour my Mosom the family had a three-day wake, and a funeral with a feast on the last day. My Kohkom was Catholic and her daughters were Christian. My Mosom was a traditional elder, and his two sons practiced traditional Cree beliefs. To respect the beliefs of my Mosom, his sons and brothers organized the funeral with traditional ceremonies. Being a traditional elder my Mosom was a teacher of traditional ways of living and believing. And the one thing I remember the most from his teachings was the he distinguished 'our traditions' from other Cree communities. For example he taught that traditionally our people did not burn sweetgrass or use the sweat lodge, our people traditionally burnt sage and played the drum. He would say "those are the Crees from Central Alberta that burn sweetgrass and use the sweat lodge, those are not our traditions". My Mosom did not agree with the methods of combining various Aboriginal cultures, I suppose this is because of our spiritual relationship with the Creator and the land, and our relationship with the Creator is localized to the specific gifts from mother earth in our traditional territory. My parents are Christian, they raised my brothers and I in a Cree Pentocostal church founded by one of the elders, in fact I learnt Cree from attending church listening to hymns and sermons in Cree. My brothers and I also attended Catholic Sunday mass with my Kohkom, and sometimes we went to the Anglican Church since my dad was raised Anglican. My brothers and I grew up attending church tent meetings around different Aboriginal communities in the area. We were raised Christian, but we were taught the Cree language, how to hunt and fish, how to prepare

traditional food, and to respect our community, so although we did not practice Cree spiritual beliefs we were raised traditionally.

So when I heard my Mosom's funeral would be traditional, I really didn't know what that meant because I had only ever been to a Christian funeral in the community. My Mosom's wake was held at the school gym at Oski-Pasikoniwew-Kamik school, because he was one of the five founding elders of the First Nations operated school with culturally appropriate curriculum. The school is an amazing architectural structure, at the centre is a large tepee surrounded by smaller tepees, each of the small tepees is a classroom. Outside of the gym doors was an actual tepee set-up, it had a large burning fire inside, and it was my Mosom's tepee, a resting place for his spirit. Inside the school gym, was my Mosom's body, in an open casket, in front of the casket, there were three bear furs, at the centre of the bear furs was burning sage, this was a sacred area, where the drummers sat on the bear furs and sang songs of mourning.

In the back corner of the gym was a commercial size kitchen, where I spend most of my time with my mother and aunts preparing food. My eldest brother had killed a moose especially for the occasion. It was actually quite amazing, on the morning the wake was supposed to begin, my brothers went hunting early in the morning, where my eldest brother shot a moose right through the heart. It was amazing, I saw the moose's heart too, because I was a kitchen helper, and moose heart soup is a delicacy that we served at the funeral feast. My mother and her helpers butchered the moose meat, and served it as moose stew, moose roast, moose nose stew, and moose heart stew, even moose chilli.

When I initially entered the school gym, as I walked past the tepee outside, and looked at the bear furs and sage, I thought to myself, how well these traditional believers and Christian believers get along, this is going to be funny or this is going to be disastrous. It turned out it is more funny then anything. For example, my mother was in the kitchen preparing food, her aunt came in and yelled at my mother saying, "I hope you are only preparing traditional food for the people, we don't want to serve turkey and ham", to which my mother replied, "Yes, we are making moose meat and we ordered 20 muskrats", knowing her aunt detested the taste of muskrat, we all laughed at this exchange. I found it ironic, because I remember always eating traditional food, like wild meat and fish at my Kohkom's. But my Kohkom was not only an excellent cook when it came to traditional food, she was also an excellent cook when it came to Canadian food like cakes, pies, cookies, turkey, roast beef, and ham roasts. Ironically, although my Mosom was spoiled with traditional food and Canadian food most of his life, now at his wake we were to only serve traditional food, I suppose this is part of the meaning-making ceremony and celebration involved in funerals. What made my Mosom a great elder was not only his traditional knowledge, but his life story which meant leaving the reserve and working in Fort McMurray for over 25 years, teaching the younger generations we could be successful in the white world too. My Mosom taught us to have a hard work ethic and that it was okay to leave the community to find work to take care of our family. In fact, because of my Mosom's work ethic in the oilfield for all those years, he retired when I was a child and the Mosom I knew was a retired one that spent his time practicing his spirituality and the other time spoiling his grandchildren with gifts and love.

There were other funny moments during the wake. For example, at the funeral during the pipe ceremony, an elder who was known for being a great hunter and father of a prominent family in the community, turned to my husband and said, "Do you know what they are doing here? I have been an Indian all my life and I don't know what they are doing here". Later this elder explained to my parents, that traditionally when someone died, they made a pyre where

they burned the body, and left the remains there in the bush, he didn't recall a pipe ceremony, or sage burning ceremonies. The fact that this elder referred to himself as an "Indian" spoke to the internalization of colonial labels of Indigenous identity. So throughout the funeral there were discussions about what the proper local Cree traditions were and the authenticity of certain ceremonies, which due to colonization and the loss of such traditions there was considerable debate. This loss of traditions was due to the forced introduction of Christianity and the outlawing of traditional ceremonies; therefore the debates of cultural authenticity were due to a patchwork of cultural memory for some present. For those that had retained the cultural memory of these ceremonies, there were deep sacred meanings because they had the traditional knowledge to understand the meanings in the ceremonies. For those that debated, they relied on a patchwork of broken and lost cultural memory; they sat back, whispering in Cree trying to figure out the purpose of the ceremony.

On the last day during the funeral, despite a few days of being nervous not to offend the traditional believers and not to offend the Christians, I came to realize we were not on different sides. We all loved our Mosom, and we were there to celebrate his life. So after the pipe ceremony and traditional prayer, my mother went up to sing a hymn, after this my mother and her traditional aunt hugged. So busy cooking, and cleaning, and serving guests, in all of this I did not cry. Then as they lowered my Mosom's body into his grave, I stood in the cold snow with everyone else, there a lone drummer named Albert sang a song of mourning, I listened closely to hear the Cree words, as I listened I heard the words of love for my Mosom and the sounds of mourning. In the days prior, I didn't know what the proper way was to mourn my Mosom, I wanted to follow the proper protocol and not offend anyone, the traditionalist burned sage, the Christians cooked moose meat, we all prayed and cried together, we all loved him, he was with my Kohkom now. At that moment, I could hear the love and mourning in Albert's song and drum; after that, I didn't care about the proper protocol. We were there, all Nehiyawak (Cree people) missing Mosom in the only way we knew how.

In designing an Indigenous methodology, I ask the question: What does a Cree methodology look like? What does a Nehiyaw methodology look like? As my above narrative exemplifies, our Cree culture and our Cree traditions mean different things to different people. To some "our culture" is defined by traditional spiritual practices and ceremonies. To some it is defined by hunting and fishing practices, and the preparation of traditional foods. To some it is defined by the Cree language. To some it is defined by the networks of family and community. In designing an Indigenous methodology, I incorporate all of these definitions of Cree-ness, taking into consideration the fluid nature of this modern understanding of culture and identity, that there isn't one proper way to be Cree and that there are different understandings of what it

means to be Cree in the community. So my methodology is a Cree methodology, but taking into consideration the various understandings of what it means to be Cree in the community.

My Indigenous research methodology draws on interviews with community members and my own experiences in the community. Research with Indigenous people in Canada is a very sensitive subject and a highly political act; because of this there has recently been a move to work collaboratively with communities so that the community benefits from the knowledge production as much as the researcher.

> The word itself, 'research', is probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world's vocabulary. When mentioned in the Indigenous context, it stirs up silence, it conjures up bad memories, it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful. (Smith 1999:1)

Smith suggests a decolonising methodology, in which Indigenous peoples begin to produce knowledge based on an Indigenous perspective. A challenge of using an Indigenous perspective is that Indigenous peoples are not homogenous because we come from diverse historical, cultural, geographic, political and economic contexts; therefore there are many Indigenous perspectives. What Indigenous scholars have in common is the experience of colonialism and experiences of western scholars exploiting us with objective positivistic methodologies. We can therefore decolonize research by using more subjective Indigenous perspectives. I use a methodology that respects Indigenous forms of knowledge in the community; involving working collaboratively with community members and leaders and overall, trying to breakdown the hierarchy between researcher and research subjects.

According to Menzies, "It is unfortunate that there are still many researchers who continue to conduct research *on* aboriginal peoples as opposed to *with* us" (Menzies 2001: 21). I attempted to do this research project with the community as much as possible, especially since I lived in the community and was a member of the community. Having spent a few years living between the

city and the reserve, I have come to see in my own experience a unique understanding of home and belonging. For this research project I interviewed community members between September 2011 until February 2012, it took a total of 6 months to complete the interviews for this project.

Qualitative research methods have become widely used by many Aboriginal scholars who are studying contemporary Aboriginal identity and questions of race. This method is especially useful since the oral tradition and story-telling is an integral part of many Aboriginal cultures. Lawrence interviewed 30 mixed blood urban Native peoples in Toronto. The stories and narratives these participants shared were based on their experiences of coming to the city and their experiences once their families settled in the city (Lawrence 2004). By using narratives Lawrence came to understand how they negotiated their Aboriginal identities within the urban context. In her study of the Cherokee Nation, Sturm, who is an anthropologist, used ethnographic methods that understand the complexity of the multiracial Aboriginal identities in the context of the reservation. In fact Sturm commends those ethnographers who strive to understand multiracial Native Americans, especially those that "acknowledge the complexity of these communities and no longer assumes a priori that blood degree correlates with cultural authenticity or ethnic identity" (Sturm 2002: 18). Qualitative research used by Aboriginal scholars contributes to the emerging concepts that help us describe the complex relationships of race, identity and location. I used qualitative research methods to understand the complex discourses of Aboriginal identity, and the journey's taken along the life courses of those that live in rural/reserve areas and in the city.

The interview guide for this study is attached in Appendix A. It was reviewed by the community members. The community members mentioned that they appreciated the open-ended nature of the interview questions. As well with the consultation of the community members I

have added a question on the importance of the Cree language to Aboriginal identity, and a section on housing issues since finding adequate housing is an ongoing issue with members of the community.

The interview guide was designed with the Cree concept of acimowin (pronounced achi-mow-in), which means, "to tell a story". I believe that acimowin to be a key concept in the Cree culture. Whenever a family member would tell a story, my mother told us all to be quiet because "*eh-wi-acimowit*", meaning "he/she is going to tell us a story". From childhood we are taught to listen when someone is telling their story. Or when my mother talks about one of my grandfather's hunting stories, maybe about the time he got stuck in the bush and had to sleep under the brush of a pine tree, she would say "*ki-Mosom eki-acimowit mana*", "your grandfather would tell the story". Storytelling is how the history of our people is kept alive through a series of stories. But where I feel that acimowin is most central to Cree culture is when someone tells their life story to someone else. This casual yet sometimes serious act of acimowin is what I tried to capture in my interviews.

The interview guide was divided into three main sections. The first section was meant to get an understanding of the community member's experiences of where they live now and where they have lived in the past. The second section was about how the community member's life choices and circumstances affect where they live. This section had questions that dealt with family life, schooling choices, work choices, and their housing situation. The third section was to gain an understanding of Aboriginal identity and how it is connected to location. This last section may be more personal because it dealt with questions of home, belonging and cultural identity. Each question was meant to get an understanding of Aboriginal identity and migration experiences.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement on the Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans includes a chapter on "Research Involving the First Nations, Inuit, and the Metis Peoples of Canada" (Tri-Council 2010). It is recognized that non-Aboriginal researchers have often carried out research involving Aboriginal peoples, with approaches not generally reflecting Aboriginal worldviews that are not beneficial to the community (Tri-Council 2010). Due to the historical colonial approach of research, Aboriginal people continue to view research from outside the community with "a certain apprehension or mistrust" (Tri-Council 2010: 105). However, as more Aboriginal scholars contribute to research, and communities become "better informed about the risks and benefits of research", the landscape and approach to research is changing to incorporate Aboriginal worldviews (Tri-Council 2010: 105). This framework is written in the "spirit of respect", recognizing "that research involving Aboriginal peoples is premised on respectful relationships" and it "encourages collaboration and engagement between researchers and participants" (Tri-Council 2010: 105). In the spirit of collaboration, I have followed the provisions of this ethical framework, by respecting the governing authorities of the community, respecting community customs, and respecting knowledge holders in the community (Tri-Council 2010). Therefore, I consulted with the local leaders of the Bigstone Cree Nation; both elected council members and respected knowledge bearers who are members of the community.

Once my ethics review was approved by York University, I met with community leaders. In August 2011, I met with the Chief and Council of Bigstone Cree Nation and received a Band Council Resolution approving me to carry out research in the community. On that same day I met with the Municipality District of the Hamlet of Wabasca in which they approved me to carry

out research in the community. I immediately began finding community members to participate in my research.

After spending some time in the community I have come to understand Aboriginal teachers and educators as respected knowledge bearers. I shared my research proposal with Aboriginal educators from the community since they have expertise in understanding our young people and experience with research projects previously done in the community. I explained to the Aboriginal educators and community members involved in this study that this research was an ongoing dialogue with the community, that their expertise and knowledge of the community helped guide how this research would be carried out in the community.

Many Indigenous researchers have stated the importance of using local Indigenous knowledge. To guide my research I used two concepts that are important in Cree culture, showing respect and family relations. Steinhauer states that according to Cree elders, "showing respect- *kihceyihtowin*- is a basic law of life" (Steinhauer 2002: 73). In my research I used this Indigenous perspective of respecting the knowledge and approval of local leaders. Steinhauer quotes a Cree elder who says, "Respect means you listen intently to others' ideas that you do not resist that your ideas prevail. By listening, you show honour, consider the well being of others, and treat others with kindness and courtesy" (Steinhauer 2002: 73). As a researcher and as a Cree speaking member of the Bigstone Cree Nation, I followed this protocol of respect when working with the community. From my Cree community I have learnt that listening more than talking is a great sign of respect. I used the respectful act of listening as an important aspect of my interviews.

I have often heard it said that Cree language and culture is about family. A common theme in Cree is *kahkiyweyak niwakohmanak*, meaning everyone is my relation. Indigenous

scholar Janice Acoose, first introduced this concept in her book "Iskwewak – Kah Ki Yaw Niwahkomakanak: Neither Indian Princesses Nor Easy Squaws", in which she deconstructs stereotypical representations of Indigenous women in popular literature and she reclaims Indigenous womanhood drawing on her family relations (Acoose 1995). In her book "Iskwewak", Janice Acoose explains the important role family and particularly her female relations held in developing who she is as a person (Acoose 1995). As my Cree instructor in university once told me, there are two important things to understand in the Cree language; the first is that the language is filled with humour; the second is that there is usually a kinship term for everyone you meet. We are all relations. Throughout my interviews, there was a great deal of laughing and humour. I believe this aspect of my culture made the interview process more casual and more informative. But I incorporated the Cree understanding that we are all relations, that each human being is a product of "Kah Ki Yaw Niwahkomakanak", that we are all products of all our relations.

To figure out how someone is your relation, you first ask who their parents or grandparents are. Sometimes they are a close relation and the connection is instant. Sometimes if you go back far enough with the grandparents, you can find how you are distantly related. For example you might find out that your grandparents were cousins. If you cannot find a close or distant relation, you figure which one of their grandparents was an elder you knew and respected, then from the respect of that elder, it is as if you are related to them. Most often, you come away from the conversation referring to each other as cousins in some sense. If they are not your relation, you find a relational term for them. I was raised with the Indigenous understanding that when you meet someone you find a relational term for each other, with a universal understanding that we are all relations.

Even as I met with various community members, they would often explain to me their family history and how indeed we were cousins. In one funny instance, after completing an interview, a male community member was on the phone with his mother. As he explained to her how he had just finished an interview with me, just then his mother explained how we were actually cousins through my father. So when he got off the phone he joked how, unfortunately, we could never be a couple because we were cousins. And although he knew I was married, we both still found this funny, as this is a common joke in the community. Immediately after the joke, there was a sense of pride we were cousins because we had known each other's parents to be respected elders in the community, especially since most of our discussions were about his mother and I had mentioned my father. So I have come to understand that family and heritage is an important aspect of my culture. You cannot understand an individual unless you understand "Kah Ki Yaw Niwahkomakanak". In order to truly know a person you must understand their relatives and how these relationships form who they are.

When I began doing research with the community, I designed my interview guide along the concept of *niwakohmanak*, which means all my relatives, highlighting the importance of family in our culture. I was interested in the cultural identity formation between those that stayed in the Northern Alberta community of Wabasca and those that left for the city of Edmonton. Based on my upbringing I had an intuition that family would be an important factor in understanding identity. I didn't realize how hugely important understanding the concept of family would be in this research. I didn't realize how family and community would influence the life choices of those that I interviewed, and the marked differences between those in the city and those that 'stayed up north'. I didn't realize that central to understanding cultural identity I needed to examine how community members understood their family. I needed to understand

how they formed families. I needed to understand how contemporary understandings of family would be influenced by traditional Cree egalitarian understanding of gender roles. I needed to understand how our families today are influenced by an unfortunate legacy of colonialism, residential schools, cultural genocide and the capitalist economy of the oil industry that surrounds our community.

By understanding that *kihceyihtowin* is a basic law of life and that *niwakohmanak* defines the individual in Cree culture, I attempted to incorporate this moral in the way I carried out this research project. Therefore, although my primary goal was to understand young Aboriginal adults in the community, if a community member did not seem comfortable as an authority on discussing their cultural family history, I would ask them if they were comfortable referring me to an elder in their family that might have more expertise in that area. In this way, I respected the role of elders in the community as traditional knowledge bearers of cultural and family history, and that some young adults may defer to their elders for some of this history and knowledge. I told them I would interview the family elder using the same basic structure of the interview guide. However, since I am still considered a "young person" in my community I would modify the interview to be less structured and focusing on key questions (omitting probing questions as needed), and respecting the role of elders as official storytellers in the community by allowing them to tell their story more freely. However, I did not receive any referrals to interview a family elder with any of my community members. Two community members mentioned they had a traditional elder in the family, but they were comfortable with the interview we had done and did not find it necessary to interview their family elder. I was disappointed to not interview any elders, although it was comforting to know that these young Aboriginal adults felt comfortable and confident in telling their own life stories. And it reinforced these young people as traditional

knowledge bearers because they themselves were excellent storytellers. This takes me to my research question and objectives of this project, which focuses on young adults in the community.

3.1.1 Research Question and Objectives

I ask a research question that explores the identity formation and experiences of young Aboriginal adults from a Northern Alberta community who move between their traditional rural/reserve territories to the regional urban centers. I ask this question in the context of secondary research questions examining gender differences experienced in this process, and in the context of the choices that young Aboriginal adults have to make in terms of education and entering the labour market at this stage in their lives. In this study, qualitative interviews with community members and my personal experiences in the community will be examined to understand the complex nature of cultural identities and experiences of migration. Quantitative research that requires a respondent to identify their ethnic identity by checking off one box cannot capture the experience of racialization or the experience of negotiating one's identity between different spaces. Quantitative research has identified that Aboriginal people have a fast growing young population, a highly mobile population, with increases in educational attainment, but this does not capture the individual experiences of movement and identity formation. I chose a qualitative approach and an Indigenous methodology, and used acimowin interviews to understand the lived experiences of community members making choices of where to live, work, and build family. The richness and depth of understanding the life stories of Indigenous men and women through qualitative interviews allows for understanding the complexities and relationships between cultural identity, location, gender, education, work, and family.

While conducting my research project, I wondered what makes this an Indigenous qualitative research project. Just being a mother with a young family, working and pursuing an education made me live an experience similar to many of my community members. As well, as I worked between the city and the reserve, I realized I have a unique experience of spending half of the week at my parents on the reserve where family members watched my daughter while I met with community members, and the other half of the week I worked in the city, so I experienced life in both locations of Wabasca and Edmonton. During this time I felt connected to my community and began to re-establish relationships with my family members and the community. It was almost a coming home as I relied on the support of relatives to complete the project.

The main approach of this study is an Indigenous research methodology based on Cree cultural concepts of storytelling and family relations. However, to fully understand the sociological phenomenon of Indigenous identity, migration, and family relations a mixed methods approach is applied. This mixed methods approach follows the transformative emancipatory perspective set out by Mertens. This paradigm "places central importance on the lives and experiences of those who suffer oppression and discrimination whatever the basis – be it sex, race/ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status" (Mertens 2008: 98). According to this approach, ontologically "reality is described within a historical, political, cultural, and economic context" (Mertens 2008: 98). Epistemologically the relationships between researcher and community members is based on trust and "understanding to accurately represent viewpoints of all groups fairly", showing the positive and negative experiences especially within marginalized communities. And methodologically, "mixed methods offers avenues to address the issues of diverse groups appropriately" (Mertens 2008: 98). The primary source of data

collection is qualitative, based on the acimowin interviews that were done with community

members. Using a mixed methods approach, in order to gain a full understanding of the

geographic, demographic, historical and colonial context of the community, I have conducted a

secondary analysis of 2011 census data from Statistics Canada. As well, I have used government

documents, government websites, newspaper articles, and my own participant observation in the

community to describe the colonial history in the Wabasca area, which is the traditional territory

of the Bigstone Cree Nation and Metis Nation of Alberta. By using a mixed methods approach,

findings presented using qualitative data, historical data, demographic and statistical data allows

the research to present structural inequalities from different types of data sources, in order to

allow for transformative social changes to those oppressed by racism, sexism, colonialism.

3.2 MY STORY OF NETWORKING IN THE COMMUNITY

Studying identity as being formed in the context of migration and movement between

two distinct locations, my target was to interview at least 30 young Aboriginal adults between

the ages of 25 to 35. I intended the sample to be equally divided among men and women, to

compare differences in experiences based on gender. Also, in order to conduct a comparative

analysis I wanted half my sample to be those that lived in the Wabasca area all (or most of) their

life and half to be migrants that have had the experience of living off-reserve. I defined migrants

as those that have identified both as living on-reserve and living off-reserve as separate times in

their lives. This comparison allowed me to understand how migration affects cultural identity

and how Aboriginal peoples living in different geographic spaces understand their cultural

identity.

Since my interest was to interview young Aboriginal adults I tried to interview anyone

from the community that identified as being of Aboriginal heritage, whether this meant being

Metis, Cree, Nehiyaw, Status Indian, Non-Status Indian, Indigenous, or First Nations. Having experienced discrimination and experienced the feeling of being excluded or made to feel different based on my cultural-racial differences (I am culturally and racially Metis/Cree), my hope was to have a spirit of inclusion in my research project, and an acceptance of all different varieties of what it means to be Aboriginal. Therefore, because my target was to interview people with diverse experiences, my sample of community members was actually between the ages of 21 to 41, with an average age of 30 years old. I tried to be inclusive of young adults that were willing to participate in the research and felt they contributed to the diversity of the project. The hope in this research was to understand differences within the Aboriginal community of those from Bigstone Cree Nation and Wabasca, who still lived in the community or moved to Edmonton.

I used snowball sampling through networking with people, and considering the importance of family and community, this informal form of sampling allowed me to network with community members, family and friends. As well, the community members already participating in this study helped with identifying potential participants of the study. Most of my networking was done through those I had already known in the community then referrals to their family and friends, or I would bump into someone at a community event and they would self-refer themselves as a community member to participate in the research. About a third of the referrals ended with the statement "I'm on Facebook, under my name so just in-box me and we can meet up" or else "He is on Facebook, I'll send him a message to expect you to contact him, so you can in-box him a message". So although most referrals were done by face-to-face discussions, and some by telephone calls, quite a few people were comfortable using social media to contact me as a researcher.

I completed interviews in Edmonton and interviews in Wabasca. Half of the interviews were with men and the other half of the interviews were with women. I spent Tuesday to Friday in Edmonton and Saturday to Monday in Wabasca; from September 2011 until February 2012 I followed this schedule. In addition, the roads in Northern Alberta were unpredictable and I had to take this into consideration when making travel arrangements. Overall, it was a much more difficult task then I anticipated to schedule interviews with community members. When I met with Chief and Council, they wanted me to try to get a more representative sample of the community and try to get interviews with members of the First Nation that lived on Bigstone numbered Reserves 166, 166A, 166B, 166C, and 166D in the Wabasca area. Despite making myself known in the community and participating in community events (membership meetings, weddings, funerals, community gatherings, visiting with community members, speaking to educators and employers, etc.) and trying to build rapport with the community, it took much longer than anticipated to find and interview community members. I was only able to find community members living on Bigstone Reserve 166A and 166D; new housing developments were located on these reserve lands and they were more populated areas than other Bigstone Cree Nations Reserves. I estimate for every one interview I had scheduled I had to reschedule at least three times because of scheduling conflicts, which became challenging since I was working between Edmonton and Wabasca.

Some of the community members I interviewed in Wabasca worked long hours in the local oil industry. Oil industry workers in Wabasca were in the oilfield between approximately 6:30am until 7pm, so I had to schedule on their days off work, and they often worked schedules of 10 days at work and 4 days off work. Although most community members worked in industries with tight time schedules, during their free time or "days off" the community members

were more relaxed about time, and I respected their personal schedules. As a researcher in an Aboriginal community I was very thankful for any time they used to contribute to the research project.

Finding members of the Wabasca Aboriginal community and Bigstone Cree Nation living in Edmonton was more difficult than I had anticipated. I used networking and snowball sampling techniques to find community members in the city. I did not have as many scheduling difficulties in Edmonton. However I discovered the community was more dispersed and often times I had to schedule one meeting to explain the research project to the community members and another meeting to conduct the interview. Due to the fact that the community was more dispersed in Edmonton, I had to work harder to build rapport with community members in the city. I initially estimated it would take me 4 months to complete interviews with community members; however it took 6 months to complete the interviews. Furthermore, I found it easier to find female community members in Edmonton, as many were a part of my personal network. A number of us had moved to the city at the same time, so there was a loose community of women that had left together to pursue an education. There were males that were a part of this same cohort that 'left the community around the same time' which were my initial community members. However I struggled to find about half of the male community members in the city; they were harder to locate. In the following I describe the sample of community members that took part in this study.

3.3 THE COMMUNITY MEMBERS SAMPLE: WABASCA AND EDMONTON

Recall I am using a life course approach to understand and analyze race, gender, and class. In this research project, I look at how Indigenous men and women described their life script and how it is connected to race and gender. I discuss further how some Indigenous women

described early childbearing and finishing education later in life as a normative aspect of Indigenous women's life script. I also examine how Indigenous men described making an early transition from school to work and entering work into a resource extraction industry, which was considered to be a normative aspect of Indigenous men's life script. I discuss how Indigenous men and women have made the choice to follow these life scripts or made the choice to explicitly not follow these life scripts or made the choice to make their own variation of this life script. I believe these life scripts of Indigenous men and women come out of colonial ideologies and racist stereotypes that work to marginalize our young people. But through the stories of community members I tell how there is a great deal of resistance and resilience through purposeful choice making in order to defy or undermine these stereotypical life scripts. I will discuss this further throughout this study.

In total, fifteen community members from the Wabasca area participated in this research. Four women lived on the Municipality District #17 (MD), which is known as the Hamlet of Wabasca, four men, lived on MD, four men lived on Bigstone Cree Nation reserve land, and three women lived on Bigstone Cree Nation reserve land. Ten of the community members were married and three were in long-term common law relationships; most had 2-3 children in their home at the time of interview. Therefore, it can be said that most of the community members who participated in this study that were living Wabasca were coupled with children. However, one woman I interviewed on reserve was a lone parent with two children, and one man I interviewed on reserve identified as two-spirited and had no children.

Five of the men interviewed worked in the oil industry, from truck driving to engineering to management, and the other three men I interviewed worked in local government or for Aboriginal organizations. Of the women interviewed in the Wabasca area, three women worked

in local government administration, two worked in education, one worked in oilfield administration, and one was a college student. There are clear gendered differences in paid labour in the community of Wabasca, with men primarily working in the oil industry and women working in administrative positions or local government. I will discuss this gendered labour force in a later chapter on school to work transitions, but I wanted to mention these trends here that impact family life. The educational experiences of those interviewed in the Wabasca area are diverse; there are those with some high school, there are high school graduates, and there are some with college or technical college diplomas, as well as a couple with university degrees. About a third of those interviewed had left the community for a period of time to pursue their education, but most went to school at the local high school and community college.

The individuals I interviewed that were from the Wabasca area that moved to the city of Edmonton had very different family formations than the families interviewed in Wabasca. For the most part, I interviewed single parents with one child or people with no children at all. Of the sixteen people interviewed from Edmonton, only three were in long-term common law relationships and the other thirteen were single; no married people were interviewed. Of those thirteen that were single, four were single mothers with one child; the remaining eight men and women interviewed had no children. Of those three that were in common-law relationships, one woman had one child, the other woman had three children, and the one father had six children in a blended family.

Most of those interviewed in the city had some form of post-secondary education; the lowest levels of education were two people who only had high school diplomas, and one person who had a grade 10 education. Three of the individuals interviewed were currently in post-secondary programs and had graduated high school (two of which completed their programs

shortly after the interview). Of the ten remaining, six had graduated college and four had completed a few years of college/university; at the time of the interviews there were no university graduates, however one person completed their university degree shortly after the interview. Please refer to the table below for a full break down of demographics.

Table 1: Study Sample Characteristics: Gender and Family (N = 31)				
	Wabasca: Bigstone Cree Nation Reserve (On-Reserve)	Wabasca: Municipal District of Opportunity (Rural)	City of Edmonton (Urban)	Total
Gender:				
Male	4	4	7	15
Female	3	4	9	16
Family Status:				
Individuals with no children	1	0	8	9
Parents with 1 child	0	2	6	8
Parents with 2+ children	6	6	2	14
Marital Status:				
Single	2	0	13	15
Married/Common-Law	5	8	3	16

On limitation of this study is that every community member interviewed had been at least moderately successful in maintaining steady employment, and most had a high school education and/or a post-secondary education. Everybody I interviewed had a journey of success, either completing their education and/or maintaining steady employment. I was interested in those that had left the community for their education and/or work, and those that had stayed in Wabasca for education and/or work, so I did not interview those community members that had not pursued an education or employment. Therefore future research will need to explore those that did not complete a high school and/or post-secondary education to determine how they live out a personal agency, resistance and resiliency to colonial structures around them, and possibly how an accumulation of colonial traumas across their life course impacted them differently.

3.4 ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVES AND LIFE STORIES

I had the privilege of interviewing members of my community, many of which were from my age cohort in which our life courses had collided together at certain points. Some of the people I interviewed had attended grade school with me, some of whom had moved away at the same time as me to go to post-secondary institutions in the city, and some of them experienced the stage of parenthood at the same time as me. Therefore, I am honoured to have listened to their life stories which are very close to mine, as some of us have had linked lives coming from the same community in the same cohort. When it came to analysing their stories, I used the Cree understanding of *acimowin*, so as I reviewed the transcript of each story, I looked at their lives in relational terms, which follows the Cree understandings of *kahkiyaw niwakohmanak*—of how we are all relations. These stories are not necessarily linear, as they focus on one's life in relation to others and they are actually circular stories in which the stories normally come back to describing relationships (which is in line with the linked lives principle of the life course approach). In the following chapters, I will present the narratives of community members whose life stories exemplify aspects of family, gender relations, and how they intertwine with educational experiences and work experiences along their life course.

When I was looking at these stories I used an indigenous way of analysis by focusing on *acimowin* and *kahkiyaw niwakohmanak.* However, I used a life course analysis in order to understand timelines and patterns between the different life courses. It was helpful to begin by focusing the narratives from a western linear perspective. After reviewing each transcript, I drew a chronology of life events in which I chronologically mapped their lives based on events that happened at certain ages in their lives. For example, along their chronology I would mark the age

when they moved between city and reserve, when they completed high school or post-secondary education or returned to complete their education or when they dropped out of school, when they entered the workforce, when they began new jobs, when they had children, and when they experienced traumatic events such as the death of a relative or illness or abusive relationship. By looking at one life course along this chronology of life events I was able to see how certain events in one life influenced future events, and also compare how similar types of events occurred in different life courses of different people. The chronology of 'when' certain life events happened showed the pathways they took in their lives; however, my Indigenous feminist analysis of family relations, class relations and gender relations examined 'how' they took these pathways along their life courses.

After I completed my analysis, I realized that my 'chronology of events' was something I was trained to do as a Labour Relations Consultant, in which I would assess and understand complex situations of relationships and workplace experiences. Several times I have worked on complex situations in which I had to review employees' personnel files and collect information such as witness statements and interviews. I looked at the progression of their career and their 'years of service', looked at periods of maternity leave or sick leave or education leave, reviewed credentials, noted promotions or demotions, or past histories of conflict and complaints. Sometimes these careers would span up to 35 years. So in a sense, I already had experience with a life course analysis of work and family life in order to have a holistic understanding of an employee's current circumstances.

So as much as I wanted to use purely Indigenous methods of understanding people's stories, my analytic training in understanding how events in one's work life and personal life

intersect, somehow seeped into my analysis. Although I was not using these chronologies to

resolve conflicts and understand workplace relationships, this model of a 'chronology of events'

helped me understand the importance of family relationships and conflicting understandings

between Indigenous and western understandings of life course events in family, school and work.

Therefore, the individual narratives presented in future chapters are meant to follow an

Indigenous understanding of storytelling, yet I have organized these narratives in a chronological

manner in order to understand life course events in family, school and work. In the following I

will critique my use of Indigenous methodologies and the Indigenous tools I developed in my

methodologies.

3.5 THE STORY ON METHODOLOGICAL CONCEPTS: INDIGENOUS ENOUGH?

As I was developing my research methodology, and sharing my ideas, one previous

committee member suggested to me, "It needs to be more Indigenous". I struggled with this

statement, because I had designed the research based on the training I received in qualitative

methods and my personal knowledge of my community and culture. I almost felt it was a personal

attack on my Indigenous identity, but in time I realized how this fracture allowed me to grow into

an Indigenous scholar. I felt her sense of being Indigenous differed from mine, as she was from a

Mohawk community in eastern Canada, and I was from a Cree community in Northern Alberta;

the politics in both communities differed quite a bit. I had to search deep within myself to figure

out what it meant to be a Cree person and what this meant in terms of designing an Indigenous

methodology in a primarily Cree community.

As a result of her statement I incorporated concepts from the Cree language. Incorporating

acimowin (i.e. Cree storytelling) became a central aspect of my research methodology. As I

incorporated acimowin in the interviews, I noted there were two key roles in the process. The first

role was the storyteller's role, by freely telling his/her story the community member could decide what was most important to discuss and he/she choose how to tell their story. By allowing the storyteller to tell their story, this also highlighted the importance of my role as listener, to be respectful by not interrupting. In the role as the listener, I really tried to incorporate, what Steinhauer called *kihceyihtowin*, showing respect and listening, honouring the role of the person speaking (Steinhauer 2002).

Before I began the interview I would explain that through the interview process I would like to get a glimpse of their life story. I would explain that through the interview I wanted them to feel free and *acimostawin* (tell me your story). This was interesting, as a few of the community members did not understood Cree and so explaining the interview process as 'acimowin', did not have much meaning since they did not speak the language. Generally, I would get one of two responses when I mentioned acimowin. For those non-Cree speakers, I would get a curious look followed by a giggle, followed by "Oh okay I don't know Cree, but go ahead with the interview and I will answer your questions". Sometimes I would feel I had touched a sore spot as they would mention their desire to learn Cree. For those that understood the language and/or spoke the language, it would be followed by the prompt response, "Oh okay, so I will tell you my story". Then I would get an appreciative smile to acknowledge they were comfortable or else mutual laughter between the two of us as if to acknowledge how cute it was to use such a common term for a serious research project.

This method worked very well with most community members. Once prompted to tell their life story they would talk about their family and life experiences. Often, they would include interesting unexpected twists and turns, often resulting in humorous stories or personal tragic stories or stories of personal triumph. Some were very talkative and comfortable telling their life

story. I got a sense with some they had been role models in the community and had told their story many times of how they left the community to pursue their education and came back to serve their community. This was the case with one community leader that was involved in local politics and sports. Another example, involved an individual who identified as gay. I felt he had told his story many times of how he had left the community to become an active member of the gay community in Edmonton and Calgary, and how he was now a role model among the Aboriginal gay community. Some had very elaborate stories of how they moved back and forth between the city and Wabasca to pursue their education and career, and how they maintained relationships with family during these moves, so their stories of moving involved stories of cultural adjustments between the city and reserve.

However, a few community members were not as comfortable with this method. Some had to be prompted by every question in the question guide, and even after asked a question they wanted to ensure they answered the question correctly, to which I reassured them there is no right answer and they could tell their life story freely. During a couple of particular interviews, I felt this apprehension was due to the fact that they viewed me as a researcher, and they wanted to make sure they were following the procedures of the interview correctly. This completely went against the intention of my research methodology. However, I also acknowledged this apprehension may be due to the fact that Aboriginal people have been marginalized, and that cultural genocide as a result of colonization has left some unaccustomed to having a voice. In one particular interview, it seemed that the community member felt her life story was not that interesting or worthy to be recorded as a story, since she had not attained a high level of education or high career aspirations. However I felt this was completely absurd, particularly as she explained to me how she left an abusive relationship and was now a single mom going to

college. To me her story was one of triumph. For a couple of community members, they had not taken much consideration into the fact that they were an Aboriginal person living on a reserve. Their race was not at the forefront of their identity; instead their identity was more focused on being a working parent. This was interesting for one community member, as his story of being a working parent in an Aboriginal community was structurally influenced by the employment opportunities in specific industries available in the region. Ironically his story became about being part of the Aboriginal workforce in the oil industry and about the limited opportunities in an industry that was flourishing.

The other Cree concept, which I used, was "Kah Ki Yaw Niwahkomakanak", meaning all my relations (Acoose 1995). I come from a large family, with many siblings and two parents and many cousins and aunts and uncles, and these relationships formed the basis of my personal life story. As well most of my family lived in the community of Wabasca or had originally come from the community. My experience has been of a large close knit family. Even as adults now, my siblings and I are creating this experience for our own families, where the kids spend a lot of time with Kohkom and Mosom, and our children play with all their cousins and are reared by aunts and uncles. Coming from such a large family, we share everything from food, clothing, money, childcare obligations, life experiences and close relationships. In addition to all the warm fuzzy relationships in my family, there are complicated relationships with ongoing conflict, especially since we share so much; this is like any large close family I'm sure. For the most part, this was a similar experience with community members. This large family network is especially crucial for caring for family members that leave the community, and those that stayed in the community appreciated all the help and resources they receive from family on reserve. Having a

large family network isn't perfect, there is still family gossip and conflict, but in this community, relatives are something we have in abundance.

However, I learned that I had made a terrible assumption that we <u>all</u> come from large supportive extended families, and relationships with family determined where one chooses to live, as this wasn't the case for a few specific community members. One community member had lost her mother as a child, so she went to live with her Kohkom at another First Nation. When she was a teenager, she went to live with an aunt in the city and then Wabasca; and then she finally moved to Edmonton to go to high school and now lives there. Due to the tragic loss of her mother, she described herself as a wanderer. She has family in both Bigstone Cree Nation and another First Nation. So although she came from a large family network, the experience of moving between relatives did not seem to allow her to get particularly close to any relative like she had with her mother. However, she was optimistic and it was also clear that this moving around had given her an adventurous personality. Moreover, she had built some very close friendships as a result of her circumstances. There were a few community members that were from two different First Nations communities, or were from Bigstone Cree Nation and a Metis Settlement, so intermarriage between different Indigenous communities was another aspect of family that was touched on in the interviews.

One particular community member told a story of how he had moved around in the foster-care system. He described how he moved from one parent to another, from the reserve to small white towns and in the end did not really feel he belonged anywhere. As family relations were a central concept to my project, I felt I had to reframe my approach for his interview, and at times I was at a loss. As he described how he had come to live in Edmonton, he included a chronology of places he had lived and at points he recalled being moved around in the foster-care

system, and he couldn't remember the names of places he'd lived. Now as an adult he was attempting to rebuild relationships with cousins and extended family he had lost touch with. Since a whole section of my interview was about family and community, and my other sections referred to gendered experiences in the community, I was at a loss to try to reframe his interview, as his life story wasn't centralized around a family and community. But perhaps what his story showed was how the child welfare system had taken him away from his family and community, and unfortunately this is a tragic part of our community's story.

Although many of the people I interviewed were not fluent Cree speakers, many understood the art of storytelling, and they became very comfortable in that role. In most interviews, I felt we were just relatives talking, and I would listen as they told their story. In the end I reached the conclusion, that although the community members were not all Cree speaking, it was clear that storytelling about one's life history and relationships is so intertwined in our culture. They had all learned at some point the importance of storytelling. For an interview designed to be one hour, sometimes the interviews lasted a couple hours and we would have to take breaks in between, and even after the interview ended we would carry on in more conversations and storytelling.

While doing interviews with community members, I came to appreciate the art of storytelling. I came to understand life stories, not necessarily as a linear chronology of events, despite my ability to map them, but more of a series of circular stories going through various experiences and relationships in one's life. This was ironic because I would start by asking the community member where they currently live and how they came to live there, and they often went through a chronology of places they have lived. Next I moved to ask about schooling choices and then career choices, which was also a chronological structure. Although this kept the

interview on a linear path of a personal history, what I found most interesting were the series of stories within the life story, and the themes of relationships, as their life stories were not only an individual story but also stories of their family and community.

So to the question whether my research methodology was Indigenous enough? I believe my own concepts of what it means to be Indigenous, such as we all come from large close-knit families and we all speak Cree and we are great storytellers, actually placed limitations and assumptions in my research project. Through the many stories of my community members, I learned we each have our own understanding of what it means to be Indigenous. Sometimes this means we have close knit families, sometimes this means the history of colonialism has torn our families apart. Sometimes we are Cree speakers and can tell long drawn out descriptive stories. Sometimes we tell shorter stories. But they are still our stories. I soon learned that this is what Indigenous sociology is all about.

Chapter Four: The Geographic, Demographic, Historical and Colonial Context of the Migration

In the following chapter, I analyze the geographic, demographic, historical and colonial context of the community of Wabasca, Alberta, which is where the community members interviewed for this study are originally from and where some still reside. I discuss the major structural institutions that stratify the community based on race, gender and class. Through my interviews with community members, I have come to realize the divided land between reserve land and Municipality District (MD) land in Wabasca is a classed, structural divide in the community. Therefore I separately discuss the community contexts of Bigstone Cree Nation reserve land and the community context of the MD.

I also address the divisions between people based on the history of Treaty 8 in the region as a major factor of racialized divisions and classed divisions. Some community members have Indian Status and fall under the federal jurisdiction of the Indian Act, and some are Non-Status Indians or Metis and fall under provincial jurisdiction. Other major institutions, which are relevant to the classed, racialized, and geographic divide are the school systems available in Wabasca on-reserve and off-reserve. In the interviews, community members discussed how their educational experiences and perceptions of the educational system influenced their decisions regarding post-secondary education and future employment. I also describe the local labour market and local economy, which have major implications regarding class differences and choices in work. I discuss the context of the city of Edmonton, in what I refer to as Aboriginal Edmonton, as this is where I interviewed community members that moved away from Wabasca.

4.1 THE GEOGRAPHY OF WABASCA

The community of Wabasca, Alberta is about 330km north of the city of Edmonton and about 130km north east of the town of Lesser Slave Lake. Lesser Slave Lake is the closest major business and shopping center, which serves surrounding northern communities. Wabasca sits in the beautiful vast northern Boreal forest. The Wabasca River runs through the community; on one side of the river is the North Wabasca Lake, on the other side is the South Wabasca Lake, and on the southwest tip of the community lies the smaller lake of Sandy Lake. These lakes and the surrounding forest are the traditional territory of the Bigstone Cree Nation and the home of Metis Local #90 of the Metis Nation of Alberta. Wabasca is a community divided by the boundaries of the Hamlet of Wabasca, under the Municipality District of Opportunity #17, and the five plots of Bigstone Cree Nation reserve lands that surround the lakes.

Growing up in the community, I didn't realize I lived on Bigstone Reserve 166D. I just knew I was from Wabasca and I lived in a world surrounded by relatives. But as an adult I understand the lines between municipality and reserve mean the difference between provincial and federal jurisdiction. These jurisdictional lines mean people are grouped as living under the municipality or living under the *Indian Act*.

4.2 BIGSTONE CREE NATION

4.2.1 Population and Location

It seems the government agents who chopped up the traditional territory of my people into reserve land were not very creative. Government agents bureaucratically divided our reserve land into reserves 166, 166A, 166B, 166C, and 166D. My ancestors were a bit more descriptive and they named these reserve lands in Cree as Sakitawasihk (166), Ka-Asiniskasik (166A), Cipaskansihk (166B), Kisipikamahk (166C), and Muskoteek (166D)[i]. Bigstone Cree Nations is a

94

classic "checker-board" reserve. It is not one large connected plot of land. Instead the community

is divided into separate blocks of reserve land around the North Wabasca Lake, South Wabasca

Lake, and Sandy Lake (which is demonstrated in Appendix D: Municipal Boundary Map).

According to the 2011 Census, Sakitawasihk (166) has a population of 152 people, Ka-

Asiniskasik (166A) has 738 people, Cipaskansihk (166B) has 250 people, Kisipikamahk (166C)

has 182 people, and Muskoteek (166D) has 885 people (Statistics Canada 2011). In 2011, the

combined Bigstone Cree Nation reserves had a total population of 2207 (Statistics Canada 2011).

Ka-Asiniskasik (166A) is where Bigstone Administration buildings are located in Desmarais.

Muskoteek (166D) is along the major highway to Slave Lake. In addition to having higher

populations, Ka-Asiniskasik (166A) and Muskoteek (166D) are the more centralized reserve

lands closer to amenities and major highways. In addition, there is a sizeable housing

development with several units on Cipaskansihk (166B), which community members refer to as

Bill C-31 housing, although the First Nation officially named this housing development

Willowridge Estates. In recent years, Bigstone Cree Nation's housing authority has built large

housing developments with rent-to-own units to accommodate the growing population; during

the period of this research project some of the people I had interviewed had recently moved into

these new units on reserves 166A and 166B.

Bigstone is one of the largest First Nations in Northern Alberta and in Treaty 8 territory.

As of January 2014 Bigstone Cree Nation has 7444 Registered Indians (AANDC 2014).

According to Aboriginal Affairs, in 2014 the number of Registered Indians on Bigstone reserve

land is 2812 (38%), there are 131 living on Bigstone Crown land (2%), 4268 living off-reserve

(57%), with the remainder 233 (3%) living on other reserve land or other crown land (AANDC

2014). Unfortunately, the Aboriginal Affairs and Census data do not explain what percentage of

off-reserve Bigstone members live in the Hamlet of Wabasca and which percentage live in urban centers such as Edmonton or other cities.

4.2.2 Educational Systems

The availability and access to educational systems was one of the main reasons community members in this study chose to live in the community or move to the city. There is one band-operated school on reserve on Bigstone reserve 166A in Desmarais. It is called Oski-Pasikoniwew-Kamik which directly translated is broken down to mean the following; "Oski-meaning children, Pasikoniwew- meaning rising up, lifting up or bringing up proud, and Kamik-meaning house or place" (Bigstone Cree Nation 2014: n.p.). The school was opened in 1998 after over a decade of negotiating with Indian Affairs for Bigstone Cree Nation to have control of its own education (Yellowknee 1997). According to Gladys Cardinal, former principal of the Oski-Pasikoniwew-Kamik, the "new school served as a catalyst for the Bigstone Cree Nation to promote language and culture through an education setting" (Cardinal 2009: n.p.). The school offers preschool, and kindergarten to grade 6 programming. The focus of the school is Cree language. The school offers a Cree culture curriculum, has Cree teachers, and an in-house Kohkom. The learning is "holistic in nature and considers the mental, physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual well being of our people" (Cardinal 2009: n.p.). Part of the school's learning takes place at the Kapaskwatinak Cultural and Education Centre, which is 10 km from the school. At the Centre students can partake in outdoor traditional practices such as harvesting roots, plants, berries, hunting skills, and traditional food preparation. As well, the Centre has a facility, which is a large log cabin building, where children can learn beading, drum making, and other indoor activities.

Cardinal emphasizes that disempowerment leads to the despair of our people, because "we have undergone severe cultural and language loss brought on by social and cultural forces" (Cardinal 2009: n.p.). She goes on to say that we "perpetuate our own oppression by abiding by Western philosophy and ideals" while "ignoring our Indigenous values and knowledge that could provide that cohesiveness within our communities to support families, children, parents and Elders – we need to heal as a nation in order to progress" (Cardinal 2009: n.p.). What I believe Cardinal is calling for in providing a Cree language and Cree cultural curriculum is a decolonization of the education offered on reserve and an Indigenizing of it. However, she recognizes that as long as "the federal government holds the purse strings, we will be restricted in our ability to control our education" (Cardinal 2009: n.p.). Cardinal points out that band-operated schools on reserves are federally funded and receive all their operating capital from out-dated funding formulas (estimated as 28 years behind by the Auditor General), resulting in a small school trying to do great things with marginalized funding. Therefore, the decolonization of education in this case, actually happens under the limited federal funds of a colonial government, which is a tricky space to operate within.

4.2.3 Political Structure and First Nations Sovereignty

Bigstone Cree Nation is governed by an elected Chief and Council. In total there are ten Councillors and one Chief; six Councillors representing members from the Wabasca area, two Councillors representing the Calling Lake members, and two Councillors representing the Chipewyan members. There is a staggered bi-election every four years, so that half of Council is elected every four years.

Bigstone Cree Nation is a member of the Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta. In this territory, there is an understanding of what it means to be a "Treaty Indian" that comes from an

oral history passed down from elders who were at the treaty signing. Being a Treaty Indian

means we have recognized rights to the land and that our ancestors signed this treaty with an

understanding that our well-being would be taken care of "as long as the sun shines and the

rivers flow". Through my own upbringing by a politically involved father and my later

involvement in protests during Idle No More, I have come to realize that being a "Treaty Indian"

is a very political and proud thing to say because our ancestors had the insight, foresight, and

tenacity to enter into an agreement as a people that would protect and care for the descendants of

our nation. Unfortunately, this was not the opinion of the federal government who used the

agreement to strip our people of what we deserved. In the following, the Treaty 8 First Nations

of Alberta organization explains the context of the treaty signed in 1899.

> Treaty 8 was the last and largest of the nineteenth century land agreements made between First nations and the Government of Canada. At the end of it, over 840,000 square kilometers of land was set aside by the agreement. From that point in time up to the present, the federal government has claimed that the Cree, Dene, Metis and other various First Nations peoples living within the Treaty boundaries had surrendered any claim to title to all but the lands set aside as reserves. However, many Native leaders have challenged that view, claiming instead that their peoples signed a nation-to-nation treaty that not only recognized their rights to maintain a traditional way of life without restriction, but that also included rights to education, medical care, tax exemptions, immunity from military conscription and access to land, game and other resources for as long as the sun shone upon those lands (Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta 2014)

Having worked for Aboriginal Affairs as a Funding Officer early in my career as a public

servant, I was reminded on occasion that the federal government's relationship with First Nations

was not nation-to-nation, and that language that alluded to such could not be officially

recognized. However, as a member of a First Nation and as a Treaty Indian, I was taught by my

elders that we considered ourselves as sovereign nations, and we have lived on this land

according to our traditional ways since time immemorial. So despite Canada's official position

and my small role in this bureaucracy, deep down in my spirit I know, based on my relationship

with the land and my connection to my ancestors, that as First Nations people we are a nation.

Therefore, as a First Nations person from Treaty 8, I can relate to this belief among my people

that the treaty was a nation-to-nation agreement. In the following section I will discuss, the

specific Treaty 8 history in Wabasca among the Bigstone Cree Nation and the historical Treaty

Land Entitlement claim.

4.2.4 Treaty and Scrip History, and Treaty Land Entitlement

Treaty 8 has a complicated history. For some, it is the history of our rights as First

Nations people, while for others it is the beginning of the colonial rule of our lands and stripping

of our traditional relationship with the land. Still others see it as the beginning of being divided

between Treaty Indians and those considered Metis who took scrip. For many, it is the beginning

of broken promises.

According to Bigstone Cree Nation, "Wabasca was the final scheduled stop for the Treaty

and Scrip Commissions in 1899, with Treaty Commissioner J.H Ross meeting with the

assembled population there on August 14, 1899" (Bigstone Cree Nation 2014: n.p.). In the

following quote, the history of the signing of Treaty 8 with Bigstone at Wabasca is recalled:

> In 1899, 196 persons were paid gratuity and annuity as members of Bigstone Band, while
> 106 others received scrip at Wabasca and two other nearby locations. The next year, 39
> additional persons joined the Bigstone Band, while 25 more were taken into treaty in
> 1901, most of them after making unsuccessful scrip applications. There is no doubt that
> the population which had entered treaty by 1901 was considerably smaller than that of the
> Bigstone communities. Elder's advised the Commission that some of those who spent
> part of the year at Wabasca were absent hunting when Commissioner Ross visited, since
> they "had to go out in the bush to make their living to survive". (Bigstone Cree Nation
> 2014: n.p.)

The families of the Cree people that would become Bigstone Cree Nation lived in a vast

area of Northern Alberta surrounding the Wabasca North Lake, Wabasca South Lake, Sandy

Lake, Calling Lake, Peerless Lake, Trout Lake and Chipewyan Lake. Those in attendance with

the Treaty Commissioner that day were available because they happened to be around the Wabasca Lakes area for some other reason such as fur trading, and those not in attendance were out on the land. The signing of the Treaty in 1899 was based purely on coincidence; it certainly wasn't a comprehensive census of all those Indigenous people living in the Bigstone area. Prior to the Treaty being signed there were Hudson Bay Company trading posts located at Wabasca, Peerless Lake and Chipewyan Lake. These trading posts were small economic hubs in the north, which fuelled the fur trade industry, which was said to be especially profitable in the Peerless Lake and Trout Lake area (Indian Claims Commission 2000). In between the lakes was the traditional hunting and trapping area of the Indigenous people of this territory. Due to the fur trade, the presence of the Hudson's Bay Company, and the rich natural resources, there was an influx of French, English, Scottish, and German people into the area, from which there were early inter-racial relationships and resulting mixed race and Metis population. Indeed, through my interviews and discussions with community members, some recalled ancestors from these groups of settlers.

Elders have passed down and shared stories regarding the choice to enter treaty or accept scrip when the Commissioner arrived in 1899. According to the Indian Claims Commission, most of the elder's accounts in interviews and historical documents suggested "the effect of the decision between scrip and treaty was explained to, and understood by, those who were present in 1899" (Indian Claims Commission 2000: 15). In the following quote, some of these accounts regarding the choice of treaty versus scrip in the Wabasca area are discussed:

> The late Catherine Auger, who received scrip at Wabasca in 1899 with her first husband, remembered almost 70 years later that she and the other scrip recipients "were told that the land you were given, you could sell, but you wouldn't have any rights." According to the late Martin Beaver, the Treaty Commissioner required those who wished to apply for scrip to listen to the Commissioner's presentation in favour of entering treaty, so that, once the choice was made, "you cannot blame anybody else but yourself." Elder

Alphonse Auger advised the Commission that one of those who chose scrip over treaty was (his great uncle) Julien Beaver (brother of Martin Beaver)…According to Alphonse, a reserve was an unwelcome prospect to his great-uncle, since the latter didn't "want anybody to own him or he doesn't want to own the land." The choice between treaty and scrip could be made freely by all who were at least 20 years of age, irrespective of the election made by other members of the same family… (Indian Claims Commission 2000: 15).

As most are aware of the colonial process, although the decision between treaty and scrip was presented as being "freely made", it indeed was not a free choice. According to Elder Louise Auger, one women from Trout Lake was denied treaty because she had fair skin "just like a white person", therefore she and her husband were compelled to apply for scrip. At the time the government wanted to sign treaties with the "Indians" to begin the process of bringing settlers on the land and they offered "scrip" to the Metis as means of getting rid of the "half breeds" that neither fit as "Indians" or as white citizens. Interestingly, almost one third of those who took part in the treaty versus scrip process had received scrip; meaning one third of my ancestors in the Wabasca area had been defined as Metis, partly by their own choice in application of scrip and largely by the decision of the Commissioner's understanding of their racial identity as "half breeds". Between 1900 and 1901 there were 64 more Bigstone members who received treaty, most of whom had made "unsuccessful scrip applications" (Indian Claims Commission 2000: 16). This suggests the possibility that there were more Bigstone Cree people in the area who would have identified as Metis or didn't agree to the terms of treaty.

From reviewing the numbers of those who initially signed the treaty, it appears that it was mostly those who happened to be present at the time in Wabasca who were able to gain membership into Bigstone, while those located at the more northern lakes (Trout Lake, Peerless Lake, Chipewyan Lake) were not accurately captured into the count. Even worse, those who happened to be out on the land sustaining a traditional living for themselves by hunting and

trapping were not captured in the treaty. According to Bigstone, "No Trout Lake residents entered treaty when the adhesion was signed at Wabasca in 1899" (Bigstone Cree Nation 2014). It appears that two grandsons of Alexis Auger from the Trout Lake outpost entered treaty in 1900, one becoming a member of the Bigstone Band and the other grandson "becoming the first (and only) member of the "Trout Lake Band", which disappeared the next year" (Bigstone Cree Nation 2014). A third grandson of Alexis Auger entered Treaty a year later after his scrip application was refused. As for Chipewyan Lake, elders interviewed in 1980 "remembered that only two families from their community entered treaty in the early years of the 20th century, although a study carried out in the 1970's indicated that five of the families who were taken into treaty in 1901 after their scrip applications were refused were from Chipewyan Lake" (Bigstone Cree Nation 2014).

In 1913 Indian Affairs sent an official to survey the Wabasca area. As a result of the survey "four reserves along the shores of the two Wabasca Lakes" were set aside. These reserve sites were loosely based on where most of the local population resided along the lakes. During the survey, elders recall no mention of whether the Indian Affairs surveyor took into account the number of acres promised to each member under the Treaty. According to the Treaty, the First Nation would be entitled to receive 128 acres of land per band member. Coincidently the surveyor hired at the time "had no background in the survey of Indian reserves and was hired primarily for his availability" (Indian Claims Commission 2000: 21). According to the Indian Claims Commission, the four reserve lands "totalled 37,352 acres, which was sufficient, under reserve clause of Treaty 8, to satisfy the land entitlement of 291 persons" (Indian Claims Commission 2000: 22). The four blocks of reserve land set aside were 166, 166A, 166B, and 166C.

In 1937, after requests for additional reserve land in Wabasca because of the post-survey adherents to the Treaty and the growing membership, a long delayed second survey was conducted. The Surveyor General requested a new calculation of reserve land entitled to Bigstone. Indian Affairs calculated that there was a shortfall of 4480 acres from the 1913 survey and Bigstone Cree Nation was also entitled to additional land for the 213 people who joined the First Nation in 1913 (Indian Claims Commission 2000: 29). In total, the 1937 survey calculated that Bigstone Cree Nation was entitled to an additional 31,744 acres of reserve land under Treaty 8 (Indian Claims Commission 2000: 29). Most of the land set aside at this time was reserve 166D. However, according to the Indian Claims Commission report, "Bigstone elders were consistent in their view that the survey of additional land at Wabasca in 1937 left a substantial amount of unfinished business regarding the treaty land entitlement of the Bigstone Cree Nation" (Indian Claims Commission 2000: 39). For decades later until the 1970's, there was documentary evidence that Indian Affairs at times also believed additional reserve land was entitled to Bigstone, but upon each review they conveniently held to their initial calculations.

Outside of Wabasca, the only additional land granted to Bigstone Cree Nation was "a 507.5 acre parcel of land at Calling Lake" (Indian Claims Commission 2000: 36). Elders confirmed that this reserve land "belongs to Bigstone" but that it had been originally set aside "for one family", the family of Jean Baptiste Gambler (Indian Claims Commission 2000: 37). In 1915 Jean Baptiste Gambler submitted an application that the land in Calling Lake he lived on should be set aside as "reserve" for his family (Indian Claims Commission 2000: 37-38). As a claim to the land, it was indicated that Jean Baptiste Gambler had wintered on his Calling Lake plot of land since 1885 and that he had raised his family on this land (Indian Claims Commission 2000: 37-38). Originally when the land was surveyed in 1919, Gambler had 11 family members,

by 1939 he had 24 family members living at Indian Reserve (IR) 183 (Indian Claims Commission 2000: 37-38). He made several unsuccessful applications for additional reserve land until his death. A decade after his death in 1966, "Bigstone Cree Nation passed a Band Council Resolution asking that IR 183 be set aside for the First Nation" (Indian Claims Commission 2000: 39).

As for the "isolated communities" surrounding Peerless Lake, Trout Lake, and Chipewyan Lake, there were requests for additional reserve land to be set aside for Bigstone members. Elders recall a surveying of land by Indian Affairs officials near Peerless Lake and Trout Lake, and land being "pegged" off in 1938 and promised to the Bigstone members, but nothing ever came to fruition (Indian Claims Commission 2000: 33-34). Around the same period in 1940, elders at Chipewyan Lake remember "persistent requests" and "promises" of reserve land in the community (Indian Claims Commission 2000: 33-34). However, no land surrounding the Trout Lake, Peerless Lake or Chipewyan Lake was ever set aside as reserve land. Essentially members of these northern communities were denied treaty rights and land rights in their traditional territory. This has resulted in these northern First Nations members being considered off-reserve members who therefore cannot benefit from on-reserve infrastructure and Treaty rights, such as tax benefits, First Nations schooling, and housing or medical services available on-reserve. In addition, these are northern isolated communities, sometimes only available by winter roads or by plane, so they are cut-off from the larger economy and from other communities during certain parts of the year. In my review of the Indian Claims Commission's report, it appears these northern communities were too far north for Indian Affairs officials to venture during the adhesion of the treaty, and due to the presence of Hudson Bay posts, perhaps

they appeared too mixed race to be considered Indians at the time, creating an isolated northern community marginalized from their rights to the land.

I will now summarize the history and context of one of Canada's most complicated Treaty Land Entitlement Claims, which addresses the disparities in rights to land that Indigenous peoples experienced because of the colonial history of signing Treaty and taking scrip. This history of land rights being denied to Cree and Metis in the traditional territory of what is now known as Bigstone Cree Nation is important in understanding relationships to the land today; especially since Indigenous peoples have a much smaller land base than municipalities. In Northern Alberta, rights to a larger land base means rights to natural resources and rights to natural resources means more profits in the oil and gas industry. Today it is the municipalities that have rights to a larger land base, not Bigstone Cree Nation. And due to this denial of the land rights of Indigenous peoples in this area, generations of Indigenous peoples have lived under this disparity of land rights. I will not be using only legal jargon. My discussion will come from my own understanding of the claim from reviewing historical events, and my own feelings as an Indigenous scholar and as a member of Bigstone Cree Nation. During the time when the Treaty Land Entitlement Claim negotiations were being finalized and after the claim was accepted (between 2010 and 2014), I attended several Bigstone memberships meetings in Wabasca and Edmonton. However, I was recently made aware that under the Bigstone Membership Code I am not allowed to share the information or events of membership meetings with non-Bigstone members. So what I will share are my feelings and perceptions after those meetings. Being made aware of the fact that membership meetings proceedings cannot be shared with non-member has, made me aware of the racialized politics created by the Treaty, because some of those non-Status non-Bigstone members or Metis members of the community are close

relatives and distant relatives of mine, and relatives of Bigstone members. It saddens me that families can be racially divided due the Treaty. Because of that one fateful visit from a Treaty Commissioner in 1899, some Indigenous people in Bigstone territory were defined as Indian and some defined as Metis. These divisions were based on their application to the Commissioner, on the Commissioner's decision on their racial identity, and on the fact that those who were out hunting in the bush would have had no notion that they and their future descendants' racial identity and rights were being irrevocably decided that day. Since 1985, Bill C-31 has allowed some to regain their Indian Status and membership to Bigstone, and as a result of the Treaty Land Entitlement Settlement, some of those whose ancestors that were missed by the Commissioner can regain their status. However, there will always be those who cannot wade their way through the bureaucratic muskeg of applications and genealogical paperwork that is required to gain Indian status. I believe too much was determined about the future generations of northern Alberta Cree peoples that day the Treaty Commissioner came to briefly meet with Chief Bigstone.

As early as 1989, Bigstone Cree Nation entered a Statement of Claim for remaining land entitlement to the First Nation under Treaty 8, which was filed with the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Development (DIAND) under the federal Specific Claims Policy (Indian Claims Commission 2000: 3). Early on in 1990, the province of Alberta was invited to participate in the negotiations between the Government of Canada and Bigstone Cree Nation. Being such a large complicated claim to a huge area of land with genealogies around a number of different communities, it appears that the claim was almost dropped by DIAND in 1996 for not being a valid submission. However, in "the course of its inquiry, the Commission received as exhibits the substantial collection of genealogical and historical evidence complied on behalf of

Bigstone Cree Nation, Canada, and Alberta between 1989 and 1995" (Indian Claims Commission 2000: 3). In addition, the Commission requested another historical and genealogical report be completed, and as a result more than a dozen additional exhibits were collected from other sources (Indian Claims Commission 2000). In 1996 and 1997 the Commission held three community sessions in Desmarais and Peerless Lake, where elders from Wabasca, Calling Lake, Chipewyan Lake, Peerless Lake, and Trout Lake were able to tell the oral histories of the communities, providing historical and genealogical evidence to the Commission (Indian Claims Commission 2000).

In April of 1998 Indian Affairs "broadened" its approach to calculating Treaty Land Entitlement claims to shortfalls of land, which would no longer just be based on the original band population count but to include "late additions" of those "who joined the band shortly afterwards" (DIAND Press Release April 30, 1998, in Indian Claims Commission 2000). In the case of Bigstone Cree Nation, the second survey of land in 1937, which had "late additions", would be included in the calculation of the band count and resulting shortfall of land, and the TLE claim was approved for negotiation. In October of 1998, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development formally accepted the Bigstone TLE claim for negotiation in a letter to the then Chief of Bigstone Cree Nation Melvin Beaver.

In 1999, the Kituskeenow Cultural Land-Use and Occupancy Study was completed. Kituskeenow was done using a participatory action research methodology, between Bigstone Cree Nation, the Metis People of Kituskeenow and The Artic Institute of North America from the University of Calgary. Kituskeenow translates in Cree meaning "our land". This study was inclusive of those Indigenous peoples who considered the Wabasca and surrounding area their traditional territory. This study was also a comprehensive analysis of the cultural land use of the

Indigenous people in the region; it showed traditional hunting and harvesting in the areas between Calling Lake, Chipewyan Lake, Peerless Lake, Sandy Lake, Trout Lake and Wabasca-Desmarais. Using a map analysis combined with interviews with local elders, the study was able to show traditional hunting areas of big game, fur bearing animals, birds, and fish; locations of settlement sites and spiritual sites; trails used; place names in Cree; and where berries, trees and plants were harvested (The Bigstone Cree Nation and Metis People of Kituskeenow 1999). One of the fascinating aspects of this study was how those involved in the study did not distinguish between the Metis and Bigstone Cree's use of the traditional territory; instead elders highlighted how all Indigenous people in the area traditionally used the land. The family histories discussed in the individual elder's profiles, showed intermarriage between the Bigstone Cree and Metis for generations. This study showed the tremendous amount of traditional ecological and cultural knowledge in the community, and showed the vastness of the land, which the people of Kituskeenow occupied in Northern Alberta. This study was subsequently used as a major exhibit in the Bigstone Cree Nation Treaty Land Entitlement Claims negotiations process.

In 1999, negotiations between Alberta, Canada, and Bigstone Cree Nation officially began. Although some of the isolated communities had historically considered themselves as distinct from the Bigstone community in Wabasca, in 2002 negotiations began to include elected representatives from the five communities of Wabasca, Calling Lake, Trout Lake, Peerless Lake and Chipewyan Lake to work together collaboratively as a team (Beaver 2007). In 2003, the TLE claim was expanded to include "community infrastructure costs and new governance mechanisms, including the creation of a new First Nation at Peerless and Trout Lakes" (Beaver 2007: n.p.). Then in 2006 and 2007, "Canada accepted three Ancillary Benefit Claims of the Bigstone Cree Nation and negotiated these in conjunction with the TLE" (Beaver 2007: n.p.),

these are related to treaty promises of agricultural implements and livestock to the First Nation

(AANDC 2011). In October of 2007, Bigstone reached an Agreement-in-Principle with Canada

and Alberta, agreeing to a settlement of $299.5 million and no less than 140,000 acres of land, as

well agreeing to an establishment of a new First Nation for the Peerless Lake and Trout Lake

community (Beaver 2007).

On May 19, 2010 the claim was finally resolved with a landmark settlement agreement.

In the following quote, Aboriginal Affairs explains the largest Alberta settlement in claim:

> It includes $259 million and up to 140,000 acres of unoccupied provincial Crown land to
> become new reserve land for the First Nations. The figure also includes $59 million for
> renovations and construction of new infrastructure projects for the First Nations.
> Alberta's contribution includes $28 million and a commitment to construct two
> elementary school in Peerless Lake and Trout Lake, as well as water treatment plants for
> each of these communities (AANDC 2011).

As a part of the settlement the newly formed Peerless Trout First Nation received 63,000

acres set aside as reserve land, and Bigstone Cree Nation received 77,000 acres of reserve land in

Wabasca, Calling Lake, and Chipewyan Lake (Narine 2010). As well, $11 million of the

settlement claim would be used to pay negotiation and legal costs. At that time Bigstone Cree

Nation Chief Gordon Auger explained $150 million of the settlement would be set aside to

"invest in our future" in community trusts "to make sure it continues to grow and to generate

revenues every year to boost programs and services to our members" (First Nations Drum 2010:

n.p.). In addition, a "modest amount of money" was provided to Bigstone members in the

amount of $3,500 each "to address some of their immediate needs" (First Nations Drum 2010:

n.p.).

Next Bigstone Cree Nation held a vote for First Nations members to agree to the

settlement through a ratification vote. Bigstone's TLE office mailed detailed information

packages about the settlement to all eligible voters' on-reserve and off-reserve. In addition,

membership information sessions were held in all of the Bigstone five northern communities, and at off-reserve sites where Bigstone members lived such as Edmonton and Slave Lake. Voting stations were held at on-reserve and off-reserve communities where Bigstone members resided. In the last two weeks of February 2010 Bigstone members overwhelmingly ratified the settlement agreement, ending years of negotiation (First Nations Drum 2010).

I had mixed feelings after attending membership meetings at the time of the ratification vote in 2010. At one meeting, one of my uncles poignantly spoke up that we were giving up a vast amount of land for a cash settlement and that we would be receiving a fraction of the land which was our traditional territory. I had strong feelings towards the complexities of this negotiation process. However, due to my own work in the federal government, at the time I knew that large settlements like this were rarely reached in Canada. I was also aware that it had been over twenty years since we entered these negotiations in the 1990's. I was aware of these negotiations even as a child since my father and uncles were on Chief and Council when it all began. As I voted I could hear my uncle's voice in the back of my head saying; *kinisitohten* (Do you understand?), we are selling our children's children's land for a cash settlement and a little bit of our land. But I wondered as well if the large bureaucracy of the Government of Canada would ever give my children's children a better deal in the future. As a Bigstone member I calculated in my mind, that getting any more land in such a deal would cost years and years of further litigation. After all, we were not negotiating with close friends, but a government that had denied us most of our land in the first place and we were not likely to get more land from the province and the federal government in a natural resource rich region. So I voted in favour of the settlement at the ratification vote.

It's surprising how what is described as "one brief discussion" between the Treaty Commissioner Ross and then Chief Joseph Bigstone resulted in the adhesion of a treaty, and two short surveys of land in 1913 and 1937 that fixed the amount of land allocated to Bigstone Cree Nation. Yet it took over a hundred years, including 20 years in negotiations, to ascertain that the families that constituted Bigstone membership actually lived traditionally among a large land area between the Wabasca Lakes, Sandy Lake, Chipewyan Lake, Trout Lake, and Peerless Lake, especially since our elders knew this all along.

As a part of the settlement, land was carefully chosen based on traditional and cultural land use, and for future economic ventures. In choosing the new reserve land, the negotiators had "a shared interest in preserving and protecting traditional burial sites and areas where medicinal plants and berries were harvested" (First Nations Drum 2010: n.p.). As well, the negotiators received technical advice "to distinguish area with potential oil, gas, and timber resources" and on which areas were suitable for residential developments (First Nations Drum 2010: n.p.).

Once the settlement was ratified by First Nations members, a ceremony was held in Wabasca on September 12, 2011 to celebrate the end of the negotiations and the settlement process. Present the day of the ceremony was the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, and the Chiefs of Bigstone Cree Nation and Peerless Trout First Nation. At the time of the ceremony newly elected Peerless Trout First Nations Chief James Alook exclaimed "Today truly marks a new beginning for members of the Peerless Trout First Nation as we now are recognized as a First Nation and will have the resources to build a community. We are making progress on building our new community, which will bring many benefits to the members of Peerless Trout and allow members to grow and develop" (AANDC 2011: n.p.). At the same time Bigstone Chief Gordon Auger expressed his contentment over the claim being

settled "Today marks a milestone for the Bigstone Cree Nation as members are celebrating the fact that we have reached a historic land claim settlement on issues that go back to the signing of Treaty in 1899…This settlement represents a new beginning for our community and the start of many more opportunities for our members. I am proud of the commitment and dedication displayed by Bigstone's Negotiating Team over the years and jubilant that the community rewarded our efforts with a strong acceptance vote" (AANDC 2011: n.p.).

As an Indigenous scholar interested in the sociology of the family and someone who grew up on Bigstone reserve 166D/ Muskoteek, what strikes me is how family and extended family networks were not mentioned in the Indian Claims Commissions report. In fact, their argument was that traditional Bigstone Cree "bands" were small families that traveled seasonally on the land, following subsistence patterns of hunting and harvesting, that the "social organization of the people who came to be recognized as the Bigstone Cree Nation was loose and atomistic" (Indian Claims Commission 2000: 7). This understanding of Bigstone Cree social organization came from a retired expert witness named Dr. James Smith - plucked from the North American Ethnology for the Museum of the American Indians in New York. Dr. Smith described the small family groups as existing "separate and apart from other entities as hunting groups through the fall, winter, and spring of each year" and membership among these hunting bands was described as "flexible" (Indian Claims Commission 2000: 9). What Dr. Smith missed were the large extended family networks that extended through a vast area in Northern Alberta, connected through intermarriages and economic alliances of trading, sharing and reciprocity in communities at the surrounding lakes. Although you hunted with your family, your family also extended to other families that traveled separately; what he missed was that we were all relations and that these relations are strong. Indeed, the relations that he described as "flexible" I would

describe as our culture respecting the autonomy of family members; we were connected by strong extended family networks that respected the autonomy of each member.

Growing up in Bigstone and having the opportunity of doing research with the community, anyone would realize the importance of extended family, and how Bigstone extended family networks stretched across the five communities in Northern Alberta. Even in my interviews with community members, they discussed, for example, how family moved from Sandy Lake to Wabasca Lakes, how family moved from Calling Lake to Wabasca Lakes, and how family moved from Wabasca to Peerless Lake based on intermarriages between the communities and employment opportunities between the communities. There were even community members who discussed moving between different northern First Nations such as between Bigstone, Whitefish First Nation, Saddle Lake First Nation, Fort McKay First Nation, and Lubicon Cree. There were even community members that had moved to nearby Metis Settlements such as Peavine because of intermarriages between Treaty and Metis.

Thus, the history of Treaty 8 and Metis scrip, and the Bigstone Treaty Land Entitlement is actually the history of families. The bureaucratic process of defining certain individuals as Treaty or Metis, as having land rights or no land rights, is actually a history of how the colonial government divided a people based on loose definitions of being an "Indian" and being a "half breed". Despite this, the community thrived in a vast area of the bush where intermarriages between Status Indians, Non-Status Indians and Metis occurred. In the end, based on this history we are all relations. In the following section I discuss the context of the community in the municipality of the Hamlet of Wabasca, which is where many of the families in this study lived during the time of this study and where many grew up.

4.3 MUNICIPAL DISTRICT OF OPPORTUNITY: THE HAMLET OF WABASCA

4.3.1 Population and Location

The Municipal District of Opportunity #17 promotes itself as the land of opportunity on its website, emphasizing the available natural resources of petroleum and forestry industries, and boasting about its large land base as the third largest municipality in the province (Municipal District of Opportunity 2014). According to the 2011 Census, the MD of Opportunity had a population of 3074 (this is including the communities of the Hamlet of Wabasca, Red Earth, Calling Lake, Sandy Lake, Chipewyan Lake, Peerless Lake and Trout Lake). However, in 2011 in the Wabasca area there was a population of 1,302 on MD land and 2,207 on Bigstone Cree Nations reserves, making a total population of 3,509 in the Wabasca community (Municipal District of Opportunity 2014). By looking at the mother tongue of those that completed the 2011 Census in the MD, the cultural diversity of the community is revealed. The following is a breakdown of those that responded to a 2011 Census question as what their mother tongue was; 64% English, 33% Cree, and less than 1% of each of the other languages found in the community (French, Arabic, Tagalog/Pilipino, Polish, Cantonese, Dutch, German, Korean, Slovak, Spanish, and Ukrainian) (Statistics Canada 2011). Having spent a considerable amount of time in the community and based on the 2011 Census, I have observed that most of these community members that speak languages other than English or Cree are recent racialized immigrants that work in the local service industry (hotels, restaurants, and stores). Some work directly within the oil industry, while others work in professional occupations that are often difficult to recruit in Northern communities (medical professionals, accountants, social workers, etc.).

As is apparent in the map of the community (see Appendix D: Municipal Boundary Map), the MD of Opportunity has a majority of its land on the North Wabasca Lake, and unlike the 'checker-board' reserve land it is one solid plot of land. While in the community, I heard a few times how the MD was much richer in natural resources compared to the Bigstone Cree Nation just based on the larger land base in the area. For community members, this meant greater infrastructure and greater opportunities in the natural resource industries for the municipality compared to the First Nation, although I have yet to substantiate this with research into the local economy.

4.3.2 Educational Systems

In the Hamlet of Wabasca there are three secondary schools. St. Theresa School offers kindergarten to grade 6, and Mistassiniy School offers grade 6 to grade 12; both schools are located near the Wabasca Lakes and each have an enrolment of just over 300 students (Northland School Division 2014). Pelican Mountain School is a smaller school near the Sandy Lake which offers kindergarten to grade 6, and has an enrolment of just under 20 students (Northland School Division 2014). These schools are within the Northland School Division; this district is often in local media and community discussion highlighted as one of the lowest academic achieving school districts in Alberta. Since the mid-1980's Bigstone Cree Nation has questioned the quality of schooling students receive in Northland School Division Schools, which initiated the opening of their own band-operated school (Yellowknee 1997). Most recently St. Theresa School was noted as one of the lowest 10 schools in Alberta, based on the Provincial Achievements Tests, (PATs) according to a report done by the Fraser Institute[ii] (Cowley and Easton 2014; Richter 2014). Even a review of the Northland School Divisions PATs shows that the district's students score substantially lower in every core subject (English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science

and Social Studies) for grade's 3's, 6's and 9's, in comparison to the province of Alberta (Northland School Division 2012). The Northlands School Division serves primarily Aboriginal communities in Northern Alberta, and it is often criticized for its quality of education, and has struggled in the past with the recruitment and retention of teachers in these northern communities (Northland School Division 2012). Although Aboriginal educators have noted that standardized academic testing is not a full reflection of student learning, that such testing is often culturally biased, and that a more holistic Aboriginal model of lifelong learning should be implemented (Canadian Council on Learning 2009), community members' perceptions of the low quality of education offered in Wabasca is tainted by these negative standardized scores. As well, community members often mentioned that they wanted the best learning opportunities for themselves and their children in order secure viable opportunities to enter post-secondary education and secure employment.

At the time I was carrying out this research project, some of my own family members from the community moved their children to Edmonton high schools because the Northland School District high schools were moving to a "self-paced learning" model (Northlands 2013: 97). Under the "self-paced learning" model there would no longer be classroom instruction but self-paced online modules (Northlands 2013: 97). This decision was made by the district due to the low attendance rate and most of the high achievers leaving the district; it is touted by the district as a more flexible approach of education to accommodate the community (Northlands 2013). My own family members choose to send their children to high schools in Edmonton where their children would continue to receive classroom instruction and have access to core subjects that prepare students for post-secondary education. Some of the community members I interviewed mentioned that those that complete their high school education in the local

Mistassiniy High School are not offered the necessary courses for entrance into post-secondary programing, and with a high school diploma from Mistassiniy you will likely have to attend upgrading for a year in order to complete courses required for entrance to post-secondary institutions. In their analysis of the education system in the Wood Buffalo Region (which includes Fort McMurray and Fort McKay First Nation), Taylor et al (2009) noted similar criticisms of First Nations/Metis/Inuit (FNMI) students being over-represented in the "Knowledge and Employability" stream. This is an 80 credit high school certificate that is based on applied courses, as compared to the 100 credit high school diploma which is based on pure core subjects; the "Knowledge and Employability" streams "do not lead to post-secondary education" (Taylor, Friedel and Edge 2009: 20). As well, Taylor et al. (2009) noted the difficulty in the recruitment and retention of qualified teachers in Northlands School District in the Wood Buffalo region, negatively affected the quality of education.

Based on my interviews with community members in their twenties and thirties, many have been aware of the poor quality education offered by Northlands School Division. Our community has been sending students out of the community for generations. In this study alone, parents in their thirties were planning on sending their junior high and high school children out to the city for a better education similar to how they were sent themselves. Bigstone Education Authority actually has a policy that offers financial sponsorship to students wanting to move to the city to pursue a high school secondary education. Many of the community members I interviewed were a part of this program in the 1990's and 2000's. I myself was a Bigstone Education sponsored student when I left Wabasca in grade 11 and went to high school in Edmonton; I lived with a billet family. Today my home is a billet family to my niece who attended junior high and high school in the city. Under this program students receive funding to

cover their school expenses and to board with a billet family. Unfortunately, the Bigstone Education Authority secondary sponsorship program is only available for members of Bigstone Cree Nation, which puts Indian Status students in the community at an advantage over non-Status or Metis students, to access better high school education outside the community. However, the program does have attendance and grade requirements, so poor performing students could potentially be 'dropped' from the sponsorship program if they fail to meet these requirements. This means only well performing First Nations students have access to a high school education in the city--unless of course, the whole family decides to move to the city, or the high school student is sent to live with family in the city; without sponsorship, both options require financial and social resources on the part of the family.

In Wabasca there is one post-secondary institution located off-reserve in the MD. Northern Lakes Colleges is a local community college that primarily offers distance education courses in Wabasca, although there is some in-class instruction. The main campuses are located in Slave Lake and Grouard, with more than 25 satellite campuses in rural communities, First Nations communities and Metis communities in northern Alberta. The college offers programs in academic upgrading and life skills, trades' apprenticeships, university studies, and workforce development certificates. It also offers a variety of career options, such as Carpenter, Electrician, Welder, Business Administration, Practical Nurse, and Educational Assistant. University studies programs such as the Aboriginal Education Program (a Bachelors of Education program) offer university courses that can be transferred to larger institutions to enter Degree programs. Northern Lakes College seemed to be a great institution for those choosing to pursue a post-secondary education while remaining in the Wabasca community, or as a starting point before transferring to larger Degree granting institutions.

4.4 REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND LABOUR MARKET

The community of Wabasca is located in the Boreal forest and within the Athabasca tar sands region; this region is rich in forestry resources and in petroleum resources. Many of the community members interviewed discussed beginning work at a young age in the oilfield and/or in the forestry industry. I too had the opportunity to work in the oilfield when I was a 19-year-old summer student for an oilfield maintenance company owned by my First Nation. Every morning we would meet at 7am, get in a truck, and drive for an hour or so out into the "oil field" outside of Wabasca on dirt roads to maintain the pipes and wells on oil leases. I recall it was dusty, dirty, involving long hours, with breaks in the work truck. We had to wear a lot of protective gear because of the carcinogenic chemicals we worked with, and the other female summer student was the only other woman I saw all day. Beyond where we worked, I was told, the dirt roads went even further towards Chipewyan Lake, with oil leases and work camps along the way. Although I only worked in the oilfield for two summers as a student, when I hear community members refer to the "oilfield" I think of long dirt roads full of industrial vehicles and long days surrounded by forest, dirt, and chemicals.

One of the most fascinating things I discovered while researching the history of Treaty 8 land was that the government was prompted to enter into Treaty with the northern Indigenous peoples because it was found to be an oil rich region. According to Smilie, the Indigenous people living north of Treaty 6 had made pleas in the late 1870's to the federal government to enter into treaty because of their destitute situation of starvation and poverty due to the "reduction in the price of furs and the scarceness of the animals upon which we have to depend for our living" (Smilie 2005: 6). These pleas went unanswered until the government realized "there were vast quantities of petroleum in the District of Athabaska and the Mackenzie River valley"; then they

began making preparation for treaty (Smilie 2005: 6). To be exact an 1890-91 geological survey discovered "there were 4,700 million tons of tar in the region, as well as natural gas, bitumen, oil and pitch", which made the government very interested in entering into Treaty with "Indians from the Peace River and Athabaska regions" (Smilie 2005: 6). Before that time, the government felt content in leaving be the Indians of the deep wilderness of the Boreal forest, which did not seem to have much economic value for settlement or agriculture. Therefore, as I consider the current economic development of the community of Wabasca, I keep in mind the colonial government's historic interest in the Treaty 8 oil rich land, and capitalists' current interest for reasons of the profitability of our natural resources.

The community of Wabasca is described as primarily an oil and gas dependent community, and is part of the global oil market. As a petroleum industry-dependent community, the Municipal District of Opportunity projects to have increased long-term development in the oil sands industry in the Wabasca region. Currently, there are several major Canadian oil companies and multinational oil companies in the Wabasca area; including Cenovus, Canadian Natural Resources, Laricina Energy, Shell Canada, Husky Energy, Encana, and Paramount Hoole (Municipal District of Opportunity 2014). These companies are in the Wabasca area for good reason; the community is located within the Athabasca oil sands deposit area.

Within Alberta there are three major oil sands deposits, the Athabasca Deposit, the Cold Lake Deposit and the Peace Region Deposit. The oil industry is the pride of the Alberta economy, and according to a Government of Alberta report, "the population of the Municipal District Opportunity may eventually increase to 6,000 or even 8,000 once total production of the Athabasca Oil Sands Area reaches 6 million barrels per day (bpd)" (Municipal District of Opportunity 2014: n.p.). The municipality is proud of the local oil industry, and cites the

Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers by boasting "approximately half of the world's investable oil is in Alberta's oil sands" representing "significant developments for Alberta and for oil and gas-dependent communities across Alberta" (Municipal District of Opportunity 2014: n.p.). In addition, they quote the Oil Sands Developer's Group in 2010 by citing the estimated growth, which forecasts oil sands bitumen production to "reach 4 million bpd by 2020", and that over the next decade "the oil sands are anticipated to be the single largest source of new oil in the world" (Municipal District of Opportunity 2014: n.p.). The oil sands bitumen, which is crude oil that comes from the Wabasca region, will be taken by one of the locally present multinational corporations; it will be refined and placed on the global market. By being a part of the oil sands industry in Alberta, the community is thrust into the complexity of the global economy of oil.

The estimated growth in the oil industry in the Wabasca area is expected to create the impetus for economic growth in other industries such as forestry, tourism and outdoor recreation sectors (Municipal District of Opportunity 2014). As a part of the growth expected in the local economy, there is expected to be an increase in the local population. There was a permanent resident population of 3,500 in the Wabasca area in 2011, which includes those residing in the MD and those residing on Bigstone Cree Nation reserves. By 2016, with the increase in the oil and gas industry the permanent resident population of the Wabasca area is expected to grow to 5,650 (Municipal District of Opportunity 2014). Additionally, "there are currently 1,775 beds in work camps across the region which are generally full in the winter and less than half occupied during the summer months"; this represents a "sizeable temporary workforce or non-resident population" known as a "shadow population" (Municipal District of Opportunity 2014: n.p.). The "shadow population" in the Wabasca area is forecast to reach 2,200 by 2016 (Municipal District of Opportunity 2014: n.p.). With this expected growth in the permanent resident

population and in the non-resident shadow population, this population will bring with it their oil industry earnings, and there are expected opportunities in local economic growth and in the service industries to cater to the growing population.

I now turn to a review of the local labour market through basic Census data. By examining this data, I highlight the connection between work in the local natural resources industries and work taken up by those on Bigstone Cree Nations reserves. This data will show how those on reserve (especially Indigenous women) are less employed than those in the neighbouring municipality. As the Census is divided between subdivisions of Bigstone Reserves 166, 166A, 166B, 166C, and 166D and this data is not available as a whole for all Bigstone Reserves, I focus on the data for the most populated Bigstone Reserves which are 166A and 166D to reflect the community trends. By comparing the labour market data, one can note that average incomes increase as you move from the reserve, to the municipality and to the city. As well, one can see from this data that employment rates increase as you move from reserve, to the municipality, and to the city. Finally, from looking at this data it is apparent that males have a higher employment rate and higher average incomes when compared to women in each location. This brief review of labour market data clearly shows how those on reserve and especially women on reserve fare much worse in terms of employment rates and average incomes. In comparison, the municipality does have slightly higher average incomes and employment rates than those on reserve, but overall it is almost at parity to those on reserve.

Table 2: Employment Rates, Unemployment Rate and Average Incomes[iii] Based on 2011 Census

Bigstone Cree Nation Reserve 166A			
	Total	Male	Female
Employment Rate	47.9%	53.1%	43.5%
Unemployment Rate	26.2%	25.7%	25.9%
Average Income	$28,231	$31,214	$24,924
Bigstone Cree Nation Reserve 166D			
Employment Rate	44.9%	45.9%	44.8%
Unemployment Rate	16.9%	22.2%	10.3%
Average Income	$35,250	$41,307	$28,606
Municipal District of Opportunity #17			
Employment Rate	54.5%	55.3%	53.2%
Unemployment Rate	16.5%	21.7%	9.3%
Average Income	$37,132	$43,680	$29,336
Edmonton (CMA)			
Employment Rate	69.0%	74.1%	64.0%
Unemployment Rate	5.6%	5.6%	5.6%
Average Income	$49,266	$61,001	$37,492
Province of Alberta			
Employment Rate	69.0%	74.6%	63.6%
Unemployment Rate	5.8%	5.7%	5.9%
Average Income	$50,956	$64,260	$37,439

Source: Statistics Canada. (2011). *Census of Canada: National Household Survey.* Survey Profiles for: Wabasca IRI 166, 166A, 166B, 166C, 166D, Alberta; Opportunity No. 17, MD, Alberta; Edmonton, CMA, Alberta. Ottawa, Ontario: Statistics Canada.

4.5 CITY OF EDMONTON

4.5.1 Population and Demographics

Since half of the community members that participated in this study reside in Edmonton, I provide a detailed picture of the demographic characteristics of this urban area from an Indigenous perspective. The City of Edmonton is the capital of Alberta; it is a major cultural, economic, governmental and educational hub of the province. It is located in central Alberta and sits along the North Saskatchewan River, and is within Treaty 6 territory. In 2011, the City of Edmonton had a population of 812,201 within its city limits, but the Edmonton Census Metropolitan Area (CMA)[iv] had a population of 1,159,869 (Statistics Canada 2011). Within the Edmonton CMA, there are 61,765 residents identified as Aboriginal identity[v], a majority of

123

which identify as Metis (31,775) or First Nations (26,945), and a small Inuit population (1,115), as well as those that identify with multiple Aboriginal identities (975) (Statistics Canada 2011).

Edmonton is quickly becoming one of Canada's most ethnically diverse cities. According to a recent report from the city, an "increasing proportion of Edmontonians (17% in the 2006 Federal Census) are from a visible minority background" and since 1999 "the number of immigrants choosing to come to our city has grown steadily" (City of Edmonton 2009: 8). Most new immigrants (about 40%) come from India, the Philippines and China, as well as a growing population from African nations and other parts of Canada (City of Edmonton 2009: 8). This backdrop of an ethnically diverse city makes Edmonton a more appealing place to an open-minded Aboriginal population. As urban Aboriginal people in Edmonton "display a higher tolerance for other cultures than their non-Aboriginal neighbours"; 77% of Aboriginal people "believe there is room for a variety of languages and cultures in this country, in contrast to 54% of non-Aboriginal urbanites" (Environics Institute 2010: 9).

Since Edmonton has a sizeable Aboriginal presence, the population can be understood from an urban Aboriginal perspective. Within Edmonton the head offices of the Metis Nation of Alberta, Treaty 8, Treaty 6, and the Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association reside. In addition, there are major human services and healing societies that serve the local Aboriginal population, such as the Oteenow Employment and Training Society, Rupertsland Institute Metis Employment Services, Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society, Ben Calf Robe Society, and the Nechi Institute. As someone that lives within Edmonton, one aspect I enjoy about this city is the number of familiar Aboriginal faces I see on a daily basis and the Aboriginal organizations I can access. As a mother, I wanted my child to have access to our culture in the city. My own child has had the opportunity to attend the Mother-Earth and Me Aboriginal Head Start Program

through the Ben Calf Rob Society, and the Awasis Cree Program at Prince Charles School, which offers an alternative Aboriginal education school. One of my most favourite aspects of the city is the extensive parks and trails in the river valley parkland, which gives me a sense of closeness to nature and the land. Raising a family in a city such as Edmonton has allowed me to continue to make a conscious decision to stay connected to my culture and the Aboriginal community. It also helps that I have several family members with children living in Edmonton and I stay very connected to my family living on reserve. Since many of the community members in this study choose to live in Edmonton to pursue schooling, I begin with a brief overview of the educational systems available in the city of Edmonton, which is a major part of the context of the Aboriginal community in Edmonton.

4.5.2 Educational Systems

The City of Edmonton is the location of many of the province's most distinguished and complex schools and educational institutions. As the educational systems in Edmonton could be a whole report within itself, I have summarized the major educational institutions in Table 3. As most of the community members that were a part of this study were in their twenties and thirties, some have had the opportunity to go through these institutions. A few community members in this study were still students in the post-secondary system, some were parents with children in this system, and some at certain points may have even been employed by this educational system. As well, much might have changed over time as some of the older community members were students in these educational institutions in the 1990's to the 2000's. Most of the community members mentioned facing discrimination and marginalization from elementary school all the way to post-secondary institutions in Edmonton, while some 'blended' into an ethnically diverse educational system and utilized the supports of Aboriginal programming in

these institutions to help facilitate their academic success. These educational experiences will be

discussed further in later chapters. However, in presenting this information on schooling in

Edmonton, I wanted to note that there were a variety of experiences over time.

Table 3: Educational Institutions in Edmonton

Educational Institution	Student Population	Number of Schools or Campuses	Programming Offered	Aboriginal Programming[vi]
Edmonton Public Schools	86,000 Students (September 2012)	202 Schools and District Sites	Pre-Kindergarten Kindergarten Elementary Junior High High School	Amiskwaciy Academy programming immerses students in a learning environment that honours aboriginal culture, language and traditions. It is a grade 8 -12 school. Awasis (Cree) programming at Prince Charles School allows students to increase their knowledge of Aboriginal cultures and traditions, and develop language skills in Cree. Students in Kindergarten to Grade 6 from all cultures are welcome to enrol. Cree Extended programming emphasizes Cree values throughout the curriculum. Students in Kindergarten to Grade 3 from all cultures are welcome to enrol. (Edmonton Public Schools, accessed February 2014, www.epsb.ca)
Edmonton Catholic Schools	35,546 Students (September 2012)	88 Schools and District Sites	Pre-Kindergarten Kindergarten Elementary Junior High High School	Braided Journeys programming is intended to support First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) youth to become leaders of character, vision and action. FNMI youth are provided multi-component, culturally-based programs that challenge their creativity, build on their skill set, and increase their support network. Primarily for junior high and high school. The Nehiyaw Pimatisiwin Cree Language and Culture program at Ben Calf Robe Elementary Junior High School delivers culturally permeated curriculum in all content areas to FNMI students in the district.

				The district employs Aboriginal Consultants, Curriculum Consultants and has Council of Elders to ensure an Aboriginal perspective in learning and to promote cultural teachings. (Edmonton Catholic School Board, accessed February 2014, www.ecsd.net)
Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT)	27,095 students in credit programs. 33,000 students in non-credit programs. 13,000 apprentices in the trades anticipated for 2013.	NAIT has four campus sites in Edmonton; Main Campus, Patricia Campus, South Campus, St. Albert Campus. As well as a Calgary Campus.	NAIT has approximately 140 credit programs leading to degrees, applied degrees, diplomas, and certificates.	"The Encana Aboriginal Student Centre is a community gathering place where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students can gather to network, study and share their post-secondary learning experiences. It is a place where culture and tradition are welcome and encouraged". NAIT also has Elder's Services and an Aboriginal Student Club. NAIT offers Upgrading and Bridging Programs which allow Aboriginal learners to gain prerequisites to enter most of NAIT's full-time programs. As well, they work with Aboriginal communities to bring full-time and apprenticeship programs to the communities. (NAIT, accessed February 2014, www.nait.ca)
Norquest College	8,500 full-time, part-time and continuing education students	The college "provides access to adult education in Edmonton and the surrounding region for 23 communities". The main campus is located in downtown Edmonton.	A community college that offers 22 post-secondary career credentials and foundational program. From high school upgrading to two year college diplomas.	As a part of the College's inclusive approach, the institution has "designed an extensive network of services tailored specifically to the needs of this group, including Aboriginal Student Support Services and Elder support". Included in this network of services are an Aboriginal Student Advisor, Aboriginal Educational Counsellor, Aboriginal Elder, and Aboriginal Ceremonial Room. The college has Aboriginal Studies Programs which include the Aboriginal Community Support Worker program, Aboriginal University/College Preparation, and the Ben Calf Robe Upgrading program. (Norquest, accessed February 2014, www.norquest.ca)

MacEwan University	11,838 full-time students in credit programs. 18,897 full and part-time headcount.	The university has four campuses in Edmonton: City Centre Campus, Centre for Arts & Communications, South Campus, and Alberta College Campus.	The university's four faculties and schools offers bachelor's degrees, degree transfer programs, applied bachelor's degrees, diploma certificates, and university preparation programs.	"The Aboriginal Education Centre offers a diverse range of services; such as, academic counselling, personal support services, and cultural programming. Cultural activities include an annual feast, Aboriginal Cultural Day, and an Elders-In-Residence program". As well, the "Aboriginal Student Club works to create a sense of community for students while they study at Grant MacEwan University". (MacEwan University, accessed February 2014, www.macewan.ca)
University of Alberta	29,947 Undergraduate full-time, 1,957 Undergraduate part-time, 6,083 Graduate full-time, 1,515 Graduate part-time. In total 39,502 students. (2012-2013)	The university has 5 campus locations in Edmonton: North Campus, South Campus, Campus Saint-Jean, and Enterprise Square. As well as Augustana Campus in Camrose, Alberta	A research intensive university with close to 400 undergraduate, graduate and professional programs on campus. Offering Bachelor's, Master's, and PhD's.	The Aboriginal Student Services Centre is located on campus. ASSC's "vision statement recognizes our commitment to the Aboriginal community on campus and for providing services that reflect this responsibility: ASSC honours the Indigenous worldview of education as a continuous ceremony of learning by respecting and supporting the voices and spirit of our community at the University of Alberta" The Faculty of Native Studies offers bachelor's degrees, certificates, and graduate degrees. The Faculty's vision is to "produce a better society by educating Indigenous and non-Indigenous students to be responsible citizens through excellent community engagement, teaching and research focused on the complexity of Indigenous issues and thought". The university also has an Aboriginal Teachers Education Program, Aboriginal Student Groups, a Council on Aboriginal Initiatives, and the Canadian Indigenous Languages and Literacy Development Institute. (University of Alberta, accessed February 2014, www.ualberta.ca)

4.5.3 Aboriginal Edmonton

To discuss Aboriginal Edmonton, I will primarily be using two survey reports done specifically in Edmonton's Aboriginal community. The Urban Aboriginal Peoples Survey (UAPS)[vii] conducted in Edmonton in 2009, provides a general sense of the urban Aboriginal experience in the city. "Aboriginal Edmonton – A Statistical Story" looks specifically at the Aboriginal population in Edmonton based on the 2006 Census results, this analysis is done by a Metis scholar that worked with the city's Aboriginal Relations Office to 'tell the story' of our people in the city.

Data from the recent 2011 Census and the 2006 Census tell a similar story; the largest Aboriginal group in the city identify as Metis, second are First Nations, and finally there is a small Inuit population. According to Andersen "Aboriginal Edmontonians are Canada's second-largest urban Aboriginal population" and this population is growing (Andersen 2009: 9). The largest urban Aboriginal population in Canada is located in Winnipeg; therefore comparisons are often drawn between the two cities regarding the urban Aboriginal experience. The UAPS results show that, "There is a strong Indigenous pride among both Metis and First Nations people in Edmonton, Aboriginal peoples in Edmonton are also more likely than average to take pride in being "Canadian" (Environics Institute 2010: 23). Particularly, 81% of Aboriginal Edmontonians state they are very proud of their specific identity (Metis, First Nations, Inuit) and 78% take proud in being Canadian (Environics Institute 2010: 23).

Just over half of the Aboriginal people in Edmonton "know their Aboriginal ancestry at least fairly well"; this is a measure of their awareness of their family tree and cultural ancestry (Environics Institute 2010: 25). However, "Metis (35%) are twice as likely as First Nations peoples (16%) to be very familiar with their family tree" (Environics Institute 2010: 25).

According to the UAPS, "the legacy of policies of assimilation in Canada and their outcomes have contributed to multiple ongoing challenges experienced by Aboriginal peoples, not least of which is the disconnection from their heritage and culture that many have experienced, and the resulting struggle to reclaim and reconstruct their Aboriginal identity" (Environics Institute 2010: 25). Most Aboriginal people gain this understanding of their family tree from their parents (62%) and their grandparents (26%), which show the importance of family relations in maintaining a cultural identity and understanding of heritage (Environics Institute 2010: 25).

In Edmonton, Aboriginal peoples have challenges of not being widely aware of Aboriginal cultural activities in the city and not feeling as connected to other Aboriginal peoples in the city (compared to other UAPS cities). However, "most Aboriginal people in Edmonton are unconcerned about losing their cultural identity", a level of confidence that "is second only to Aboriginal peoples in Winnipeg, and is true for both First Nations and Metis" (Environics Institute 2010: 11). This level of confidence may be due to the strong connections that Aboriginal people in the city maintain with their home Aboriginal communities outside the city, and it may be due to the growing population within the city.

Despite the pride and confidence Aboriginal people have in their cultural identity and our significant presence in the city, we still face racism and discrimination on a daily basis. In the following, this experience of marginalization due to discrimination is explained:

> More so than in any other UAPS city, Aboriginal Edmontonians believe they are viewed in negative ways by non-Aboriginal people. Most UAPS participants feel discrimination of Aboriginal people to be a pervasive problem that majorities have experienced personally, but this is particularly true for Aboriginal Edmontonians. This feeling is eloquently described by one Edmonton participant, who said "I notice the non-verbal cues the most, the ones that imply that all Aboriginal people are thieves, criminals or dangerous. Like people locking doors as I walk by, putting their wallets away, or following me in stores". Only a minority of Aboriginal people living in Edmonton believe these perceptions are changing for the better, and such optimism is less common than in other cities. (Environics Institute 2010: 10).

130

As an Aboriginal person, there is a comfort and ease to living in the city of Edmonton, which has a large diverse Aboriginal community, but this is contrasted by the daily systemic racism we must face. As an Aboriginal Edmontonian myself I am aware that being in any retail setting (grocery store, mall, restaurants, property management rental office, etc.), I am likely to be there to 'steal' something or will likely be seen as unable to afford my purchase. When interacting with certain doctor's offices, or with the police in the city, you never know whether will get the help you need, or be stereotyped and not be taken seriously. However, there are 'safe' spaces for me in the city, such as the Edmonton's north side which has a large Aboriginal presence, where I went to high school and see many familiar faces, or my church which has many Metis congregants, or going to a round dance to celebrate my culture. I think due to the noticeable Aboriginal presence in the city, we are able to share these similar experiences with other Aboriginal people in the city, and discuss the 'safe' spaces where we will be accepted and 'unsafe' spaces in the city where we will face discrimination. 'Safe' spaces and 'unsafe' spaces in the city is common knowledge among my Aboriginal friends and family.

In Aboriginal Edmonton, 80% believe non-Aboriginal people have negative impressions of Aboriginal people, 10% believe non-Aboriginal people have positive impressions of Aboriginal people, and 10% are indifferent or don't know (Environics Institute 2010: 38). In addition, we overwhelmingly believe that "non-Aboriginal people hold a wide range of stereotypes of Aboriginal people, and that these are most commonly related to addiction problems (alcohol and drug abuse)" (Environics Institute 2010: 39). I remember when my car was stolen while we were at church in Edmonton. In reporting the stolen car to the police, they questioned whether my sister and I were drunk or high because we were laughing at the irony of the situation. The police officer would not take our statement until we 'composed ourselves and

took the situation more seriously'. I guess the police officer that Sunday didn't know humour was a major part of our culture. Instead he stereotyped us as lying drunken Indians. When asked what they believe are the most common stereotypes non-Aboriginals hold of them, five main stereotypes emerged from the Aboriginal respondents: addiction problems (78%); lazy and lack motivation (36%); unemployed and can't keep a job (24%); lack of intelligence and education (23%); poor and on welfare (22%) (Environics Institute 2010: 25). Therefore, in navigating 'safe' and 'unsafe' spaces in the city, we need to keep in mind these are the stereotypes that non-Aboriginal people may hold about us as we go about our business.

Most Aboriginal people in Edmonton consider the city our home, but we stay connected to our communities of origin (Environics Institute 2010: 9). Six out of ten feel a close connection to their communities of origin "links that are integral to strong family and social ties, and to traditional and contemporary Aboriginal culture" (Environics Institute 2010: 9). A majority of First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples "consider their current city of residence home (71%), including those who are first generation of their family to live in the city" (Environics Institute 2010: 9). Three-quarters (77%) of UAPS participants were "first generation" residents to the city[viii], and these are typically First Nations people rather than Metis residents. The "second generation" UAPS participants were one-fifth (19%) of Edmonton's Aboriginal population, and just 4% were "third generation" residents of the city (Environics Institute 2010: 18). This is particularly interesting for this research project since most of community members who participated in this research were "first generation" residents to Edmonton who moved from Wabasca and maintained connections to family back home.

Aboriginal people in Edmonton are also considered "highly mobile" compared to our non-Aboriginal neighbours; 35% of Aboriginal people moved within the city in the last year (in

comparison to 20% non-Aboriginal) and 70% of Aboriginal people have moved within the city

in the last five years (in comparison to 49% non-Aboriginal) (Andersen 2009: 12). About "60%

of Aboriginal Edmontonians live in Traffic Districts designated by the City of Edmonton as

Inner City"[ix] (Andersen 2009, 10). Six of these 'Inner City' Traffic Districts – "North Central

(13.5%), Calder (11.3%), Beverly (11.0%), Downtown Fringe (8.1%), Londonderry (7.8%) and

Jasper Place (6.9%) – have proportions of Aboriginal residents above Edmonton's overall

proportion (5.6%)" (Andersen 2009: 23). Most of those in "Inner City" Traffic Districts have a

higher proportion of lower income residents (Andersen 2009: 23).

The three main reasons Aboriginal people moved to Edmonton was to be closer to

family, to pursue an education and for employment opportunities (Environics Institute 2010). In

fact the top life aspiration of Aboriginal Edmontonians is "completing their education, which is

consistent with that of urban Aboriginal peoples generally" (Environics Institute 2010: 56).

Other important life aspirations include raising or providing for a family, home ownership,

having a good or enjoyable job, and travel (Environics Institute 2010: 56). These UAPS findings

somewhat correspond to the life stories of the community members from Wabasca in this study,

as many moved to the city for school and ended up staying in the city for family and work.

Another aspect that distinguishes Aboriginal people in Edmonton is that we are "much younger

than our non-Aboriginal neighbours, with a larger proportion of households with children"

(Andersen 2009: 3), which would explain why raising a family is an important life aspiration.

In terms of our educational attainment levels and our labour force participation rates in

Aboriginal Edmonton, we are 'closing the gap', which is true all across Canada, but we still lag

behind our non-Aboriginal neighbours. According to Andersen, although we are improving we

still have "lower levels of educational attainment than non-Aboriginal residents: in 2006, slightly

more than one in five Aboriginal residents had completed high school; we were slightly more likely than non-Aboriginal residents to have a trade certificate or diploma; we were far less likely than non-Aboriginal residents to have completed university" (Andersen 2009: 16). As for our labour force participation rates we are "only slightly behind those of non-Aboriginals (68.6% compared to 72.3%), our unemployment rates remain much higher (10.3% compared to 4.6%)" (Andersen 2009: 17). And just more than two-third of Aboriginal Edmontonians are working, more Aboriginal men are working than Aboriginal women, and Metis are working more than First Nations (Andersen 2009: 17).

Unfortunately, most Aboriginal people working in Edmonton work in "jobs with lower status and lower pay than our non-Aboriginal neighbours" (Andersen 2009: 19). Specifically, Aboriginal men in Edmonton "tend to work in jobs related to trade, transport and equipment operations", whereas "Aboriginal women work in sales and service occupations" (Andersen 2009: 19), this is similar to Albertan labour market trends of Aboriginal peoples being in these lower status occupations (Statistics Canada 2007).

In terms of the class differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Edmonton, Aboriginal people fare a bit worse than their neighbours. According to Andersen, "Two in five Aboriginal residents of Edmonton live below the poverty line, and our median income is only two-thirds that of our non-Aboriginal residents" unfortunately this is "particularly true for Aboriginal women and even more so for First Nations women" (Andersen 2009: 3). So even within the Aboriginal community in Edmonton there are class differences, in which we find men doing better than women and Metis doing better than First Nations. Although not eluded to in either survey report, with the increase in post-secondary completion rates among Aboriginal peoples, I believe there is a growing middle class of post-secondary educated Aboriginal

peoples. Some of the community members interviewed in this study had completed their post-secondary education or were close to completion, and distinguished themselves as those in professional occupations (for example, healthcare professionals, educators, and social workers). I believe they were a part of this emerging middle-class.

4.6 THE STORY BEHIND THE NUMBERS: LIVING IN A RACIALIZED COLONIAL REGIME

As a qualitative researcher who has developed Indigenous methodologies for this study, I am often very skeptical of statistics I read regarding Aboriginal peoples in Canada, as they often highlight the 'deficits' in our communities and I am careful in using statistics in my own work. However, having taught research methods, and having been trained at a graduate level in quantitative research methods, I have come to appreciate the 'stories' that numbers can tell. One lesson I have learned from my father who has worked in First Nations leadership and management for many years, is that in order to understand the government and work against (and sometimes within) a colonial bureaucracy, we must learn the language of our colonizer and use this language to form a resistance against the colonial regime. For myself, speaking the colonizer's language means speaking in statistics and numbers, and by doing so showing how we have been denied our rights to most of our land, and how most Indigenous people have been marginalized in most structural institutions such as the educational system and the labour market. I understand how numbers and statistics can be 'used' to tell certain 'stories' or lay out the contexts of understanding a group of people. In the following quote, Metis Scholar, Chris Andersen explains why statistical information is useful:

> Governments and their officials emphasize evidence-based decision-making, and statistics play an important role in producing this evidence. Although statistics have all too often historically been used to harm Aboriginal communities, today they can be useful for correcting mistaken or inaccurate feelings and impressions among dominant

135

groups…. Likewise, Aboriginal academics have used statistics to correct dominant stereotypes about Aboriginal people in a wide variety of contexts. Statistics are, in other words, a crucial element of the relationship between Aboriginal people and various levels of Canadian government…statistics must be seen as a tool – they are not 'the truth' in and of themselves. Readers cannot treat statistics as 'gospel truth'. Rather, you must read them with a critical mind and you must ask hard questions about the information they summarize" (Andersen 2009: 27).

As there is not much previous research into the Indigenous people from the Kituskeenow area, I tried to use history and numbers to convey the story of how Indigenous people in the traditional territory of the Bigstone Cree Nation and Metis people of Kituskeenow have lived, and how we have been denied most of our land and our Indigenous rights, how educational systems marginalizes us, how the labour market marginalizes us. In the following chapters, I hope to convey how our lives play out with resistance and resilience in these spaces. As the Indigenous peoples of Kituskeenow have been forced to live within the colonial spaces of the Indian Act, under the direction of Aboriginal Affairs funding, policies, and programs, I have used this government's own statistical language to show how we continue to live within a colonial regime which marginalizes us. Even as we move to urban areas, the colonial regime of the government follows us, where we are still distinguished between Status Indians, Non-Status Indians and Metis peoples, where those who are not under the Indian Act – the Metis – seem to live a better existence in terms of class differences compared to their First Nations neighbours in the city. Though not discussed in detail, access to education and employment training in the city may also be determined by racial identity, since Status Indians have access to post-secondary funding under the Indian Act, and Metis have access to specific educational funding through the Metis Nation. So even though we leave the north and head to the city, we move into separate spaces of the city based on our racial identity defined by the federal government.

Chapter Five: Family Relations and Community Connections

5.1 UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF FAMILY

Central to this research is the understanding of family, and before I attempt to analyse the family relations of community members in this study, I want to explain my own family. I remember once hearing in one of my graduate classes, the idea that "your race is your family", meaning your racial identity is influenced by your family relations and your ancestry. So I am going to explain my family background.

I am a member of Bigstone Cree Nation and my husband is a Black Canadian with family from Jamaica and Trinidad. We have a mixed race daughter and a mixed race son. In addition, I have a stepson and we are raising my niece who is a very fair-skinned Cree. We have been married for almost a decade, and we have acquired several children in our home, including several other nieces and nephews over on a regular basis. The joining of our two cultural backgrounds has been a challenge at times. My husband claims my culture is too matriarchal and I have felt his culture is too patriarchal. Despite all the gender studies literature I have read, being a member of this family has often tested my feminist values. We've gone through phases where I have been the primary breadwinner while supporting his education, and phases where he has been the primary breadwinner supporting my education, and throughout trying to find as much equal division of labour in our home, trying to value the paid and unpaid labour that we both do.

I have come to realize that being a married couple with children our family has become somewhat of an institution in our community. We are parents that try to teach our children about equality, sharing, fairness and caring for one another. We also strive to have a fairly stable home, we both work in careers we enjoy, and we are in a committed relationship. Unfortunately this means our home has become an institution to our extended families (or maybe we are fortunate for this). Our siblings drop their children off on weekends, our relatives from the reserve treat our home like a hotel when they are in town, and if there is any sensed instability or conflict in our marriage it is cause for concern for our extended family. As our family is valued in both our extended families, we also receive help from others when needed. Our home has become a place of teaching, caring and providing for others.

I grew up in a large family on Bigstone Cree Nation Reserve in Alberta. I was raised with my three biological brothers and with my stepsister. In addition, when I was a toddler, my parents adopted my fourth brother when he was a teenager. Later on, my parents adopted another daughter who was the same age as me. As well, throughout my childhood, my parents were foster-parents, and they raised several other children in our home. My parents taught us to value education, as they believed it was the only way for the self-determination of First Nations people. So when we were teenagers, my three biological brothers and I were separately sent off

to go to high school in the city. My brothers returned home after school to work in the oil industry in Wabasca; they then returned on separate occasions to go to college in the city. After high school, I stayed in the city to attend university, and never returned home, except for summers. My stepsister started a family, moved to the city, went to university and didn't return back. I recently lost one brother, but my surviving siblings live on the reserve or in the city with their families. We have been a major support network, as we all took turns moving to the city to pursue our education and careers. And as our children grow, my nieces and nephews will likely move to the city as well to pursue their education and careers. My parents have over a dozen grandchildren, and they travel back and forth between the city and the reserve to visit with all of them. My parents raised us to value spirituality, family, education, and work. These values are based on a combination of my parents' Christianity and their understanding of self-determination after years of community work. They stressed these values based on Indigenous resilience and survival. They did their best with what they had, and above all I am glad they raised us to be critical and politically conscious.

In my own personal narrative, my one strength has been the support of my family. As mentioned earlier, this understanding of coming from a large family network from the reserve has influenced my research. At times I assumed the community members I interviewed came from similar large families, which wasn't always true. Some people I interviewed were from smaller families, some grew up in single parent homes, and some were raised in the foster care system. And at times I assumed they were raised on reserve in a Cree speaking family as I was raised, but this wasn't always true. Some grew up in small towns outside of the reserve, some grew up in the city, and some had very mobile childhoods where they moved between the city and the reserve, while some lived on reserve their entire lives.

Recall that the research question I ask in this project is how the migration process between the reserve and urban areas affects the cultural identity formation of young Aboriginal adults? This question is underpinned by secondary questions examining gender differences experienced in this process, and in the context of the choices that young Aboriginal adults have to make in terms of education and entering the labour market at this stage in their lives. In general, all community members stated that the location of where they choose to live was not

based on their racial identity as Cree, Metis, Native, Treaty, Non-Status Indian or Indian, because regardless of what the Indian Act states, all territories in Alberta and Canada are the traditional territories of Indigenous peoples. As Indigenous peoples, community members felt they could move freely between rural, reserve or urban centres. As I analysed interviews I ultimately found that questions of cultural identity essentially came down to understanding familial relationships and connections Indigenous people have to extended family networks and community. In essence, understanding cultural identity meant questioning of relationships, and how Indigenous understandings of relations shaped life choices made around family, school, and work. Notions of identity came down to where the self is placed within family and community, and choices made in building family in young adulthood. In the following I examine Indigenous family relations as a way to understand identity, gender relations, and choices in school and work.

5.2 FAMILY LIFE IN DIFFERENT LOCATIONS

When I set out to do research in the community I did not intend to interview people who were married or common-law with children. The fact that I ended up with this sample characteristic may be based on a number of factors, such as how I targeted young adults who are in their child-bearing years, or because the network of people I knew in the community are from this demographic, or this may just be representative of family life in the community. Whatever the reason, I ended up with mostly what I considered to be working couples with two or more children in the Wabasca community. Most of the individuals interviewed in Edmonton had initially moved to the city to pursue a secondary or post-secondary education, and remained in the city once they began working. The fact that few people in the Edmonton sample had children

seemed to connect to their pursuit of their careers. Individuals who moved to Edmonton from Wabasca were like other Canadians who delay the start of their families in order to pursue their own economic well-being or choose childlessness.

Those that lived in Edmonton tended to have stories of moving around. As these stories reflect the life courses of these individuals, it is not surprising that family meant different things at different periods of their life and their reasons for choosing where to live. For some that moved away as youths, they did so to go to high school in the city. While their parents supported this choice, they did leave behind their large extended family networks in their Indigenous community. For those that moved away to pursue their post-secondary education in the city in their early twenties, their large extended family networks back home also influenced these choices, both positively and negatively. Some had very positive family support networks, which supported them through high school and college. Some had negative experiences with family, such as abuse, violence, alcoholism and traumatic experiences and the choice to move away to the city was to get away from these negative influences. For those that moved to the city in their late twenties or early thirties, whether it was to pursue a post-secondary education or a career in the city, their children and their partners often influenced these choices, since at this point they may have a family of their own. So family at different periods of their life courses influenced their choice of where to live, beginning with their parents and siblings as youths, their children and partners as young adults, and throughout, their connections to Indigenous extended family networks.

5.3 THE CHILD AS CENTRAL TO FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

> Children sit at the core of every traditional Native society; they are the heart of our nations…In this worldview, children are at the centre of the community. The elders sit next to the children, as it is their job to teach the spiritual, social and cultural life ways of the nation. The women sit next to the elders and the men sit on the outside. From these points they perform their perspective economic and social roles, as protectors and providers of the two most important circles of the community. (Anderson 2000: 158-159).

In this study, it became clear that children were central to the community, and families were organized along this model. As I interviewed these working families in the Wabasca area and Edmonton, and we discussed their life stories, it became clear that many of the choices they made in their lives were based on the fact that the well-being and development of their children was central to family and community. Indigenous peoples often consider children to be sacred gifts and children are valued members of the community; they are taught and nurtured by grandparents, parents, aunts and uncles. There is an understanding in many Indigenous societies that the survival of our ways of being and our future self-determination are determined by how we care for our children. In the following, Anderson explains how children are considered gifts and how the community is responsible for our children:

> Aboriginal children are precious to us because they represent the future. They are not considered possessions of the biological parents: rather, they are understood to be gifts on loan from the Creator. Because of this, everyone in the community has a connection to the children, and everyone has an obligation to work for their well-being. Each one of us has a responsibility to them. (Anderson 2000: 159).

For parents in Edmonton, children were central to the decision to move to the city to build healthy family relations, especially for those that left behind unhealthy family histories of trauma in Wabasca. Building healthy family relations in the city also meant choosing to live in urban areas where children had greater access to a better education, extracurricular and cultural

activities. For some individuals building healthy family relations in the city meant maintaining connections to their extended family networks and building community in the city.

Most of the parents interviewed from the Wabasca area explained that they wanted to stay in the community in order to remain close to family. One of the main reasons for staying in the community was for their children to maintain a relationship with their elders and to maintain an understanding of our culture. As well, grandparents were considered to be very important caregivers to their children, and since most of the community members interviewed in Wabasca had 2-3 children, having additional caregivers available was important to enable them to continue participating in the local labour market. Siblings of the community members were also important caregivers to their children; there seemed to be a network of siblings or close cousins that relied on each other for help in order to maintain a balance between their busy schedules that often included work, extracurricular activities for children, and household duties.

In the following stories, which strongly feature this reliance on 'grandparents and siblings as co-caregivers of children' it becomes clear how important an extended network of relatives is for caring for the child and continuing to work outside the home. To expand on this cultural idea of 'co-caregivers', I will begin with my own personal narrative of when it became revealed to me how important grandparents are in Cree communities.

5.3.1 Grandparents and Siblings as Co-Caregivers

As discussed, children are central to the community and part of this understanding is the relationships children have with Kohkom and Mosom. In a few of the interviews, a major reason for staying on reserve for several parents was to keep children close to their grandparents, and this was also related to the fact that grandparents are often considered primary caregivers and teachers to the grandchildren. The grandparents seem to be just as important as the parents are in their role of caring and teaching children. I do not live on reserve, so I didn't think this understanding applied to me. However from the time my daughter was an infant, my mom said

142

she was going to "train" my daughter to spend extended periods of time with her on reserve. I thought this was just because we lived in the city and she wanted to see her more often. Now I am learning that these one week or two week visits are a time of learning for my daughter. My mother considers herself a caregiver of my daughter, and this practice is unique to our culture. When my daughter goes on these long visits, she learns to make bannock, she learns to tend to the garden, she learns to socialize with the several cousins that are at Kohkom's house, she learns the Cree language and she learns to be outside in nature. During this time, she also learns her place in the family. Kohkom teaches her that her voice is important and that her role is to play and learn. In addition, her Kohkom and Mosom come to spend weekends with us in the city. During these visits to the city, Kohkom and Mosom take her on shopping trips, they run errands, they eat out, and when they are tired they come back to the house for tea. I thought this relationship my daughter had with her grandparents was very Canadian. I didn't realise it was based on our Cree culture. On their last visit to the city, after a long day together, I was invited to dinner with Kohkom, Mosom and my daughter. Over dinner my mom started going over the conversations she had with my daughter that day. First she began with my daughter's physical well-being; my mother reminded me how important it was to take care of my daughter's curly hair on a daily basis, and, since she has eczema and allergies, to remember to take proper care of her skin, and bathe her daily. In addition, she reminded me that my daughter needed a balanced diet to control her eczema and allergies, and to avoid getting diabetes, which runs in the family. Next she went into her mental well-being, explaining how my daughter had told her "when daddy goes out of town for work mommy yells more and seems mean." She told me that I was no longer to raise my voice because this is not how you speak to a child. My mother reminded me my daughter was a child and had to be allowed to take her time and that I was not to yell or rush her. She then reminded my daughter that if mommy ever raises her voice, to "remind mommy that Kohkom and Mosom don't allow that" and that she is to call them if this happens. Then she went into my daughter's spiritual well-being. My mom explained how my daughter told her that "I'm not sure that mommy believes in God anymore because we don't pray anymore and we don't go to church anymore". My mother then reminded me how important it is to pray with your child so they will be spiritually protected and so that they know God. At no point did I disagree with my mother or try to defend myself, I took her advice, although I did remind her that I was aware of bathing my child. Throughout this discussion she explained all these things to me in Cree, saying several times that she had spoken to my daughter about her wellbeing and whether she felt she was being properly cared for by her parent. My mother reminded me the importance of the child's voice in the family. Then after dinner when we got to the house, my mother reiterated these things to me, in front of my daughter, to remind my daughter how she should expect to be treated and if she was not treated properly to call Kohkom and Mosom. After my parents left, I was on high alert and my daughter consistently reminded me of how she expected to be cared for based on the standard that Kohkom had set in place. My daughter had a sense of pride, that as a child her role was very important in the family and she was to be treated in a very special way according to her grandparents. As I put her to bed and watched her fall asleep, I thought of how I was once again slightly insulted by my mother's instructions on how to care for my daughter, I thought every young mother must go through this type of thing. Then I realized that it may not be true; this experience may be unique to my culture in a sense, because the relationship between a Kohkom and her Nosisim (grandchild) is a special relationship of teaching and learning, and through this relationship I was taught to be a better parent. As I thought of the authority that my mother assumed when she spoke to me about how to

care for the physical, mental, and spiritual well-being of my child, I realized she did this in such a way as if she was explaining to me how I should care for her child. I realized my mother considered my child to be her child. As I watched my daughter curl into a ball under the blankets and finally fall asleep, I realized this was not only my child, this was also Kohkom and Mosom's child and it was my job to care for our child accordingly. My mother had explained to me many times that her mother and mother-in-law taught her in the same way and that we are to learn to be good mothers so that our children can fulfill their role of learning.

My personal narrative highlights how the child is central to community, and the ways in which co-caregivers help maintain the physical, mental, and spiritual well-being of the child. An important aspect of childrearing in Indigenous communities is the holistic approach of taking into consideration all aspects of the child's development, and this holistic development is done through the care of those in the extended family network. The following stories from community members exemplify the value of 'grandparents and siblings as co-caregivers of children', and the overall importance of extended family networks.

Sheila (34, married, mother of three children) explains how her mother was the primary caregiver of all her grandchildren when they were toddler age and pre-school age:

> So a big part of it is because my parents are here and my brothers and sisters and my husband's family are from here too. I just like all the support… if we didn't live here than I would probably have a hard time getting somebody to look after my kids if we had to go somewhere or do something. My mom's raised… eighteen or nineteen grandchildren and she's kept every single one of them until they were ready to go to school… She loves the company from them. Yeah, so she's raised us and then she's had them until they reached kindergarten. This is the first time actually this year…where we do the drop-off at daycare only if my mom's not around which is rarely but at least we have that just in case.

Sheila recognizes that if she were to raise a family in the city, she would have a hard time finding the support she receives from family. A grandmother that will provide childcare for grandchildren prior to entering school, allows her adult children to focus on work and family and to save substantially on daycare or caregiver costs. This kind of support from a grandmother is a

major resource in the community. In this way the grandmother becomes a major caregiver in the child's life and this follows the traditional Cree model of elders passing down knowledge to the children, and being primary teachers to the children.

Another community member that stayed in Wabasca because of the support she has in regards to childcare was Carla (30, married, mother of two children). She describes a system of sharing childcare she has established with family, "…we have my parents and my sister to help and we help each other". Carla goes on to explain that on occasion if her sister needs childcare she can help. For example, she will take care of her sister's youngest child while her sister takes her older niece to hockey practice. In exchange, Carla's sister will take Carla's children on another occasion. Carla explains that "we make a schedule around each other's schedule and we're constantly helping and… we're not alone, we have each other all the time". Carla also mentioned she has lifelong friends in Wabasca that can be available to provide childcare to her children and in exchange she can be there to help her friends out as well. Carla describes this system of sharing childcare as "family all over to help you and we look out for one another and help each other to make every situation easier".

Part of staying in the community for family is about the value placed on the relationship between child and grandparents. Carla describes how the children's grandparents act as parents and help with the children on a daily basis:

> I could stay after work till 6:00pm because I know my babies are taken care of by my mom and my dad and they're going to be fed supper and all this, I don't have to get up and say, 'oh my goodness I have to leave because I have to go get my kids' and I don't have to worry about that … that's how I was raised as a little girl, I remember always being with my Kohkom and Mosom everywhere, everywhere they went I wanted to go and that's where I was during my childhood mainly… picking berries with Kohkom and going pine cone picking with Kohkom and Mosom or going to on a little trip on a Sunday

to another reserve to visit. It was always Kohkom and Mosom helping and now that's what's happening with my girls, always Kohkom, and Mosom.

As a child Carla spent a great deal of her time being cared for and taught by her grandparents, and now her own children get to experience this same special relationship between child and grandparent. As well, due to all the childcare support she receives she is able to focus on her job. Carla values the intergenerational nurturing and learning that comes from elders.

Jennifer (25, married, mother of two children) believes if she didn't have children, she would probably try moving someplace else again to go to college, but she stays in Wabasca because she wants her children to have a relationship with their grandparents; she didn't have the opportunity to get to know her paternal grandparents. She explains the importance of grandparents:

I'd say for my girls I live really close to their grandparents… I'd just like for them to know them… myself, I didn't really know my dad's (parents)… I think I would have loved to know them, so I want my girls to know where they're from and how we live.

Without saying it, it seems she wants her children to maintain their roots by developing relationships with their elders and knowing about their Cree way of living. Jennifer also mentions that her mother choose to raise her in Wabasca so she could have a relationship with her family and her culture. In the following I expand on this choice to stay in Wabasca to maintain relationships with family.

5.3.2 Staying in the Community to Maintain Family Connections

I begin with the story of Sheila, who values her large extended family network. She lives in Wabasca on MD land with her husband and three children. She explained her large family was a very important reason why she decided to settle her family in Wabasca. Sheila has lived in

Wabasca on MD land most of her life. Her father is Non-Aboriginal and her mother is Bigstone Cree. She grew up with both parents and several siblings. After graduating high school in Wabasca, she moved to Edmonton to go to college to become an educator. After completing her post-secondary education, she moved back to Wabasca to work with children in the community. Even while living in Edmonton, she stayed with family, living with a sibling for one year, then with extended relatives in the city the second year. One of her main reasons for coming back to Wabasca were the strong ties of her large family and the other reason was to work with the First Nations children in the community. After returning to Wabasca, she got married and bought a home for her growing family. Both Sheila and her husband moved away for their post-secondary education and came back to work in the community as educators, and both cited family and working in community development as important reasons for coming home. Both had a sense of social responsibility and giving back to the community after receiving their educations.

Sheila describes the importance of staying in Wabasca for family because of the close relationships she has with her siblings and parents: "We're very close, we see each other almost every day if not the one day it would be the next; we have lots of get-togethers". She describes that for all special occasions, holidays or birthdays, she spends time with her parents, all of her siblings, their spouses and children; they have very large family gatherings. They are a large close-knit family. She explains that her experience as a working mother in the community is distinguished by support from her large family.

> I would have to say the family support, the closeness, the bond, the friendship because I come from a big family I find… if you have something that you're going through or something I just have to call one of my brothers or sisters or my parents and there's my support…my husband and I kind of have busy lives because he does so much for the community. There's a lot of volunteering and things like that and then for me with work

and then to cook and clean, and then homework, you know doing all these different things.

Due to the family support she receives, she has the option to stay at work an hour later, or she can take her son to hockey until late in the evening and not have to worry about childcare or preparing meals. The support she receives from her siblings and parents allows her to balance her job, childrearing, and volunteering.

Another similar story is Carla; she was raised in Wabasca with both parents and her sister on reserve. Her story also highlights how strong close knit family support networks have kept her in the community. Carla explains that she stayed in the community because of her close relationships with family and friends:

> The main reason for staying in Wabasca would be because of my family, it was hard to leave mom and dad and my sister... I tried to leave when I was 18, I ended up coming back because I felt most comfortable here, this was home… it was hard to even leave my Kohkom and Mosom because I was so close to them. You know they were like parents to me. So it was hard to leave them, I'd get lonely for them. And it was hard to leave childhood friends as well because going into a city you feel alone. And you come back home here, everybody knows you, you know everybody, it's a small community.

Carla had such close knit relationships with her parents, grandparents, sister and lifelong friends, that when she tried to move to the city as a youth she felt lost and alone. Her identity and sense of belonging was so entrenched in the relationships she built in the small community that for Carla the city was too large and isolating, and probably too foreign for her to thrive. However as an adult her reasoning for staying in Wabasca changed, although it is still tied to her strong family network.

> Now today it's hard to leave the reserve because I have a steady job and my husband has a steady job in the oilfield and he's trying to make his way up. I'm trying to gain my experience as a teacher here. If we were to up and move, I think it would be difficult. I wouldn't know where to turn or where to even begin to look for work. I need to work and

he needs to work. We have our piece of land here and our house. We established our own little home here. We're not renting, we have a mortgage here in Wabasca. So there are a lot of things. And my mom and dad are here, and they support me so much. You know they have my kids right now while I'm doing this interview, whenever I need somebody to pick up (my daughter) from daycare moms there.

As an adult Carla has established herself in the community. She has been able to establish a career through the support she receives from family, she gives back to the community through her teaching, and she has been able to buy a home in the community. The support of her extended family network has allowed her and her husband to establish themselves economically in the community.

Many of the parents in Wabasca described how they choose to stay in the community because of the availability of support they receive from parents, siblings and friends. Along a life course approach, this would be explained as the way in which available resources help shape the choices that individuals make. In this aspect, family acts as a resource to allow parents to balance childcare responsibilities with school and work. From an Indigenous perspective, grandparents are highly valued as teachers with lifelong wisdom and a resource in childrearing, and siblings also act as co-caregivers, in which the child is raised by the community. By raising children in a community of grandparent and sibling co-caregivers, mothers and fathers can maintain autonomy in the community by being able to focus on their other roles in the community. In the above examples, both Carla and Sheila can focus on their roles as educators in the community because of the support they receive from extended family. Also parents are able to participate in paid labour because of the support they receive from extended family, which allows families to maximize the wage-earning potential of young adults.

5.3.3 Building Healthy Relations in the City

Some of the community members in Edmonton were parents and they discussed moving

to the city in order to make a better life for their children. During their childhood and youth some

experienced instability because of different factors such as abuse, alcoholism, addictions,

unstable family relations, and the foster care system. For these community members, they had

the personal agency to move to the city to pursue an education and steady employment, which

was a part of creating stability in their own lives and in the lives of their children.

I begin with the story of a mother who left unhealthy family relations and moved to the

city to build a better life for her child. Louise (33, single, one child) lives in Edmonton with her

son. Her story spoke to the great deal of agency and resilience Indigenous women have over their

life courses. Her agency and self-determination have allowed her to change her life course and

become successful in school, work and family. She began her story by describing the instability

of her upbringing, going back and forth between parents:

> My parents never lived together…they divorced when I was two. My mom never lived on
> reserve, she always lived in towns and my dad lived on reserve (in
> Wabasca)…throughout the years of growing up, they sort of bounced us back and
> forth…till my dad just wouldn't allow us to go back to my mom.

These early experiences of bouncing between both parents homes and sometimes being in foster

care, led her into a path of addictions as a teenager. However, she overcame these addictions at a

young age by going to a treatment centre, which used traditional ceremonies, teachings from

elders and connecting with Indigenous culture as a way to healing.

But in her early twenties, she found herself in an abusive relationship with a boyfriend

while living in another Aboriginal community in Northern Alberta. When she became pregnant,

she was determined to leave the abusive relationship and moved to Edmonton. In the following

she explains this transition, which was motivated by giving her child a better life:

> I lived…for 5 years with my son's father and I was going through some things at the time with that relationship and needed to leave and didn't want to go back to my reserve and I just came to Edmonton and put myself in a shelter…Well I had already been here a lot visiting family before I decided to make that move but it was scary… I was motivated for my son, not to go backwards.

While at the women's shelter she was encouraged to go back to school. She began upgrading her

high school credits at a local college when she was accepted into a social work program. She

wanted to enter a field where she could help Aboriginal youth better their lives, and escape the

cycles of abuse. She completed a college diploma and quickly found employment with an

Aboriginal agency in the city.

She describes the importance of having stability in the home she is raising her son: "I

think before I had my son, there was no such thing as stability in my life, it was always on the

go, on the go, but having my son, throughout all these years that's one thing I've never not

showed him was stability". Throughout her son's life, they have lived in the same house and her

son has gone to the same school. She has purposely kept this stable environment for her son to

avoid the instability she experienced growing up.

I was astounded by the tremendous resilience and strength Louise had demonstrated in

overcoming addictions, abuse, and instability in family relations. I was amazed at how she is

now an Outreach Worker who guides youth and is part of the revitalization of traditional culture

in the city, while raising her son in a healthy stable environment. According to some life course

approach researchers, the stumbling blocks she faced in her early life should have prevented her

from completing an education, maintaining employment and raising a child successfully. For

example, using Cooke and McWhirter's model of an "accumulation of disadvantages" (Cooke and McWhirter 2011), someone like Louise would have too many disadvantages in her childhood and youth to have accomplished an education, entered a career and was raising a child in a stable environment. But according to Louise "my story is similar with all Aboriginals"; she explains, "I went through a lot of abuse when I was a kid and which followed with addictions and abusive relationships". Louise had the personal agency and resiliency to complete an education, to raise a child in a healthy environment, and to maintain traditional Indigenous culture and spirituality, despite many disadvantages in her early life. She also had the structural supports such as the treatment centre and the women's shelter she attended to help her along a more stable path. Next I tell the story of another mother that left to live in the city to get away from unhealthy family relations back home, and to raise her son in a healthy environment in the city.

Rebecca (28, single, one child) lives in Edmonton with her young child. Her story is one of resilience and agency as well. She was raised in a middle class home with both parents and two other siblings. However, she explains that she grew up in a strict Catholic home. Outside of the family, she appeared to have the perfect upbringing, in a lovely home and parents with successful occupations. However the strict middle class Catholic upbringing resulted in what she describes as "psychological abuse".

After graduating high school in Wabasca, she moved to Edmonton for school. Moving away for college was what her parent's expected but for her it was also a way to get out on her own. She explains, "I think I wanted to get away from my parents because they are very controlling… I was in a very strict home growing up… My dad's a very manipulative,

controlling man but he hides it very well…and in hindsight I was really lost back then". After a

year in Edmonton, she left college and moved back to her parents' home in Wabasca. At this

time she explains "I was into bad shit when I lived over here and nobody knows about that part

of my life" in the city, which she didn't specify, but later in the interview she mentioned being

involved with drinking and what she called "bad habits" in her youth. During this time she was

very "lost" and depressed, and she attempted suicide, and ended up in the hospital. After

spending some time at home to recover, her mother encouraged Rebecca to get out of the house

to overcome her depression. Her mother suggested she attend a life skills course at the

community college. Reluctantly, Rebecca attended the life skills program that, in the end, she

admits really helped in her recovery and finding direction in her life.

Eventually she went back to university to study psychology, but only went for one year.

She decided to move back to Wabasca to find work. While in Wabasca, she primarily worked at

"camp jobs"[x] for a couple years. After a few years of working in the camps, she eventually got a

steady position in local government in an administrative position. Around this time in her mid-

twenties, she had a baby while she continued to stay in Wabasca and work. She explains that she

stayed in the community because it was "comfortable" and provided "security" because her

parents could afford to help her out financially. She lived at her parent's home in Wabasca, and

then eventually had to move out to escape the psychological abuse and the threat of physical

violence from her father. There was a culminating incident outside of a public place where her

father was verbally abusive and attempted to physically harm her while her child was present.

She immediately contacted the RCMP; but they seemed to normalize the violence and

discouraged her from pressing charges against her father who was a respected member of the

community. Now that she has left her parents' home, she said "I'm totally on my own…I'm so

proud of myself". Although her parents encouraged her to get an education, and they were able to help her out financially, she described them as controlling. In this instance although family was a resource for financial support and housing, it came at the price of psychological abuse.

Rebecca left Wabasca to get away from the aggression and violence she experienced with her father, and she says "I don't want my son to grow up that way I grew up". Later in the interview she described the desire to become involved in community activities in the city, such as volunteering and sports, because "it's for my son, everything I do now is for my son". Then she goes on to describe the kind of life they have together in the city:

> I'm always a busy body when I'm at home, I don't ever just sit. I try and play with him and then cook supper and then play with him and then clean something then play with him. He's just says, "I'm running upstairs, I'm running downstairs" and he grabs me and he says, "mom, mom sit down, stay here". So I say "okay what?" He's like "Listen mom, I love you". I just killed myself laughing I was like "Okay son I love you too".

This story shows the warm, playful, loving home she is raising her son in. This story is in contrast to the violence and aggression she described in her own upbringing.

What Rebecca's story really speaks to is how colonialism and Christianity have the potential, in combination, to create very patriarchal, strict families, which aren't in line with traditional Indigenous egalitarian understandings of balanced family. During our interview, she didn't mention colonialism or residential schools; however the psychological trauma she experienced from a very controlling patriarchal father spoke volumes about how patriarchy has penetrated our community. Her choice to leave her parental home and raise her child in the city away from her family, speaks to the tremendous agency she has asserted, as well as the resilience she has in her spirit. Next I will tell the story of Jacob, a father who moved to the city to start his career over and build healthier family relations.

Jacob (34, common-law, six children) grew up on Bigstone Cree Nation reserve with both his parents and his siblings. He attended high school in Wabasca and the city, and at 18 he went to Northern Lake College to complete a college certificate in oilfield operations. He then entered the oil industry which was very lucrative. During this time he moved around quite a bit in Northern Alberta for work, sometimes returning to the Wabasca area, but mainly working in camp jobs. While working in the oil industry in his twenties, he entered a serious relationship and had two children. Although he had a fairly stable upbringing, once he entered the oil industry and became a father, the long periods of time away from his children created instability in their family relations.

Jacob had various reasons for moving around as a young adult, which was influenced by his cultural identity and the value he places on family. In the following he describes leaving the oil industry and moving to the city for a better life:

> I was looking at building that relationship with my kids but at the same time I was losing contact with back home, and if you're not in constant contact with back home it's like you've cut that root. You think you've cut it…there have been things that happened in the past ten years being in the city, experiences that have led me back to remember where I come from… Not just family but I also tradition and language and religion. Those are the things that are important…

At age 25 he decided to move back permanently to Edmonton to pursue a post-secondary education at NAIT. After leaving the oil industry he became more interested in a career that involved community development and Indigenous politics. Around this time his first marriage ended, and the children from this relationship lived in Edmonton with their mother. He chose to move to Edmonton to build a better relationship with these children because he felt he had lost out on watching them grow when he was away at work in the oilfield, working for long periods in remote areas and staying at work camps.

He has lived permanently in Edmonton for a decade. While in the city, he entered a

second serious relationship. He lives with his common-law wife and their children; they have

three children together, and three children from their previous relationships. He has a large

blended family, and raising his children and being present as a father has been his priority for

living in the city. Although he originally moved to Edmonton to be near his eldest children and

pursue an education, he was strategic in where he chose to settle his family. He has chosen to

live in the west end of Edmonton because it is near the West Edmonton Mall, which is a major

shopping hub, and is therefore easy to find for family from out of town. He explained, "…we

defer for this location to come to the West End just for that purpose of being convenient for my

folks because we want that relationship with my folks, my mom and dad". As well, he explains:

> … we had a lot of bad experiences when we were living on the north side with people
> rummaging through our garbage, police running in our backyard chasing a person. Yeah
> police taking them down in our backyard, tasering them, and ambulance and cops and
> everything. Kids waking up at night and just a bad experience for the kids. We really
> chose the west end because of our kids and it just so happened that there was an
> Aboriginal Head Start in our area so it really worked out well. The bus picks up my boy
> right in our driveway. There are some good schools in the area, and big parks. On the
> negative side, we've experienced traffic but it was to be expected…

He has settled in the west end where he finds it is more conducive to raising a family. He also

mentioned being very familiar with the whole city because his family travels to arenas all over

the city for his children to play games in the hockey league. Therefore, his relationship to the city

seemed to be tied to the well-being of his children and maintaining connections with family from

back home.

Jacob made the choice to leave the oil industry because of the long hours and days he had

to spend away from his children. He has chosen to be an active parent, by finding a career that

allows him to come home to his children every night and actively participate in extracurricular

activities with them. He felt he lost a lot of time with his eldest children in all those years he was in the oil industry. He also described how the oil industry has a number of negative influences, such as drugs, and alcohol and partying, which aren't conducive to raising a healthy family. Ultimately, he made a choice to get away from all the negative factors of working in the oil industry. He admits the pay in the oil industry was excellent, but it wasn't worth the sacrifice of this personal health and the health of his family. In the following I extend on this idea of moving to the city to build healthy family relations by discussing some of the single childless community members that participated in this research and their experiences of being good aunties.

5.4 FAMILY AS CENTRAL: AUNTIES BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONS

Although most of the community members interviewed in Edmonton were single and many did not have any children, this did not mean they didn't have family connections. In fact, since these individuals with no children had fairly stable occupations, they were able to act as aunties and uncles, support their large family networks back home in Wabasca, and act as mentors to family members in the city. In the following two stories, both Deborah and Tracy initially settled in Edmonton to go to school, and then to work in the city, but many of their choices of where to live and work have been influenced by their relationships with extended family members. Although I focus on women's stories here, there were men such as Greg who played active roles in their families as uncles and mentors to younger indigenous men in the community.

Deborah is a family support worker from an Aboriginal organization in Edmonton. She is 32, single, and has no children but she comes from a very large close-knit family from three different First Nations communities. During her upbringing, she was divided between nations,

her mother being from Bigstone Cree Nation, her father from Lubicon Lake Nation, and relatives from Driftpile First Nation. Although she has membership with her father's First Nation she identifies with being from Wabasca because she has close family ties to her mother's family and her Kohkom in Wabasca. Her parents separated when she was a child and she lived with her mother for most of her childhood. Deborah comes from a large blended family; her parents had three children together (including Deborah). Then her father had other children with his new spouse and her mother had other children with her new spouse. In total Deborah has ten siblings.

When I asked which community Deborah identifies with, she explained the following:

> For some reason it's always Wabasca, even though that's not my home community. That's my mom's community so I guess I associate more with my mom's side of the family. But Edmonton is my community, because that's where I was born and raised, that's where I met all my friends, it is where my career is, that's where I went to school. So I guess Edmonton would be my community but in regards to family my community would be Wabasca.

For Deborah, community and her sense of belonging are complicated. Her friendships and career are in Edmonton, but her family is in Wabasca, so she is a part of both communities. Deborah had a strong sense of community and obligation to provide support to her siblings and their children, and to her mother. Although she is associated with three different First Nations communities, her sense of belonging and identity are tied to the community her mother is from because that is the source of support and the extended family network that she contributes to the most.

As a child, her mother moved around, so she went to school in Slave Lake, Wabasca, Peace River, High Prairie and Edmonton. She was attending high school in Edmonton when one of her younger sisters had a baby, and she volunteered to move to Wabasca to help with the baby and go to high school there. She explains it was transition moving from the city where there was constant noise and busyness, to the reserve where it was quite and dark at night. While in

Wabasca she and her sister lived near their Kohkom, and many cousins, which made her very comfortable in the community again.

After graduating high school, she moved to Edmonton for university. However, after one year of university, she couldn't continue on. At that time one of her sister's lost her boyfriend to a tragic death in Wabasca, so Deborah moved back to Wabasca to comfort her sister and grieve the loss of a friend. She ended up staying for a year because she got a job there. After a year in Wabasca she moved back to Edmonton for school and work. She has stayed in Edmonton for over a decade working as a family support work while trying to complete her university degree part-time. About a year prior to the interview she was living in British Columbia to care for her mother and she was going to university there. She recently moved back to Edmonton where she is back at her old job.

Deborah says that family has always influenced where she lives. She elaborates on the importance of this below.

> I never realized how much of a tight knit family we are, me and my sisters and my mom… Anytime someone is sick or someone passes away or anytime someone needs to be there I'm the type of person that will drop what I'm doing and go back home and be there with my family and no matter what. When I moved to BC I ended up living with my mom because she was living over there…I applied for school and she told me I could go stay there while I was going to school…And then in Wabasca… that's where all my mom's family is from so it was nice to be around mom's family. And then in Edmonton my sisters were over here, so I always had family around.

For most of her adult life she has been working consistently in Aboriginal organizations in family support and the criminal justice system. She has a very strong sense of duty to the family and community. As I examined her life course, in which she mentioned several times her love of learning and education, I was puzzled as to why she has not yet completed her university degree. It seems she has had several breaks in her post-secondary education to care for family during times of difficulty or tragedy. She seems to be a major support in her family; however I

159

questioned how much this very intelligent, determined person had to sacrifice for her family. As she explained her willingness to drop everything to help family, she seemed to be one of those 'aunties' we often hear about in the Aboriginal community, that aunty with a steady job, and a stable home, who is always there to support others. Since Deborah had been single with steady employment, she was a valuable resource in her family for moral support, emotional support, and financial support. However it seems she depleted her resources caring for others, which caused her to be highly mobile and not dedicate enough resources to complete her education.

For Tracy (34, single, no children), her resiliency was in her choice to move to the city to get an education, to remain steadily employed, and to remain single without any children to avoid unhealthy family relations. She lived a very independent lifestyle. She focused on maintaining healthy relationships with her siblings and her father on reserve, and her extended family.

One of the most interesting stories Tracy told was how she worked for the same Aboriginal group home for years, and after she left the organization she continued being a caregiver to some of these children because she knew the system was "messed up" and neglected their emotional needs:

> Still until this day I'm close to a family. I worked at a house of five kids, all siblings from 3-11, that was my shift for one full year so I was there when they came home from school and I was there when they went to bed. Every day for a year and I spent Christmas with them. For years I didn't spend holidays in Wabasca because I was their caregiver…

Tracy took on the role of an aunty for these children from the group home; she spent holidays with these children and cared for them as if they were her own kin. Similar to the way in which Deborah described dropping everything to care for her younger siblings if there was a birth or death or a family member going through a difficult time, Tracy also showed dedication to being a support for others in the community. Both Deborah and Tracy had similar stories, they came

from homes where their parents separated and they were raised between the blended families of their mothers and fathers. They both had several siblings, whom they rely on for support and whom they provide support for as well. Both grew strength, an understanding of Indigenous womanhood, and learned responsibility for family and community through strong relationships with their Kohkom. Both have worked in human services positions in urban Aboriginal organizations serving Aboriginal youth, offenders, and those more disadvantaged.

In the following, Anderson describes the roles of "magnificent mothers" and aunties in the Aboriginal community that care for others in the community, even if they do not biologically produce children themselves:

> In Aboriginal ideology of motherhood, all women have the right to make decisions on behalf of the children, the community and the nation. The Aboriginal ideology of motherhood is not dependent on whether, as individuals, we produce children biologically. Women can be mothers in magnificent ways. I have heard stories of magnificent mothers who have adopted children as well as adults and provided them with the guidance and love that they needed…Other magnificent mothers are those who do not have any biological children of their own but take on the role of aunties. They do not consider this to be at odds with how they understand themselves or within an Aboriginal ideology of motherhood. In the Aboriginal world, mother, auntie and grannie are fluid and interchangeable roles, not biologically defined identities. (Anderson 2000: 171).

Although some community members in the city may have been single without any children, they continued to maintain strong relationships with family members back home in their Indigenous community and to build strong relations with those in the Indigenous community in the city. They continued to carry out traditional Indigenous roles in the community as "magnificent mothers" and aunties, and in the case of male mentors like Greg (discussed later in the chapter), "uncles", who did not have children but cared for others in the community. I continue in discussing this idea of building healthy family networks in a later section by discussing instances where community members describe their dedication to the idea of community in general. For now I continue my discussion of family as central by discussing the

importance of cultural practices and cultural identity in maintaining and building family

relations.

5.5 FAMILY AS CENTRAL: CULTURAL PRACTICES AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

Paulina lives in Wabasca with her common-law partner and their three children. Her story

illustrates how staying in the community means maintaining close family relations and cultural

practices. During the interview, she described being very proud of being from the reserve and

being raised on reserve: "I've lived on reserve my whole life. My dad is from reserve and my

mom is from Wabasca…" She explained that by being on reserve, she is able to be near family

and to be near her "roots". At the time of the interview, she was working in local government

administration and enjoyed being able to stay in the community for work. However, as she

explains, her main reason for staying on reserve is because of a sense of home and family:

"Family, home, all my family is here, my kids".

For Paulina, staying on reserve allows her to continue in her own lifelong learning

journey of traditional Cree women's practices of food preparation. In the following she discusses

the importance of this traditional knowledge:

> It keeps me at my own roots. I'm still learning. Staying home I get to still help with the older people with meat cutting, the traditional foods… like meats and fish and duck but its important…. I didn't skin it but I can cut up a moose, cut up the meats and divide the meats because… you have to use certain parts of the moose for a certain parts of the meat like front meat and stew meat, dry meat. I've prepared duck. I make duck soup. I can prepare fish ready to be smoked.

She mentioned how her mother and a close friend taught her these traditional practices of

preparing food. For Paulina, family means maintaining relationships with older women who can

teach her traditional practices. In this sense her traditional teachers are her kin. She explains she

became close friends with one of her traditional teachers when she was 16: "She was my ex's mom and then we all became close… and we just stayed friends and she has taught me lots".

For Paulina staying on reserve means she can choose to have a stronger connection to family and culture. Those lessons she learns from elders can be passed onto her children. There is a maintaining of culture and passing down of culture by staying in Wabasca. It seems Paulina has a strong commitment to her cultural traditions and passing traditional women's knowledge from one generation to another, thereby challenging western understandings of learning.

> It helped me in good ways because in what I know I can pass onto my children. I wish there was more. Like I wish I could speak Cree better. And keeping in touch with my relatives and all our family events, like weddings and funerals. And we're taught always to help so I like to stay here. I like staying home and helping the community, my relatives.

Even in regards to maintaining the Cree language, she explains that growing up "all my relatives spoke Cree" and it wasn't until she entered elementary school that she had to start speaking English, which saddens her because now as an adult she recognizes she is less fluent than her older siblings and parents. She recognizes that the Cree language is important and in order to learn to become more fluent in Cree she must learn from her family and elders in the community.

> The language is important. I don't want to lose that…I can't always speak it but I understand it and I could probably write it better than…I can speak in Cree.

Paulina was similar to other community members I spoke with, who had a desire to speak better Cree, as they understood the language to hear it but were not comfortable enough to speak it. I also found it significant to note that Paulina could write the Cree language better than she could speak it. This highlights how the Cree language is taught as a written language in schools when

perhaps the oral tradition of the language should be the key aspect of learning the language. It seems for Paulina that staying on reserve is also about resistance to western ideals of assimilation and challenging the historical trauma of colonialism. By choosing to stay on reserve, she can learn traditional women's knowledge and maintain traditional Indigenous family networks.

Isaac is a Metis man living off-reserve; he maintains cultural practices of hunting and fishing in the traditional territory around Wabasca. Isaac (33, married, three children) lives on MD land in the Wabasca lakes area with his family, but he grew up near the Sandy Lake area on MD land. He is from the small Metis community that is situated in the Sandy Lake area. He has never lived on reserve because he is a non-status Indian, and he grew up in the Sandy Lake area with his parents and his siblings. He exclaimed "I'm not Treaty so that's why I don't live on a reserve and I've lived on MD land most of my life". But in discussing his personal choice to stay in the Wabasca area, the main reason his young family chooses to stay in Wabasca was to stay connected to his family. Most of his extended family is located in the Sandy Lake area, as well as in Wabasca and Slave Lake area: "My wife and I want to live here because this is our home, we have roots here, and our families are from here". He goes on to say, they don't want to go somewhere else because they want to build from the roots they already have in the community.

For Isaac maintaining his roots means staying close to his grandparents, following in their traditions, and feeling a sense of connections to others in the community:

> We know who our grandparents are, we know who they are, we know where they live, we know what they do from day to day, I know what they used to do because we copied them… and how they grew up and how it's changed… I guess because when my wife and I were talking about…how life would be different from the city…we'd feel so disconnected from everybody else around us. And when you're in the city you feel that you're a minority... and you're always aware of that…

He describes how he hunts in the areas his grandparents have taught him to hunt and he sets nets in the same place his grandparents' harvested fish in the Sandy Lake. Elders provide him a connection to the traditional land and practices. His fear is that his young family would feel a disconnection and marginalization if they were in the city, whereas in the Wabasca area, he has a sense of belonging in his extended family and a connection to the land. For Isaac, staying in the community of Wabasca means staying close to their roots in family and to traditional cultural practices tied to the land.

Similarly, Emily (33, single, mother of one) learned traditional cultural practices from her elders when she was growing up in Wabasca. However, since moving away she has struggled to maintain these in the city. She describes this inability to maintain traditional culture in the city:

> I'm forgetting from my childhood, how to make hides, how to set nets, and fillet fish and all that stuff…My Kohkom and Mosom used to catch fish and so I used to help fillet fish and scale… it's like I'm forgetting…my parents were against me doing the dance, like native dancing…they didn't want to support me, they were totally against it…my dad's family are very strong Catholic…

Emily felt that her parents had been colonized to believe traditional cultural practices are evil. So in addition to losing a connection with the cultural subsistence practices which are connected to the land, which she learned from her grandparents on reserve, her parents prevented her from maintaining traditional arts and spiritual practices because of the influence of the Catholic church.

In contrast to this story of loss of cultural practices, quite a few of the community members in Edmonton described a revitalization of cultural practices while living in the city. In fact, both Emily and another woman mentioned studying Cree while in university and this being the way they maintained their language. As well, some community members that worked for

Aboriginal organizations discussed the importance of attending ceremonies and sweat lodges, and seeking the advice of elders as an important part of their work in the community. I will expand on this discussion in the next section where community members discussed building community in the city, and how cultural revitalization is a part of this network building.

Next I discuss the contrasting story of Melissa (30, married, mother of two), a community member that was not defined by her cultural identity. She lives off-reserve in Wabasca, but her cultural identity does not seem to play a significant role in her deciding where she lives, and her identity seems more tied to avoiding a First Nations identity. Melissa begins her story by noting, "I live in Wabasca, I'm off reserve, and I've always lived off reserve". She explains that she has never had to rely on Bigstone Cree Nation for housing, and that she prefers living on MD:

> Well when I grew up, I lived with my mom... She had a house on the MD land and then when I moved out and I had a family... We were renting a trailer, and then we decided to get a mortgage, and we always stayed there, been there for 9 years now… Well, I never depended on Bigstone Housing to help with my housing; I guess I never needed it. My spouse, well both of us, worked together in getting our housing. I think I would rather live on MD than on reserve anyway… I think it's more uncontrolled but its stable, on that end I guess. That's the way I see it… like living with my mom off reserve kind of made me want to stay off reserve I guess.

It sounds like her preference for living in the municipality is because she felt the reserve would be too controlled, meaning under the colonial regulation of the Indian Act, and that MD is just as stable as the reserve, and you get to own your own home. If you live on MD land, it likely means you own your own land, you own a house, you have a mortgage, and therefore you have a job which allows you to pay that mortgage. Steady employment and home ownership provide stability for her family. Melissa and her husband both had steady employment in well paying jobs. Most of the community members interviewed described a sort of pride in being able to get a stable job and buy a home on MD. It was a major milestone for building a family in the

community, but it also appeared to be a sign of social class in that only those with stable employment and a reasonable income could attain this goal. Although those Status Indians living on reserve are also able to build their own houses on reserve and get a mortgage, there is still may be a stigma attached to living in First Nations housing, which some may view as communally owned housing.

She later described in the interview that her cultural identity hasn't really been a concern since she lived in a community with others of the same cultural background. In the following she explains how her family was reinstated with Indian Status, and besides the benefits it really didn't make a difference to her identity:

> I was 21 when I finally got in as a Status Indian, my mom was waiting for probably 20 years to become a Status Indian, and we were Bill C-31. But becoming a Status Indian has lots of benefits; I guess with the health benefits like getting your eye examination and those are the advantages. But we don't depend on being a Status Indian to get housing or whatever from the Band, not relying on it that much.

> I felt the same. I didn't feel no different being a Status Indian. And there were no differences for me. I didn't feel like I was part of this group because now I'm a Treaty. I felt like the same.

Melissa explained that besides this interview she hasn't really been asked about her cultural identity. She didn't have the experience of being an ethnic minority in a community, since she has grown up surrounded by her own people and has never lived anywhere else. As Melissa explained her life course she didn't feel her race, class or gender influenced her life's trajectory. However, it is clear in her family history of once being Bill C-31 and living off-reserve, and not relying on the First Nation for housing, that her family's identity has been shaped by this experience in which they have primarily lived on MD land and had pride in owning their own homes off-reserve.

167

I now go from discussing the experience of living among a majority of Indigenous people, to living among a majority of white people and being an Indigenous minority. Trevor (23, single, no children) had a highly mobile childhood where he lived in several different foster care homes away from his family. When I asked Trevor about his experience of moving around as a foster child and specifically if people knew he was Native when he was moving between these small rural white towns, he explained the following:

> I've been in a lot of homes but you never actually think or feel like it's your home because you just get kicked out of it or moved for some stupid reason. So anyway I'm trying to find my place.

> Yeah the white people knew I was Native and the Native people called me white. So when I was growing up in Wabasca basically everyone called me *moniyaw* (white person). But then when I went to work… they'd start making Native jokes because they could see I'm Native.

During our interview I sensed his optimism of finding his place in the world, but also a veiled sadness he carried from all the years of moving around. He described what it was like to be a fair-skinned Native kid being moved around to different communities. He didn't feel a sense of belonging among white people or Native people. He kind of balanced between two worlds growing up as a Native child in white homes.

When asked about his cultural identity, he explained he was a proud Native person: "I'd say I'm Native…The way I would define being Native is an overwhelming feeling of pride with a little bit of stubbornness".

Growing up, Trevor described how his mother would explain to him that Native people were looked down upon by white people in society:

> …the way my mom portrayed it is people who just don't care about our race, as Natives, like we're garbage.

> …my mom used to say 'white people think we are shit' so I always tried to prove her wrong so I tried to take pride in being Native and prove them wrong… I still want people to know I'm Native.

Yet, when we began to discuss the Cree language, he explained how it was difficult to maintain:

> Yeah I know a little bit of Cree not a lot just the things that I have in my memory bank from my mom like *astam* (come here) or *astam napesisak* (meaning come here my boys).

> I wish I did know Cree. I was always interested in Native culture but…I grew up in foster care with a bunch of people I wasn't related too.

Trevor has a complicated cultural identity because of the years he spent in foster care and due to his broken relationships with family members. He describes being estranged from his brothers because they were involved in crime and gangs. What he has learnt from his mother is that Native people are looked down upon in society. The bit of Cree he knows are the imperative phrases, such as "come here my boys", which speaks to a time in his life when he was with his mother. The foster care system has acted a colonial power in is life, breaking the bonds he once had with his mother and brothers, and breaking the connection he once had with his language and culture. Although the foster care system has dismantled his family relations, through his own stubbornness he has made the choice to be proud of being a Native person.

In these stories it is clear that cultural identity and cultural practices are tied to family relations. For some, staying in the traditional territory around Wabasca and Bigstone Cree Nation allows community members to maintain roots with elders, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural practices. And moving away from the familial and cultural roots cuts the ties to maintaining cultural practices such as hunting, harvesting, and a relationship to the land. It is also clear that Indian Status and Non-Indian Status determined where some lived in the community

169

and not being a Treaty Indian meant living off-reserve. Interestingly enough, for someone like Melissa who grew up among her people, exploring her cultural identity was not something she examined since she grew up among a majority of Indigenous peoples. However, her recent reinstatement of Indian Status did not change the core of her cultural identity; however a life time of living off-reserve meant she identified more with not relying on the First Nations for housing and the pride she held in home ownership meant she identified with the independence her mother instilled in her. Melissa lived off-reserve because her mother was Bill C-31 without full status, and Trevor was also segregated from other Indigenous peoples due to the foster care system. Trevor grew up among white foster homes, away from his family, his culture and his language. Yet he maintained a pride in his identity as a Native person, in resistance to the racist stereotypes of Native people. It seems the cultural identity of community members was strongly tied to family relations and the ways in which colonialism impacted those relations. I now move on to discuss understandings of community, which is a part of family relations and extended family networks.

5.6 UNDERSTANDINGS OF COMMUNITY

5.6.1 Community as Caring, Sharing and Reciprocity

Some community members described an understanding of community that is associated with caring for others and receiving care in return. Sheila explains to her community means helping others, especially caring for children and elders, and those that are sick or in need. She explains a reciprocal understanding of community support:

> The community is where we work with each other or help each other out when there are people in need…to try to make where you live a better place to live, especially for the

children… Mainly for the children or the older people as well, but just to lend a hand to someone else if they need it. If someone's sick I know our community will help where they'll put a big event or something to raise money…so I know there have been lots of those or even funeral costs. I always see these things at the stores (in town) to donate money…if it's somebody that you're not close to; there are always these jars to help the families out if they don't have much to cover funeral expenses.

So her understanding of family, and caring for others extends to the community level, to helping and caring for people you may not even be closely related too. In a way, the community consists of all your relations, close relatives, extended family, and those related by proximity.

Paulina comes from a similar large extended family. She explained that both her parents have very large families, and she grew up with several siblings. In this environment she learned the value of helping family and being a valued member of the family. Paulina provides the comparison that staying on reserve is about "teaching, and learning and togetherness and helping each other" and to move away from the community means "you just feel stuck and lost". Her understanding of family also extends to her understanding of community. To Paulina, community means a place you can raise your children and care for elders, "where everybody comes together in the time of need, whether it's celebrating or going through a bad time and growing". Community is defined by family, caring for children and elders, and helping those in need, those that are by your side in your learning journey of life.

For Carla, family and community are intertwined, and community is about being from a small place comprised of families. Community is "where everybody knows each other, everybody knows who your mom is, who your dad is, who your grandparents are and which family you belong to". Knowing your own family and knowing other families in the community creates a sense of a larger family in the community, where 'we are all relations'. Community can be helpful and different families in the community become known for being different types of

resources. She describes the community as a network of different families, so that if you know

which family a certain individual comes from, then you can tap into those resources, as she

explains:

> …this family has a tire shop so let's go there because I need a new tire… or this person's dad knows how to make drums… if you're looking for specific things or this person makes moose hides so if you want to find out about hides let's just go talk to them and if you don't know it's easy to ask because it's a small enough community somebody will know somebody who does something.

According to Jennifer, community means "a big family", for example when something

happens in Wabasca such as a death or illness the "big family" comes together. She believes

community is about helping each other out, and she gave an example of how the community

raised funds to take a high school sports team to an American tournament. When she witnessed

this coming together of community, she said "I think if we were to be in a city or a bigger place,

it would have been really harder to fundraise that much money". Community is also about

friendships, she said:

> 90% of my friends live here… they're actually a big part of my life, not a day goes by where I don't talk to one of my friends or hang or visit or something. We're always constantly doing something together and I think if I didn't have the friends that I have I wouldn't even be here…

It is fascinating that she had maintained the same friendships her whole life from the community,

in contrast to those that have moved from the reserve to city, then between different cities. I got a

warm sense of belonging, as she described having lifelong friends from the same community.

Although Tracy didn't always feel a sense of belonging in Wabasca because she bounced

between her mother and father as a child, she had a strong sense of community. Tracy described

how "people make the community" and as a group of "people that come together as a whole to

fight". Tracy gave the example of when one of her younger siblings died in a tragic accident as a teenager and how the community in Wabasca supported her at that time. During the week of her brother's death, wake and funeral, she says:

> I don't even remember it was just like a horrible nightmare and I don't even know how I ate or drank coffee or washed my face and it was just people coming and picking me up and feeding me and driving me somewhere and I think that's where I say my roots are, because people like that, they always accept me when I come home, they always hug me and love me.

So although she often felt she did not fit in within the community of Wabasca, it seems in some difficult times in her life she was able to return to the community and be loved and accepted.

Overall some community members described the positive aspects of community to include an extended network of families that live in close proximity, that community is about sharing, caring, reciprocity, learning, and togetherness. Essentially community is defined by the strong relationships that are built, and the support and resources available to members of that community.

5.6.2 Community as Gossip, Violence, and Unhealthy Relations

However, community members also highlighted the negative dark aspects of community. Carla explains being from a small community "doesn't necessarily mean that everybody is all loving and caring for one another". There are also negative aspects of being part of a small community, such as gossip in which "somebody can make a rumour about you and the whole community would hear about it". During our interview, we discussed a recent violent crime that took place that was in local media. There were three potential witnesses, and therefore three different stories. These different perspectives of the story created gossip and divided the community. As we discussed this recent event and all the gossip surrounding it, Carla

173

commented, "story after story after story and in a small community it's like who's to say what is true… and people like to talk when sometimes they don't even know the facts!" According to Carla, the ugly side of being part of a close knit community is the potential to be hurt by others, whether through gossip or violence. Indeed, the worst aspect of community among Indigenous peoples is the potential for violence and abuse due to the intergenerational trauma of colonization.

One community member that left Wabasca due to the violence she experienced, and moved her family to the city was Rebecca. She described a violent incident in which her father tried to attack her in a public place. When I asked Rebecca to explain how her experiences have been similar or different from other women in the community, she expanded on how violence is a part of life:

> I guess with the incident with my dad I guess obviously it's not out of the norm for people to act with aggression towards each other. I think that's a similarity that I have with everybody, everybody has violence in their life it seems in Wabasca. Like I don't want my son to grow up the way I grew up. I don't allow alcohol in my house. I don't want him to grow up seeing the shit I've seen… Everyone thinks I just had it all peachy growing up, nobody really knows me.

Rebecca felt that aggression and violence were the norm for people in the community. She illustrated this in the story of her father's threat of violence and how he was a very controlling man, and how she experienced psychological violence growing up. Recall that a major reason for living in the city is because she doesn't want her son to grow up experiencing the same violence and aggression she experienced. Another reason she mentioned moving away from the community was to leave the unhealthy work environment at her office in Wabasca. She describes being happy to leave a volatile workplace. The unhealthy relationships in her family and in her workplace, led her to make the stand for her child to be raised someplace else.

174

Tracy also described in detail, the negative cycle of abusive unhealthy relationships and the community gossip when she was back home. She described how "people are so influenced by other people … people don't have anything to do rather than sit and talk about other people all the time". Tracy asserted that she wouldn't waste her time gossiping about others. She recognizes how unhealthy gossip can be, and she would rather spend her time in the city going for walks or spending quality time with friends, distancing herself from the negative relationships and gossip back home.

She describes the cycle of abuse, of falling into a bad relationship at a young age, being trapped in an unhealthy relationship, and having children and teaching those unhealthy relationships to the next generation.

> And it's just that cycle that you stay with your boyfriend twenty years but you break up every month and your kids see it. Now we see kids over there still at their boyfriends but their boyfriends are cheating and now they're on their third kid and it's just this rampant dysfunctional cycle, they just don't know any better right, they're taught it. And I just always knew that 'oh I didn't want to be a part of it'. I love my people, I love my friends and I love my home but even being with an Aboriginal man I'm just like there's no feeling there…

> It's where I came from. We both came from the same place. Like for the dude, was his past that he learned that in his family? Did he see that all the time? Did he see his uncles or brothers, are they cheating and having a bunch of kids and all living at Kohkom's, did he see that? …I think it stems from where we grew up and the people that influenced us.

Growing up, she realized she didn't want to carry on in a dysfunctional cycle of unhealthy relationships. Listening to her explain the negative cycle of unhealthy relationships and gossip back home on the reserve, I saw how Indigenous families can fall into these cycles of unhealthy relationships. For some that experienced the brunt of the violence, abuse, and trauma, some choose to move away to the city to try to build healthy community and networks in the city.

5.6.3 Community and Building Networks in the City

The relationship Emily has with her family has been contentious, which is part of the

reason she is in the city. She explains that part of the reason she stays in the city is due to bad

childhood experiences on reserve.

> My childhood wasn't the greatest childhood, my dad was an alcoholic who was also very
> abusive and his dad was also very abusive. So I have a lot of bad memories so that's part
> of the main reason why I don't live in Wabasca or even want to be there. And when I do
> go, I usually only want to go for a short time then leave… I kind of like having some
> distance from my family.

Emily later describes in the interview that the alcohol and abuse she experienced as a

child has now affected her current generation, and as an adult some of her family members on

reserve continue in these unhealthy lifestyles. Living in Edmonton for most of her adult life, she

now described being a part of a network of Indigenous women that left to the city for school, and

she keeps in contact with these women. Yet when asked if she had a community, she answered

with the following:

> I don't really feel a sense of community in Edmonton, it's different, and that's one thing I
> kind of miss about being in Wabasca. You have that sense of closeness and when you
> need help there's always someone there that can help you or be willing to. And in the city
> you don't really feel that so much because there are so many more people and you're just
> one person and you don't really know everybody in Edmonton, whereas in Wabasca you
> pretty much know everybody or everyone knows who your parents are.

> I don't know if I really have one. I guess in a way work would kind of be a community, I
> spend so much time with them… Probably the people in my office, they were kind of all
> around, when I kicked out (my child's) dad and became a single parent so they have been
> supportive and giving a lot of advice or just there to listen to me vent sometimes.

It seems her most reliable source of community was the community of professionals she has

worked with for over a decade. In a way, her focus on career and work has resulted in her main

community being her professional community. Especially since she has had to distance herself

from negative family memories and unhealthy family members, this may have drawn her closer

to those relationships she has built in her professional community.

Similarly, Greg sees a community network that exits in the city, but it's not as strong as

the one in Wabasca. In the city Greg is part of the urban Aboriginal community, where he has

many friends:

> Well there's a big Aboriginal community in this city and most of my friends are
> Aboriginal and we hang out in the city, we socialize. There are some cultural activities in
> the city, not that many but they have round dances.

Greg has a sense of community with his relatives in the city and his friends in the city. He

explained that most of his friends outside of work are Aboriginal. In fact, I witnessed this when I

attended a few Idle No More rallies in Edmonton. Greg always came with several relatives and

friends from the Aboriginal community, and he seemed to be able to rally a community around

him at protests. In attending these rallies alongside him, he seemed to have a strong sense of

Aboriginal rights, believing in our rights to education, healthcare and environmental protections.

Working with Aboriginal youth in Edmonton, Louise has a strong sense of community

and values the healing power of maintaining traditional cultural practices. For Louise,

community means "supporting everybody around you in your community" and "assisting them

with anything they need". Similar to those on reserve, Louise defines community in the city as

providing support and help to those around you. The Aboriginal agency where she works keeps

her connected to the urban Aboriginal community. Through her work, she is able to keep

connected to ongoing cultural events in and around the city, such as round dances, pow-wows

and sweat lodges. She explains that growing up she wasn't raised around traditional ceremonies

and practices, and she says "it had to take for me to live in Edmonton to find my culture…when I

moved to Edmonton, I started going to ceremonies and sweats around the city". Through her involvement in the Aboriginal community, she now has developed relationships with elders that she goes to for spiritual advice and for her own healing.

For those that left Wabasca and the reserve to get away from unhealthy family relations and traumatic experiences in the community, coming to the city meant building a new healthy network of relationships. For some coming to the city was an attempt to stop the negative cycles of abuse back home. Yet, there were some that maintained close ties to healthy family relationships back home too. For some like Louise, building Indigenous community in the city meant returning to traditional healing practices and ceremonies and building relations with elders. For some of the community members, especially those that worked for Aboriginal organizations, their community building had to do with cultural revitalization in the urban community.

In the next sections, I shift focus to another aspect of family, the challenges of balancing family responsibilities with school and work. I begin by discussing the theme of bouncing, bouncing between different locations, and bouncing between different family relations. This bouncing is part of the delicate challenge of balancing family responsibilities. Bouncing sets the family off balance and creates further challenges for the modern Indigenous family to achieve balance.

5.7 BOUNCING AND BALANCING AMONG FAMILY AND BETWEEN LOCATIONS

I begin with the story of a young mother that bounced between city and reserve as a youth, bounced between different career paths, and bounced between different abusive

relationships, before finding balance among her extended family network in Wabasca. Marie grew up on reserve with both her parents and her four siblings. As a teenager she began to venture out of the community to pursue her education. She moved away in grade 10 to go to high school in Edmonton, and then returned to attend the last few months of grade 12 in Wabasca. However, she didn't complete enough credits to graduate from high school so she went back to Edmonton a few months later to enter an upgrading program. She lived primarily in Edmonton from ages 17 to 21. She describes wanting to leave the reserve at a young age:

> I didn't really want to be on the reserve, to tell you the truth… Just because of the stuff I seen growing up… You know like alcohol, you see a lot of that but then when I was in the city I saw a lot of that there too anyways, so I don't know. I just didn't want to be over here. I wanted to be somewhere big at the time. I think I'm stuck here now.

Marie described wanting to leave the reserve to get away from influences of alcohol and to pursue an education in the city, ironically when she was in the city, she found herself exposed to the same negative influences. And as much as she wanted to get away from the reserve as a teenager, as an adult in her 30's she found herself "stuck" on reserve. In her mid-twenties she moved to another Alberta city for a year with her two young children and her common-law partner until they split up. When she moved back to the reserve, she inherited a house from her family, and her family renovated the home for her and her children. She is now attending Northern Lakes College in Wabasca. During this interview, I sensed she faced quite a bit of marginalization in school and work. She has gone back to school a few times over the past ten years and has not completed a post-secondary program. This is partly due to drinking in her youth, abusive relationships, becoming a single mother, and the loneliness she feels when she has tried to pursue an education in the city. Most of her work experiences have been in precarious work in the service industry or lower end administrative positions. Due to this

marginalization, I sensed she didn't feel her story was worth telling but it proved valuable as a story of resilience. As a mother of two children, her personal goal is to achieve an education for the betterment of her children. On reserve, she has the support of her family to complete school. Her family is a major resource for childcare and moral support.

As a single mother, Marie also chooses to stay on reserve because she has a home that gives her stability and balance. She explains, "I have my own house, I always think if I was to move somewhere else it would be hard because money wise, I'm having a hard time even here and I'm on reserve". Marie lives in close proximity to her parents and siblings. In the past, she had a difficult time without her family when she tried to live in the city. She even explains that her family worried about her and didn't feel she would be as well taken care of in the city. In this sense, her family feels an obligation to be close to her in order take care of her and her children.

If she was to move someplace far away again, Marie said she would be lonely for family again because as she says, "I am really close to my family". The last time she moved away she was about four hours driving distance from her family, and she rarely got to see them. She says, when she lived in the city, "No one ever came… if I was to move further I really wouldn't see anybody". Her children are especially close to their Mosom and it was difficult for her children to be away from their grandfather. Although Marie has made a few attempts to move to urban centres to pursue her education, it seems on reserve she has the best resources to give her some balance so she may reach her goals.

Next I tell the story of Trevor. He experienced a more extreme version of bouncing and trying to find balance after a lifetime of moving between foster homes. Trevor is single and lives in Edmonton. He does not have any children, but his personal resiliency has led him to live in the

city. He moved to the city for a better life for himself after a life of bouncing. As a young child

he lived in Wabasca with his mother and three siblings, up until the age of 10. He then describes

being bounced around the foster care system, moving between foster homes in white

communities, at times going home to his mom for a few months, and at other times being kicked

out of foster homes or being separated from his siblings who were placed in separate homes. By

the time he was 12 years old, he was placed in a home in a small white rural town with his

brother, where he stayed until he was 16 years old. At 16 he decided to leave the foster home to

move into a place with a friend in a nearby town. By then he was in grade 10 and apprenticing in

a trade. By 18 he moved to Edmonton and tried to live with one of his brothers for a couple

months. He then went back to the small rural town he lived when he was 16. And then he moved

to a small city bordering Saskatchewan to live with a girlfriend for a few months; it did not work

out. Broken hearted, he moved to another small town where his younger brother lived. He

attended college in Grande Prairie for a few months, until his younger brother tragically

committed suicide. By this time he was 21 years old. This event entirely altered his life course.

At that point he dropped out of college and went overseas for a few months to do humanitarian

work after a major natural disaster. Because of the death of his brother, he felt the need to help

others. When he came back to Canada at age 22 he moved to Edmonton. I asked him how he was

able to move around once he left the foster care system as a teenager. He explained:

> Well I didn't have much assistance when I moved around… I don't know how to explain
> it. Things just fell together for me. I didn't go to Grande Prairie with anything. I had no
> plan, no money. I found a number, stayed one night in a hotel and I found a number to a
> job and the guy I told him I had no place to live, I had no money or anything so he put me
> in a hotel for three months.

Once he left the foster care system he was essentially homeless, and he relied on his first

employer to find him a hotel to live in while he worked. Currently, he has been living in

Edmonton with his cousin and has been pursuing entering the trades for the past year. Ever since he was 16 he has worked in carpentry and construction, although he normally only stays at a job for about 3 or 4 months. This is a distinct pattern of bouncing from his childhood that has carried into his adulthood, concerning most things he does—whether for school or work or travel. He is a very mobile person and he has not had the stability of one home since he was 10. As well, due to the tragic losses in his young adulthood, he has had to do a lot of soul searching. It seems that tragedy, loss and instability have affected his life path, and as a result he hasn't been able to find a stable home or stable job for more than a few months.

Trevor has siblings in the city, but he chooses not to associate with them because of their involvement with "crime, gangs, and stupid shit". When asked how family influenced where he lived he said the following: "Well, I try not to be in an area where they're at because they stress the hell out of me…" He explains that his older siblings have asked him for advice on how to turn their lives around, "but they don't listen so it just adds to more stress and I worry about them because of what they do… if I'm away from that and I don't know what they're doing it won't stress me out". Although he has not completed high school and he comes from an unstable upbringing, his focus on work and becoming a carpenter one day, which keeps him out of the trouble.

His goal of entering the trades, and his choice not to get involved in crime and gangs, speaks to his agency. He has chosen not to associate with family members involved in negative behaviours, and he has chosen to maintain relationships with extended family members such as his cousins and uncles who are all journeyman in the trades. Maintaining relationships with healthy, successful family members give him balance and stability. During our interview, he

described how he does not focus on the negative stereotypes of Native people, but tries to focus on the survival of our culture and our people. His agency has influenced how he has chosen to view Indigenous peoples. After our interview ended, he continued to talk about how he has Native pride and just as he was leaving he stated: "they tried to kill us off, but we survived". Throughout his life there has been an 'accumulation of disadvantages', as well as 'gravity and shocks' as per the life course lens, such as the death of his brother. However, his closing statement spoke of the spirit of Indigenous people and how the colonizer tried to kill us off, but we survived; he has this same sense of survival.

Another community member that experienced bouncing among family and different locations was Tracy. She explained her childhood as being bounced back and forth between her mother in Slave Lake and her father in Wabasca. When she was 10 years old, she ended up permanently living with her father. At age 15 she started bouncing between different cities trying to find someplace to go to high school. At 16 she moved to Edmonton, where she eventually graduated from high school. She described going to a large ethnically diverse high school in Edmonton, which had a substantial number of Aboriginal students.

> Tracy talks about growing up and not feeling like she fit in while in Wabasca:
>
> I don't fit anywhere anymore, and I've felt like that… for as long as I can remember. I felt like I didn't fit even when I was young, like I stayed at my Kohkom's…then when she moved to her other house and things changed. And I grew up and I just didn't belong there anymore and I always kind of felt it. I think maybe it stems from my mom, I didn't fit there…. then my dad would take me and I was at (his wife's) house and I felt like I didn't fit and belong there. So it was always my Kohkom's and especially after her passing…I didn't even want to go home. It was like I couldn't handle it.

Growing up between two parents that lived in different communities, it seems the one place she felt she belonged was at her Kohkom's house on reserve. But she explained after her Kohkom passed away, she felt she didn't have a home to go back to in Wabasca. The relationship she had

with her Kohkom seemed to be her source of strength and belonging, which allowed her to be resilient in difficult situations.

She was raised between two families; she had three siblings from her father and two siblings from her mother.

> I have two families…my siblings from my mom but my dad raised me with (siblings) so I have them too. But my brothers always supported me…and (my sister), they always push me to do better. And they are so proud of me, when I went home they'd say 'oh my sister's in town and you're doing so great' and just always supported me no matter what I did.

> And from high school I kind of went on a path of just spiral. I was wild. I partied. I experimented with a lot of different drugs. I did that for a while and it got me into trouble. Getting older I got into some trouble that could have been a life or death situations for me in a number of occasions. And I just I was lost because I was just here free roaming and I had roommates. I couldn't afford my own place so I had roommates and maybe they were in the same shoes, it was kind of just the norm.

> And yeah no kids. And then I went into the oilfield right so I've been in and out of the oilfield from when I was 18 when I started. So I worked with welders for years on and off. I'd go home for the summer and make good money all summer and or come home, go to Wabasca to work for a couple months if a job didn't pan out over here. That was always kind of like; Wabasca has always been kind of my saving grace so if I ever needed anything, if I ever was kind of lost that's kind of my roots.

Her siblings always supported her to do better, even when she went through a difficult time trying to find herself. Throughout her teenage years and early twenties, her siblings gave her moral and emotional support, they supported her in completing high school and they supported her when she went through difficult times. Her relationship with family seemed to be complicated by her difficult childhood. Although she grew up feeling she didn't fit in, during difficult times she was able to return to the community and find support with her siblings.

These experiences of bouncing speak to the longing and belonging Indigenous people can experience when living between different locations, when they experience unhealthy or unstable family relations, or when they face marginalization within white society. During these

experiences of not belonging they go through periods of longing, but once they maintain healthy family relations that provide them with support, they can find balance.

5.7.1 Balancing Family Relations and Education

In the following narratives, I discuss the ways in which gender relations are arranged in order to balance the responsibilities of family and education. I begin with stories from Wabasca that discuss how traditional Indigenous understanding of gender roles of men and women are maintained, in which personal autonomy is valued. The next stories will highlight how women with spouses and children are able to balance an autonomous identity and focus on their own educational and career pursuits. In the first set of stories, I believe the strength in Indigenous womanhood is valued, which is demonstrated by how families rally around these women to be successful in their careers. There were a few women that had surpassed all odds and were able to complete a post-secondary education while raising a family and they did this in part due to supportive spouses and supportive extended families. These women often received moral, financial, and childcare support from their families in order to successfully reach their career goals. There were also stories of men who had left the community to pursue their post-secondary educations, and the tremendous amount of moral and financial support they received from family when they went away.

I will begin by telling the story of Andrew and how he continued to work and care for their children while his wife pursued a university degree. At the time of the interview, Andrew lived in Wabasca with his wife and three children. Growing up he lived in Wabasca on-reserve with his parents until he was 7 years old. Then his parents moved to Lac La Biche to go to college. The transition of moving to a rural town was a cultural shift for him. When he started

grade 2 in Lac La Biche, he primarily spoke Cree; at that time he had to start speaking more English because of the school he attended. During elementary school, his parents moved around a lot between rural counties in northern Alberta, so that his father could follow the work in the forestry industry. At age 14, his parents moved back to Wabasca and lived on reserve. Andrew explains that as a teenager he ended up working in the oil industry, which shifted the focus away from his education.

Andrew's story is to similar to some other men I interviewed. They cited leaving high school to work in the oil industry, and that there was a prevalence of alcohol and drug abuse among young workers in the industry. At age 21 Andrew decided to turn his life around, and he moved to the city to upgrade his GED. While in Edmonton he met his wife and they had a child. For the next four years he lived between Wabasca and Edmonton. He worked in Wabasca during the winter when the ground was frozen and there was work in the oil industry. He said "I'd do my seasonal work and I'd go home when she'd have her turn". The family would go between focusing on his work, to focusing on her education. In the spring going into the fall he would live in Edmonton caring for the children while his wife attended university. According to Andrew, during this time, "She went to school and I took care of kids". Then they moved to his wife's First Nations community, where she completed her teaching practicum for her Bachelor of Education degree. While his wife was completing her practicum, he was a stay-at-home father, and during this time he completed an online engineering college program. After two years in his wife's First Nations community, he was approved for a home in the Bigstone housing units, so his wife got a job in Wabasca and the family moved there.

It is interesting how his family was very mobile during his childhood for his father's work and his mother's education, and in his own life he was very mobile by working seasonally and moving the family around so his wife could complete her education. When asked about moving around for his wife he explained: "It was easy for me because I'm used to moving, I guess not really settling down". His story exemplifies the intergenerational value of education in this family and how linked lives share these values and patterns.

Carla had a similar story to Andrew, since her spouse and parents helped support her to attain her Bachelor of Education degree while raising a family. However, in her case, she stayed in the community of Wabasca and went to the local community college. She went to college at age 20 when her daughter was just an infant, and while in university she had a second child towards the end of her degree. She eventually completed her degree in her late twenties. She explained it was often difficult balancing her parenting responsibilities while trying to complete university class assignments. Throughout the time she was in school, her spouse continued to work in the oil industry to financially support the family while at the same time helping with childcare:

> My husband was there as well, he was always there when I was going to school, and he has supported me the whole time as well. He took care of our daughter just when he could, when he wasn't working. He did a lot, he allowed me to sleep after my all-nighters and he did support me just as much as my parents did!

> …all I had was an allowance that I had once a month, so he took care of most of the bills, my husband paid the bills. He bought the Christmas gifts; he was the main income for our family, when I was going to school.

While her husband provided the bulk of the financial support, it seemed her parents stepped in to provide caregiving support and moral support so she could complete her degree. She explains how the support of her parents rescued her when she felt like quitting:

Okay while I went through all those things I had my mom and dad right there saying, "okay we can do this, you get this done, and don't worry about anything, don't worry about a dirty house, don't worry about your baby being sick, we'll stay here and we'll keep your baby and you just go get this done". They were constantly there to my rescue when I said "no I can't this is", I had no excuses because they'd be right there picking everything else up so I can move forward and get a degree and get a job and support my family.

Having a supportive spouse and supportive parents allowed her to balance schoolwork, childcare responsibilities, bills, and household chores. In fact, during the final years of her post-secondary education, she had to travel to the town of Slave Lake a couple times a week for classes; this drive was an hour away during winter months and she would have to travel alone to get to class. She was able to commute to get to school because of the family support she had. In describing the family support she received to complete her degree, she says "they are my main reason why I believe I'm here as a teacher, because I had so much support". By supporting her education, Carla's family was actually supporting her autonomy, respecting her role as a mother while at the same time respecting her career pursuits. Her personal career aspirations became a collective goal, when her parents would say: "we can do this, you get this done". While listening to Carla describe the struggle of getting a university degree while raising two young children, and the incredible amount of support she received from family, it demonstrated to me that the family equally valued her role as a mother and her role as a teacher in the community. These are just two examples from the sample that exemplified the ways in which extended family networks supported the career aspirations of men and women. Most of those community members that were successful in their education had spouses, parents and siblings that pitched in to provide childcare support, moral support, emotional support and financial support. What were most fascinating in these examples were the women that were able to maintain their roles of mothering and pursuing higher education because of the men and women in their families.

5.7.2 Balancing Family Relations and Work

In the following I will use the examples in which families had to balance the responsibilities of caring for a family while engaged in paid work. I begin with those stories where one partner worked in the very demanding oil industry, which created strains within the family. As mentioned earlier, five of the men and one woman currently worked in the oil industry at the time of the interview. However several of the Wabasca and Edmonton community members had previously worked in the oil industry or had a partner or other family members that worked in the oil industry. Since Wabasca has a petroleum dependent economy and labour force, the following stories will show how families balance work, caregiving responsibilities, and relationships while family members are in the oil patch working. In particular, several of the men interviewed worked in the oil industry, and due to the capitalist nature of the industry, they worked long hours (often over 12 hours a day) away from family. Sometimes oilfield workers are sent away to stay in work camps in remote areas; often times they can be away for weeks or months at a time. The amount of time spent at work and sometimes away from the family, changed the structure of the families that had to accommodate the gruelling hours of the oil field. As well, many of the men in the oil industry felt trapped in the industry. Many had dropped out of high school to work in the lucrative field, and they "got used to the money". Some went straight into the industry out of high school because the local labour market pushed them in this direction. Kirk's story, below demonstrates this experience of entering this industry at a young age.

At the time of the interview, Kirk lived in Wabasca on MD land with his wife and child. He has lived in Wabasca on MD all his life. He grew up with his mother and then when he

turned 18 he began working in the oilfield and got his own place. Although he had dropped out of high school in grade 11, he went back and completed his GED when he was 24 years old. At age 27 he met his wife and they eventually bought their own home on MD land. Then three years later when he was 33, they had a son and got married. He has worked in the oil industry for the past 15 years, and this past year he started working in a management. Kirk is an example of those that dropped out of high school and entered the oil industry at a young age; it seems the industry was made for young men with little education who are willing to work as general labourers for a reasonable wage. Kirk's career progression is typically not possible for the women I interviewed, since they tend to stay in administrative positions. The oil industry suffers from occupational segregation by gender. Throughout his life course, Kirk has had the support of this mother and the support of his wife, while he has worked in demanding jobs in the oil industry that require him to work long hours. The significant transitions in his life course included his moving from his mother's home to moving into a home with his wife. During his interview he explained his life course as a very linear path, and described how it was somewhat of an expected life course for Indigenous men in the community. As a married man who has moved up in the oil industry, Kirk's life course represents a life of heteronormative and patriarchal privilege.

For Kirk, it is not really what he said, but what he didn't say that made his life course and the gender relations in his life interesting. As a man that works in the oil industry, he did not discuss any challenges he might have faced in receiving support from his family while working in a demanding industry. Along his linear life path of moving up in the industry, he mentioned from time to time, having the support of his mother when he began in the industry, and once he was married he had the support of his wife. He did not mention any difficulties in finding childcare, or any challenges of finding employment with only a GED. The difficulties Kirk did

mention were in regards to the stress of working long hours in the oil industry. He explains the stresses he has witnessed working in a managerial position in the industry:

> A lot of stress throughout the time in the oil patch. I don't know why it's always alcohol and the oil patch. Guys are out in the sand and work lots of hours and I guess that's their way of relieving the stress… I mean I was there too working outside in the summertime its 30 degrees and you come home from work and you have a couple cold beers. So as I got into the supervisor position I was losing guys to alcohol, like not showing up, being late, coming to work under the influence and having to send them home. We're still running into that problem here and it's not just here I mean it's everywhere.

As someone that has worked for many years in the industry and as a manager of several men in the industry, he has drawn a relationship between the stress of the working long hours (in often physically demanding jobs) and the resulting 'problems' with alcohol he has witnessed with oilfield workers.

Samuel is another man who worked in the oil industry and seemed to mainly discuss his career there. He left out any discussions of the day-to-day challenges of raising a family while working in a demanding industry. During the time of the interview, Samuel and his common-law wife lived on reserve with his parents because they were unable to find housing; a short time after the interview Samuel was able to buy a house on-reserve for his growing family. Samuel was raised on Bigstone reserve with his four siblings by a single mother. Samuel has moved to Edmonton twice, once as a teenager to attend high school and later at 21 to attend technical college. At 26 he moved back to Wabasca to work in the oil industry and start a family. At age 31 he left to college for half a year to complete a Power Engineering program. While away at college, he described 'bringing' his common-law wife and baby with him while he was away. Now he is working for a local energy company as a Power Engineer and his company is

supporting him in completing more training and education in engineering. He cites his main reason for leaving the reserve to move to Edmonton has been to pursue his education.

As Samuel has Indian Status he was able to take advantage of secondary and post-secondary educational funding from the First Nation to leave the community for school and then return back to work. This has allowed him to enter a lucrative career in engineering where he is able to gain more training and education. Throughout the interview, he referred to his common-law wife as a stay at home mother whom he supported financially; she cares for the children while he is away at work for days at a time. He described this very western patriarchal family arrangement as a matter of fact part of the oil industry which. As some research has shown (Dorow 2015), over the long term this arrangement creates stresses in the family, since the husband is away at work for extended periods, and cannot participate in the childcare responsibilities.

Listening to Kirk and Samuel discuss their life courses. It was surprising they did not discuss the challenges of raising a young family. But throughout, they alluded to their mothers, and wives as supportive. I assumed these women took care of many of the household and childcare responsibilities. As well, they described very linear progressions in their careers in the oil industry. I now assume the industry is male-dominated insofar as it supports this model of men working in wage labour, women working in the domestic sphere of the home, and women working in "pink collar" jobs. In the following story, Jennifer's life course is discussed. She works in the female dominated field of administrative work in the oil industry and her husband works in the male dominated trades of the oil industry.

Jennifer lives in Wabasca on MD land with her husband and two young daughters. She has lived in Wabasca her whole life, except for short periods of time away. She was raised in the municipality with both parents and her two siblings. Her family is from another nearby First Nation and her husband is a member of Bigstone Cree Nation. Jennifer believes part of the reason her family stayed in Wabasca when she was growing up was because her father worked in the oilfield and his type of work isn't available in the city. As well, Jennifer's mother wanted to raise her children the way she was raised on the land. One of her sisters has lived in the city before and "totally loved it", and it might be something she would consider, but her husband works in the Wabasca oil industry. She states "(My husband) works here and he's got a good job down here so…we don't really want to change that." She cites her husband's job as a reason for staying in Wabasca, and earlier in the interview she stated having her children close to their grandparents as another major reason for staying.

What is important about Jennifer's story is that she and her husband are employed in gendered occupations in the oil industry. He has a technical job out in the oilfield and she works in an administrative position at an oilfield company office. Her father also worked in the oil industry, and her mother worked in a professional role in the education system. So it seems her parents worked in gendered occupations and have influenced her current work/family arrangement, a linking of lives as per the life course lens.

Another working mother whose partner is working in the oil industry is Melissa. At the time of the interview, Melissa was working in local government administration and her husband worked in the oil field. Melissa and her husband were in a dual income home, and they owned a home in the MD. At the time of the interview she was balancing childcare responsibilities, work,

going to college part-time, and on top of everything getting her kids to hockey and volunteering in the hockey league.

Melissa described her life course as the following; she went to high school, got married, had children and then began attending college to earn a college diploma. At the time of the interview she was still working on her Bachelor of Commerce part time, while working full time and raising a family. She described how overwhelming it can be working and going to school with a family, having to do homework in the evenings after supper and dropping her kids off at in-laws. But she described how her focus is on her children and she is slowly completing the rest of her education. Both Jennifer and Melissa, described having husbands that work in the oil industry, and how they balance working and childcare with the help of their parents and in-laws. Due to the long hours their husbands' work in the oilfield, they seem to defer to the help of grandparents in childrearing. Next, I will discuss the gender relations of balancing family and work in the city. Because of the different family formations in the city (smaller families and more single childless individuals), the community members' experiences are more focused on career.

A few of the community members initially moved to the city to pursue their education, either coming to the city as high school students or college students. After they graduated, they ended up staying in the city for work. Some other community members had completed their education and decided to move to the city to live and work permanently. The following stories are of two community members that initially moved to the city for school or work, ended up starting a career in the city, and established family relations in the city for over a decade.

Emily lives in the city and she has a well-established career in a health field. She now calls Edmonton home, but from a young age she bounced between the city and Wabasca to pursue an education. Emily grew up in Wabasca with both parents and two siblings. At age 12 she moved to Edmonton for junior high because her mother wanted her to get a better education in the city. Then from grade 9 to 11 she attended school in Slave Lake. Throughout the years of living away she would come home to the reserve for the summers. However while in grade 11 she had to move back to Wabasca to help take care of a family member who became ill. After graduating high school in Wabasca, she went straight into post-secondary education. At age 20 she completed technical college and began working in private medical practices. She found there were more opportunities for different types of work experience in the city whereas on reserve there was only one place for her to work. She has primarily lived in the city for more than a decade, where she owns a home and is raising her young child.

Since Emily has contentious relationships with her family from back home, she primarily relies on paid childcare to balance her role as a lone parent and a career oriented person. In fact, most of the mothers and fathers interviewed from Edmonton did not describe receive childcare support from family in the city. Since most of the parents in Edmonton were steadily employed and career focused they tended to rely on formal supports such as daycare or preschool for childcare.

Greg has a similar story. He established a career in the city and he has remained in the city. However, in Greg's case his family has been a positive influence on his staying in the city and he has become a part of the fabric of the urban Aboriginal community. Greg is single and lives in Edmonton where he works as a nurse. He was raised primarily in Wabasca with his

mother, father and three siblings. At age 18 he graduated high school in his father's First Nations community and he began his post-secondary education at a nearby community college. Once he completed his education, he moved to the city of Edmonton, where he has worked in local hospitals for over ten years. He describes himself as a "workaholic", nursing is his "life", and a great deal of his identity was defined by his work in healthcare.

According to Greg, his relations with family have influenced where he lives because "they're not far from living in the city, which is like 3.5 hours to Wabasca". Edmonton is the closest city to his family that live on reserve. It's where most of his family comes to shop and he sees them often because of that. In addition, two of his siblings have consistently lived in the city for the past ten years. The siblings have lived in close proximity to each other and they have very close relationships. So for Greg, he has immediate family in the city, and the rest of his immediate family comes into the city often to visit.

Greg described himself as a source of support and a mentor to some of his Aboriginal friends in the city. He felt he differed from some of his Aboriginal friends because he was raised with two parents that had a strong work ethic and he was able to complete his post-secondary education and enter into a healthcare profession. He describes some of his friends as "lost", as struggling with their "identity" or that they "lost their sense of direction" possibly because they weren't "educated", suggesting his belief that an education can set you on the right path. Greg goes on to explain how he tries to encourage his friends to seek a better life for themselves through education:

> …they're either trying to find their identity or where they fit in…because coming from the reserve …they have struggles back home, there's lots of alcoholism, abuse, single parent families, no money, like life hardships but they're trying to change that and they

come to the city and it's hard for them… I noticed most of my friends get frustrated and when they can't make their ends meet… or when they're trying to find funding or schooling or something to take and it gets kind of tough they go back to things that they've done back home like drinking… they're stuck in a circle… I think I grew up differently, I had both my parents and they weren't really drinkers… yes they separated but the separation of my two parents didn't affect me as a teenager and I didn't dwell on that. I just kept moving forward and was going to school and that was my focus. I think because I grew up differently and my dad was strict and showed us work ethic skills and that's what I saw, so that's what I continued.

Greg credits his personal perseverance and his ability to keep focused on completing his education as keys to his success. As well, while he was in college, his parent had separated and he was diagnosed with a serious illness. During this time he had a supportive family around him. He didn't allow these obstacles to hold him back from his dream of becoming a nurse. Greg seems to have a very resilient spirit. The support he has received from his family and his belief in a strong work ethic has made him successful in his career, as well as a mentor in the urban Aboriginal community. I was struck by his focus and determination, and how he uses his personal success to encourage his Aboriginal friends that are struggling to find a path to stability through education and employment.

Both Emily and Greg have stories of resiliency. They overcame many obstacles and made the choice to make a career, and build a life for themselves in the city. Emily left behind the negative impacts of colonialism, such as difficult family relations, intergenerational abuse and alcoholism, oppression of traditional cultural practices, moving away for her education, and made a life of her own in the city. Greg overcame the separation of his parents and a major illness, and he completed his education. He is now a mentor to other Aboriginal people in the city. For both, their educations and careers have been a driving force for making a good life for themselves in the city.

5.8 INDIGENOUS MODELS OF FAMILY AS RESISTENCE AND RESILIENCE TO COLONIALISM

> The Aboriginal family has endured a lot of trauma through colonization. The introduction of patriarchy and the systemic removal of our children have obscured the place of Aboriginal women and children. We now have elders who are abused and neglected and men with no sense of family responsibility. But in spite of these losses many Aboriginal family traditions are still in place, and our women are able to call on these traditions as they do their work towards reconstructing the Aboriginal families of the twenty-first century and beyond. In so doing, they also rework the understanding of themselves as women within the family structure. (Anderson 2000: 205)

By examining these stories of Indigenous family in Wabasca and Edmonton, we can see the very complex race, class and gender relations at work here. One thing that is clear is that in most cases, Indigenous understandings of family and gender relations seemed to persist despite the colonial structures that sought to dismantle them (e.g. the residential school system, the child welfare system's removal of Indigenous children from their families, and the church and state's patriarchal models of gender relations). The Indigenous model of family in which the child is central to community, where elders are transmitters of traditional knowledge and caregivers to children, and where motherhood and fatherhood are valued roles, was apparent in this community.

For families in Wabasca, children were central in the choices individuals made in choosing to stay and raise their children among a network of co-caregivers of grandparents and siblings. As well, families chose to remain in Wabasca to maintain connections with the extended family networks that provided childcare, moral support and financial support to young families. For families with children in Edmonton, children were central in the choices individuals made to leave unhealthy family relations and move to the city to build healthy family networks.

Parents in the city had left behind violence, abuse, and trauma, which were unfortunately a result of the intergenerational impacts of the colonial dismantling of Indigenous families.

Family was central to understandings of community in both Wabasca and Edmonton. For those on reserve and living on MD, staying in the traditional territories allowed community members to maintain connections to cultural roots in the community through elders and traditional teachers. By maintaining these cultural roots, community members could learn and pass on traditions of hunting, harvesting, and practices of living off the land, and maintain a relationship with the land. Even those that chose to move to the city were able to maintain connections to Cree language and culture. And even for those single, childless community members living in the city, family connections were central to their cultural identity. Some were aunties and magnificent mothers, and an integral source of support for children, and their siblings in the community. Community members that were single, educated and steadily employed acted as resource for those more vulnerable and in need of support, in times of tragedy or difficulty.

Extended family networks in the community were an important source of identity and belonging. Parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins were all part of the support network that was maintained by systems of sharing, caring, and reciprocity. These extended family networks, expanded to the community level, such that family is community and vice versa; social responsibility for one another is apparent. Finally, the Indigenous model of family existed in resistance and in resilience to the colonial structures that had sought to destroy Indigenous understandings and practices of family.

Some community members also spoke of the negative aspects of community where violence, abuse, gossip and trauma existed. One of the community members even described a

violent incident that involved her patriarchal Catholic father, in which the RCMP seemed to normalize the violence and psychological abuse she suffered from him. Some of the community members discussed leaving the community and moving to the city to escape these unhealthy family relations. In a few of the women's stories, violence and abuse at the hands of men in the community were tied to historical trauma, to parents who attended residential school. Here the negative impacts of colonialism and patriarchy reared their ugly heads. One woman even described not being allowed to attend pow-wow and traditional dancing because of the colonial impact of the Catholic Church. She moved to the city to get away from this cultural genocide. For some that moved to the city, they chose to build connections among the Indigenous community where they were a part of the cultural revitalization, of traditional healing, ceremonies and seeking the guidance of elders. Some others chose to build healthy family relations and community in the city by getting an education and finding employment in the city; they became a part of the fabric of the urban community.

Parts of community members' understandings of their cultural identity were the experiences of bouncing. Community members went through periods of longing and belonging as they sought to find their place between Wabasca and the city, and between different family members in their large family networks. For some this bouncing was due to their marginalization in the education and employment system. For some, this bouncing was due to parents that separated when they were young or families that were torn apart through the child welfare system. Still for others, this bouncing and trying to find home and belonging were due to the violence, abuse, and trauma they experienced as children and youth. However, most of the community members were able to eventually find home and belonging, in Wabasca and/or Edmonton, either by maintaining connections and support from large extended family networks,

or cutting off the root from unhealthy family networks and building new healthy ones in the city. Some of the community members spoke about how their own grandparents, usually their Kohkom's, were a source of belonging and strong connection to community.

These struggles of bouncing involved the ways in which Indigenous men and women found families and developed gender relations in their homes to find balance. Some of the men and women seemed to be able to maintain autonomous relationships, where their work in the family and outside the family was still considered "different but equal" (Leigh 2009). For example, women who chose to pursue an education and career were supported by their spouses, their parents and their siblings. At times it seemed the family provided moral support, financial support and childcare in order for these women to succeed in their careers, at the same time valuing their roles as mothers. At times men used their wage labour in order to financially support their wives in pursuing careers. As well, there were men who worked in the oil industry, and seemed to have women at home who cared for them as they worked the long hours and often had to spend time away from family. The community seemed to combine varying gender relations to create balance in families, from those more Indigenous egalitarian gender relations to more western mainstream gender relations. For some in the city, this balance was maintained through formal supports. Their life courses were shaped by their focus on career and their reliance on income and paid childcare. However, some in the city described the informal family networks and the Indigenous community as sources of spiritual support, moral support, and a sense of belonging.

5.9 BUILDING HEALTHY FAMILY RELATIONS

> Non-Native models of the nuclear family individualize and depoliticize most things within and outside the family. In contrast, the mutual obligation of extended blood and non-blood ties to each other and to the larger community compels "family" members to politicize relationships within and beyond the family, community and larger society…. Instead of clearly defined concepts, we are compelled to resort to strings of words and ideas such as family/mothering/care/resistance/work. Within this activism and decolonizing activities… tasks, values, skills, and mutual responsibilities *spill or leak* into one another in permeable ways. It seems likely that *spilling* is what holds this model of family/mothering/ care/resistance/work together. Rather than an examination of discrete activities such as paid work and unpaid domestic duties, the Aboriginal model embodies caring and nurturing community as central to the care of one's family. This family-community-care-resistance pivots on self-determination and defence of the land for future and past generations. (Baines and Freeman 2011:77- 79)

Many of the people that settled in Edmonton were very mobile in their youth and early adulthood, moving between Wabasca and urban centres, often leaving their home community for school and work. These stories demonstrate the agency of community members, especially those who often moved away to escape negative family relations. Due to the colonial impact on Indigenous families, some of these community members came from families in Wabasca that suffered from abuse, violence, drugs and alcohol, families divided by the foster care system, and unhealthy family relations.

Some community members chose to remove their children from unstable unhealthy family relations they had back home, and to raise their children in a stable healthy environment in the city. Some made the personal choice to maintain connections to healthy family relations back home, in order to maintain their supportive family networks and to maintain Indigenous culture. Some chose to build family relations in the city by being active in the urban Aboriginal community, becoming a part of the cultural revitalization movement, returning to traditional healing practices, and engaging in activism. Some even worked directly in the Aboriginal

community in human services working with others in the community who were more disadvantaged.

Many of the community members used education as a means to building healthy family relations while living in the city. They focused on completing their education and becoming steadily employed in order to create stability in the lives of their families. These are stories of resistance, in which community members resisted continuing cycles of abuse and negative family relations, by creating stable healthy family networks. These early childhood experiences could have lead to life course trajectories in which completion of education and steady employment was highly unlikely. But these individuals surpassed all odds and were resilient in becoming educated and start careers in the city, and building healthy family relations in the city.

The above stories also demonstrate how the child is still central to Indigenous communities, and how grandparents are still valued as caregivers and transmitters of traditional knowledge to children. As well, these parents demonstrate how they value the relationship between child and grandparent. Many made the conscious decision to maintain this relationship, along with the relationships with extended family members.

I believe this Indigenous understanding of family and community, in which children and elders are central to community, and community is viewed as a place of sharing, caring, and reciprocity, and people make choices to cut unhealthy family ties, is in resistance to colonialism and patriarchy. As well, the fact that these traditional Indigenous understandings of the strong extended family network are maintained is a sign of the resilience of Indigenous peoples. Despite how colonial structures such as the residential school system sought to 'kill the Indian in the child', somehow our people survived, and our knowledge of Indigenous systems of family and

community survived with them. The community members interviewed in this study were the children and grandchildren of residential school survivors and the sixties scoop survivors. Some were survivors of the child welfare system that is still taking Indigenous children from Indigenous homes and placing them in primarily white homes. Indigenous understandings of the family and community still thrive today as a sign of the resistance and resilience of Indigenous peoples.

Chapter Six: Choices in School and Work: The Agency of Indigenous Peoples

6.1 PERSONAL NARRATIVE ON EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

As I was collecting people's life stories from my community, I began thinking of the

stages of their lives when they had to enter institutions such as the educational system and the

labour market. I was interested in interviewing community members that had make the choice to

stay in Wabasca or move to the city for school and work. Many of the people I interviewed

presented stories of struggles and successes, which were actually stories of self-determination.

This story actually begins with my siblings and I. My three brothers and I were all
separately sent by our parents from Wabasca to high school in Edmonton when we were
teenagers. I was sent to live with a family on Edmonton's north side, I attended a large culturally
diverse public school; but out of a couple thousand students I only noticed three other
Aboriginal students there. Then a year after I graduated, my youngest brother was sent to the
same school, but he returned home after one semester. I suppose my parents didn't believe in the
local Wabasca high school as a means to entering a post-secondary education, and as a political
leader at the time, my father knew education was a means to bettering our nation. I sometimes
wonder whether sending us away to go to high school was an expected part our life courses
because my father had moved away when he was a teenager to go to the closest high school,
which was about 250km away. Or if sending your kids away to school was an extension of the
residential school experience, of children being separated from their parents in order to gain an
education. I'm not sure what my brother's experiences were like, but my experience of moving
away was difficult and isolating. I had left the friends and family and community I had known all
my whole life. But I knew if I wanted to go to university and get an education I needed to
graduate from another high school. Our high school in Wabasca was notoriously known for not
preparing students for a post-secondary education. I remember being in high school science and
math classes in Wabasca and having less than ten students in my class because others had
dropped out or moved away. I knew I had to leave. My parents had strong political beliefs
regarding education; they believed it was a Treaty right and they felt it was the greatest means
to self-determination for our community. Working in social work, community development and
Indigenous politics, my parents were all too aware of the negative statistics regarding
Aboriginal youth. They encouraged education as a means of improving our quality of life,
avoiding lives of alcoholism and addiction, avoiding having children at a young age, and
avoiding poverty.

During the time I was trying to understand the educational experiences of these
community members and how these experiences informed their life stories, I was in the process
of making decisions regarding my own children's education. I had to find a junior school for my
niece who came to live with us from Wabasca, and find a school for my daughter who was
starting kindergarten. It was through this experience that I came to think of the colonial project,

the importance of maintaining a Cree cultural identity, and education as a means of self-determination.

A cousin had approached me about having her teenage daughter come live with us in Edmonton and go to junior high. I had known my niece had excelled academically and she excelled in all kinds of extracurricular activities at the First Nations operated school on our reserve. My niece came to spend a couple weeks with us in early summer and by mid-August she decided she was going to live with us and go to school in the city. I was astonished by her own agency, that at such a young age she had decided that her education was important enough to be worth uprooting herself and leaving the reserve. I couldn't deny that ambition and determination. I therefore had the task of taking my niece to schools in our district to find a school for her. There were two schools in our district that had room for a new student. One school was a large public school. When we went to visit the school the principal seemed to view us as 'another Aboriginal family;' he gave us some forms to fill out and registered her in Cree class. He couldn't answer any of my questions regarding the inclusiveness of the curriculum, but he assured me it was an ethnically diverse institution. The other school was a small Catholic school with a special science and technology program, and special outdoor recreation programs. The vice principal met with us for a half hour, and my niece started getting excited about this small special school. When I called my cousin about our school visits, her only questions was; "But are they racist and will they be racist towards my daughter? Will she fit in?" I was torn at the decision I had to make. Would she feel marginalized in the large school as just another Indigenous student, or would she be marginalized in a Catholic school? I felt since the principal of the large school only mentioned Cree classes, that he overlooked the fact that my niece was interested in the academic core courses and elective options. As well, due to being aware of the Catholic residential school on our reserve, where some of my ancestors attended, and the horrific stories I heard of those experiences, I opposed any sort of Catholic education. However, I had to overcome these historical wounds, as my niece made the final decision. She felt more comfortable about a small school with special academic programming, which happened to be the Catholic school.

And she flourished in this small school; she participates in sports, recreation programs, and has a great social circle of friends. However, it hasn't been easy for our family to adjust to having a teenager from my reserve come live with us in the city. I didn't realize how structured and disciplined my household was before my niece came to live with us; I didn't realize how accustomed I have become to urban life and how this differed from my family on reserve. As I watched my niece make the cultural and social adjustments of urban life, I remembered my own isolating experience of moving to the city as a teenager; luckily my "city mom" was a Metis social worker who showed me the understanding and patience I needed, so I tried to model this approach with my niece. The main aspect my niece had to adjust to was now being a part of my little structured family in the city compared to the huge, extended family network she was a part of on reserve. Fortunately, now that my niece lives with us, family from the reserve visits us more often so she can maintain those relationships and those familial aspects of our culture.

I wanted to share these stories from my own family, of our experiences of moving to the city to go to junior high and high school, to illustrate how much we value education and the sacrifices we have had to make for ourselves and our children. When I was a teenager living

with my Metis "city mom", she told me "while you are away at school, you will feel like giving up every couple of months, but those feelings will pass and you will be strong enough to keep going and finish". She had completed a university degree, so I took her advice to heart. That message from a university educated Metis woman, of how it would be difficult but I could achieve an education, has encouraged me along the way. Those words have remained in my own head throughout my educational journey from high school to graduate school, and remain in my mind when I think of my niece's struggles. Those words remind me of the level of agency, strength and ambition we have as an Indigenous peoples and it makes me believe in education as a means of self-determination for our communities.

This chapter is organized according the school-work life courses of the community members interviewed, and the choices they made along their life courses. These choices are based on their own agency, and shaped by institutional structures and social policy. I begin this chapter by elaborating on the colonial structures of education, which impact access to high school education and funding; post-secondary education and funding; federal training initiatives; provincial training initiatives; and industry training and initiatives. After examining the structural impacts on choices, I discuss choices in school, and the decisions that had to be made regarding where to attend secondary school and where to attend post-secondary schooling. Next I discuss work choices. For some, these decisions came early as they dropped out of high school to work, and for some these decisions came later after attending secondary and post-secondary schooling. Then, I discuss how family choices and early childbearing choices--that is, the choice to have a child at an early age or at a later age--has influenced choices in school and work. Throughout, I highlight the personal agency community members demonstrated in determining their life courses, and the amount of resiliency they had when they faced challenges in their educational and career goals. Finally, I examine the specific factors that acted as barriers to their successes in school and work, and those that helped facilitate their successes in school and work.

6.2 COLONIAL STRUCTURES OF EDUCATION

During my interviews with community members, I asked them to discuss their

educational experiences and the pathways they took while going to school. Unfortunately, I did

not explicitly ask community members whether they had Indian Status or Metis Status, and what

type of educational funding they received. During the interview, we discussed their cultural

identity and some did disclose their Indian Status and Metis Status, but we did not discuss it in

relation to any educational funding they might have received. Some community members did

allude to receiving funding from the First Nation and Metis Nation, and some alluded to being

ineligible for this type of funding. It would have been useful for my analysis to know which

community members received funding through Aboriginal Affairs, those that received funding

through the Metis Nation and those that had to utilize other funding sources through the

provincial and federal government. One thing was clear in our discussions; racial identity in

terms of whether one had Indian Status, Non-Indian Status or Metis Status meant access to

different types of programming and funding. It seems the colonial structure of the Indian Act,

which distinguishes between racial identities, influenced the choices Indigenous peoples had in

terms of access to educational programming and funding. The following breakdown of funding

sources is based on the Taylor, Friedel & Edge 2009 study titled "Pathways for First Nations and

Metis Youth in the Oil Sands", in which they explore similar funding initiatives and policies

present in the Wood Buffalo Region in Alberta.

6.2.1 Access to High School Education and Funding

For junior high and high school, some community members made the choice to move to

urban centres for a better education. However, only those with funding support or parents that

could financially support such a move could make this choice. For example, Jason discussed how

his father set him up in his own apartment so he could go to high school in Edmonton. When he was in university, his father bought a house in the city where Jason lived as an undergrad. Jason's father clearly had the financial means to maintain a separate residence in the city for his son. A family without the same financial means would not have been able to support a high school student living on his own in a city over 350km from their Indigenous community.

Tracy discussed how she relied on funding from Bigstone Cree Nation in order to move away for high school. She initially moved away to Fort McMurray for high school. Then she said:

> I got into trouble and my grades weren't up so the band cut off my funding and I had to go home… I had to finish the semester there and they said if I picked up my grades I could reapply to move out again so I went home and I just worked my butt off. So then I reapplied and they gave me a chance, so I came to Edmonton.

Tracy was eligible for the Boarding Home Program, which falls under the *Bigstone Education Authority: In School Policy*, and high school sponsorship funding because she had Indian Status and was a member of Bigstone Cree Nation. Under this funding, students are currently eligible for: room and board payment to the boarding home; student monthly allowance; daily transportation (bus pass); books and supplies; and seasonal transportation (*Bigstone Education Authority - In School Policy 2014*). In this case, Tracy was able to make this choice based on her Indian Status. If she was a Non-Status Indian or had Metis Status, she would not have been eligible for the Boarding Home Program.

Class privilege, for those who had families that could afford to send them away to school, or privilege based on racial identity, e.g. those with Indian Status, could access educational funding, enabled community members to move away for secondary school.

6.2.2 Access to Post-Secondary Education and Funding

For those that choose to pursue a post-secondary education, their perceived racial identity influenced what educational funding they could access. All community members in this study were Indigenous peoples of Northern Alberta from the traditional territory of Bigstone Cree Nation and the Metis people of Kituskeenow. However, the colonial division between those with Indian Status, Non-Status, and Metis Status means they have access to different funding models.

The Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) "provides financial assistance to Status Indian and Inuit students who are enrolled in eligible post-secondary programs, which includes: community college and CEGEP diploma or certificate programs; undergraduate programs; and advanced or professional degree programs" (AANDC 2014, n.p.). To be eligible for funding students must be Registered Status Indians or Inuit and "must be enrolled in a certificate, diploma or degree program in an eligible post-secondary education institution and must maintain continued satisfactory academic standing within that institution" (AANDC 2014, n.p.). This funding covers three types of support for Status Indians;

> Tuition support for part-time and full-time students that may include fees for registration, tuition and the cost of books and supplies required for courses: travel support for full-time students who must leave their permanent place of residence to attend college or university: and living expenses for full-time students to help cover the costs such as food, shelter, and transportation. (AANDC 2014, n.p.).

Bigstone Cree Nation Education Authority manages the PSSSP funding for the nation, on its education funding website, it states that due to the "limited funds allocated to us from Indian Affairs for post-secondary education, not everyone that applies gets funding" (Bigstone Education Authority 2014, n.p). The First Nation has therefore had to establish policies "to provide fair opportunity to as many potential students to access this funding" (Bigstone

Education Authority 2014, n.p.). The following are the eligibility requirements as stated by

Bigstone Cree Nation Education Authority on its website:

> To be eligible for sponsorship with BCNEA, applicants must: Be a member of Bigstone
> Cree Nation for a minimum of 12 Consecutive Months – Letter of proof required; Have
> been accepted into a BCNEA/AANDC approved post-secondary institution; Program
> must be a minimum of 1 year in length (i.e.: 8 months); Letter of decline from BCN
> ASETS (Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy) or other funding agency
> required to be eligible for sponsorship for a Certificate Program. (Bigstone Education
> Authority 2014, n.p.).

One of the community members that received a university degree through Northern Lakes

College did mention being a member of Bigstone Cree Nation. She did receive a living

allowance once a month while she was in university, but primarily her husband paid most of the

household bills. She also mentioned receiving financial support from her parents while pursuing

a post-secondary education. This shows that the PSSSP funding is not enough to support one

student, especially a student with children, which is often the case for students in Wabasca.

Many Indigenous critics of educational funding note that Indigenous education is

chronically underfunded. According to the Assembly of First Nations: "The federal government

established and sustains a two-tier system of education funding that has arbitrarily established

the value of educating First Nations youth as being 25-50% below that of other Canadian youth"

(AFN 2012: 10). This is true for elementary and secondary schooling that receives funding from

AANDC for on-reserve schools, and this is especially true regarding post-secondary funding.

The AFN points out "many Canadian people believe that First Nations people receive full

funding from the federal government to attend post-secondary" (AFN 2012: 11). However on the

contrary, there is barely enough funding to go around to the post-secondary First Nations

learners who want to get an education. In fact the situation for First Nations post-secondary

funding seems to get "bleaker every year" (AFN 2012: 11). The grim state of federal funding for

First Nations post-secondary students is explained by the AFN:

> Increases in the costs to attend post-secondary, has over time, forced local community organizations to develop more and more stringent policies in an effort to stretch the funding to support the numbers of qualified learners wishing to enrol in post-secondary education. The lack of adequate funding coupled with the annual budget allocation has led to the creation of priority categories at the community level. This creates a very tenuous situation for First Nations organizations when most students seek to enrol in multi-year programs.

> For First Nations students wishing to enrol or hoping to continue post-secondary studies, the lack of adequate funding can mean that even if you are high enough on the priority list to receive funding, you may be required to await annual or semester to semester approvals before actually receiving funding.

> The national funding allocation for the federal Post-Secondary Student Support Program was capped in 1996. After that, the costs of post-secondary education sky-rocketed, the numbers of eligible First Nations students increased dramatically and the annual rate of increase in funding for PSSSP was limited to 2% annually. (AFN 2012: 12)

First Nations such as Bigstone Cree Nations are forced to create priority lists when

choosing students that will receive PSSSP funding. The Post-Secondary Student Support

Program simply cannot keep up with the number of First Nations students eligible for funding,

and the funding formula does not allow for increases in tuition, and in living expenses. The

program has been stuck at a funding stalemate for a long time, and it doesn't appear to be getting

any better. In addition, this funding is only available for Indian Status students, leaving Non-

Status Indian Students and Metis Students ineligible for this funding.

6.2.3 Access to Federal Training Initiatives

In addition to funding available through Aboriginal Affairs, other funding comes from

Employment and Skills Development Canada through a federally funded program called the

Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy (ASETS)[xi]. This program provides funding

for Aboriginal peoples whether they are First Nations, Inuit, and Metis. ASETS programing is

explained in the following:

> The Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy is a Government of Canada program designed to help Aboriginal people prepare for, find, and maintain jobs. Through ASETS, Aboriginal organizations design and deliver employment programs and services best-suited to meet the unique needs of their communities. With 84 agreement holders and more than 600 points of service, ASETS ensures that Aboriginal people in Canada are able to access skills development and training in order to take advantage of economic development opportunities. (Employment and Skills Development Canada 2013: 1)

At the time of this research Bigstone Cree Nation was an agreement holder for First Nations

clients in Wabasca, Oteenow Employment and Training Society was an agreement holder for

Indian Status and Inuit clients in the Edmonton Area, and Rupertsland Institute: Metis Centre of

Excellence was the agreement holder for Metis clients in Alberta. Bigstone Cree Nation

Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy defined their mission statement: "To

provide various labour market services to First Nations people who are unemployed and have

demonstrated a barrier to getting employment" (Bigstone ASETS 2014, n.p.). Oteenow

Employment and Training Society defined their mission "to connect First Nations and Inuit

people who live in Edmonton and area, and who are ready for meaningful careers, with a wide

range of employment and training programs, services, and opportunities so that they can become

self-reliant and lead productive lives" (Oteenow 2014, n.p.) Rupertsland Institute Metis Training

to Employment Program objective is "to identify and promote actions that improve education,

skills levels and employment opportunities for Métis people, and to manage and deliver

programs that enable Métis individuals to pursue education, enhance their skill level, and to find

productive and well-paying occupations and employment" (Rupertsland Institute 2014, n.p.).

Each of these separate Aboriginal organizations with ASETS agreements had similar missions

and objectives, to find meaningful long lasting training and employment for Aboriginal peoples.

A few community members discussed accessing ASETS funding the Wabasca area. For example, Andrew discussed accessing this funding through Bigstone Cree Nation. Although Bigstone ASETS provides funding for those pursuing trades college, Andrew was ineligible for funding because he had previously received funding. He had to wait an additional year before he was eligible for funding to attend trades college. Andrew's narrative speaks to the precarious nature of Indigenous men in the oil industry, who often move between different trades before finding an employer who will support them in a specific trade. As well, his narrative speaks to the strict eligibility requirements for this type of training and employment funding.

Isaac tells a story of being denied service from Bigstone's training initiative because he was Metis:

> But in the past I have identified myself as Metis because they're the ones that helped me. For instance one time I went to the Band because I needed work. I think I was in between jobs and I was looking for job. I needed some help with a resume. I didn't have a computer. I just needed help from them to write it down and give me some copies and they told me "Well are you Treaty?" And I said "No but I'm from here, I'm from Sandy Lake". And they said, "No we can't help you, you're not Treaty". So ever since then, I've never asked for help again.

After being denied funding through the First Nation he went to the Metis Nation of Alberta local office where he received funding and training to get his Class 1 driving license. He explained he prefers to be called Native, but identifies as Metis because the Metis Nation has helped him, although he does not believe his family has any European ancestry; they were just left out of the Treaty. Both Andrew and Isaac's stories exemplify how Indigenous peoples seeking federally funded training and employment funding must navigate between the various eligibility requirements based on location, racial identity, and the apparent need.

6.2.4 Access to Provincial Training Initiatives:

In addition to federal training and employment initiatives, there is funding available at the provincial level. Taylor, Friedel and Edge (2009), explain the purpose of this funding and how their can be differing access to it, if you are located on-reserve or off-reserve:

> The goals of Alberta Works includes helping unemployed people find and keep jobs, helping employers meet their need for skilled workers, and helping Albertans with low incomes cover their basic costs of living. It does this through four program areas: employment and training services, income support, health benefits, and child support services.

> To qualify for Alberta Works funding, one must be "under-skilled," that is, lack a high school education and be unable to maintain long-term employment, and have income below a certain level. Students who apply for upgrading to complete their high school diploma are usually eligible for funding for tuition, books, and a living allowance (which varies according to one's family income status). Students living on reserves are not eligible to receive the living allowance but may receive funds for tuition and books. First Nation students may qualify for INAC's PSSSP funding for up to one year. (Taylor, Friedel & Edge 2009: 23)

Paulina discusses her experience of going to Northern Lakes College in Wabasca where she was able to upgrade her grade 11 and grade 12 courses, and to complete a College Certificate. She explains how she had to live off reserve to receive the applicable funding:

> I was living off reserve at the time when I applied for Northern Lakes…I had to be off reserve to get the help where I got my student finance, my student funding from Alberta Works. I was never funded through Bigstone Education or my band for my schooling. It was always Alberta Works and that's the province.

Once again racial identity related to program eligibility determines the types of educational and training funding available for Indigenous students who need upgrading. In this case, the Alberta Works funding for upgrading was a very important resource. Several of the community members I spoke with dropped out of high school to either have children or join the workforce. Once they wanted to pursue post-secondary studies, one of the first steps was to upgrade their high school credits. In the case of Paulina, she had to find housing off-reserve in

the Municipality, which can be a challenge, as many community members spoke to the lack of rental housing in the community. Two other community members discussed moving to Edmonton to pursue upgrading and getting their GED through Norquest College. Although they did not discuss the type of funding they received, I suspect they moved off-reserve to access provincial funding for upgrading.

Bigstone Cree Nation Education Authority does offer funding through their PSSSP programing, for University and College Preparation (UCEP) for students falling short of entrance requirements to post-secondary programs. However, funding for UCEP under Bigstone's PSSSP funding priority list falls as one of the last priorities. Their priority list is as follows regarding funding post-secondary students: (1) Continuing Student; (2) New Student; (3) Returning Student – after break in studies; (4) UCEP – Pre-technology; (5) Probation – returning after suspension (Bigstone 2014). Generally UCEP programs differ from general high school credit upgrading. UCEP programs are entrance programs for mature students to specific post-secondary programs. They include the pre-technology program at NAIT, which is an upgrading and bridging program for Aboriginal students to earn prerequisites to gain access to their technology programs; it is a program designed for mature students (NAIT 2014). However, PSSSP funding is only available to Indian Status and Inuit students, and is only available for one year for UCEP programs. This isn't sufficient funding for those that need to upgrade more than one year (AANDC 2014). Especially for the community members I spoke with that dropped out generally around grade 10. Therefore, for a population that struggles with low rates of high school graduation, it seems access to funding for upgrading for Aboriginal students is limited and hard to come by, and particularly because eligibility is based on location (on-reserve or off-reserve) and on racial identity (Indian Status vs. Non-Status Indian).

6.2.5 Access to Industry Training and Initiatives

Taylor, Friedel and Edge (2009) discuss the controversial issue of industry providing educational funding in Northern Alberta's oil country near the Fort McMurray oil sands. For example, they highlight that at "the elementary/secondary education level, corporations have funded early literacy and high school programs in First Nation and Métis communities" in the Wood Buffalo Region (25). As well, industry in Wood Buffalo has been known to provide funding for post-secondary programs, such as the Aboriginal Environmental Monitoring program at Keyano College in Fort McMurray, and "industry will cover costs for a pre-apprenticeship program currently being developed for 40 First Nation and Métis students in Wood Buffalo communities" (Taylor, Friedel and Edge 2009: 25). Although additional funding to Aboriginal education is generally welcomed, it is noted that such funding can create "inequities in access to education and training across communities were thought to be a growing problem since different communities had differing levels of capacity and interest in engaging with corporations" (Taylor, Friedel and Edge 2009: 25). As well, individual corporations preferred to build partnerships with individual Aboriginal communities, creating an "a more fragmented, "ad hoc" approach to education and training" (Taylor, Friedel and Edge 2009: 25). There is a tendency to narrow and stream students into programs that benefit that specific industry, such as the trades in the oil industry (Taylor, Friedel and Edge 2009).

Even in my own community, industry seems to be investing in education through the local school district in Wabasca. According to a press release from Cenovus Energy, the company will be donating $900,000 over three years to Northland School Division, to support two key programs across the district, the Literacy Initiative, and Career and Technology Studies (Wall Street Journal 2014). As well, "critics say they're worried about the direction of Alberta's

massive overhaul of school curriculum after it was revealed…major oil companies are being consulted on changes" (Ibrahim 2014). More specifically, the two large oil tycoons in Alberta, "Syncrude and Suncor are listed under a working group being led by the Edmonton public school board in K-to-3 redesign" (Ibrahim 2014). Although Alberta Education assured the media that all key stakeholders, such as the Alberta Teachers Association, businesses and community organizations would be a part of this consultation process, critics are concerned about the bias industry may have in the process (Ibrahim 2014).

Although there can be a biased 'fragmented ad hoc' approach to education and training funding from industry, those in the community that received this funding did not see it this way. For example, one community member mentioned being an employee of the Northlands School Division working in early childhood development. A bursary program through her employer covered her first year of university towards a Bachelor's of Education. Samuel, who currently works as a Fourth Class Power Engineer for an oil sands company, discussed how his employer is funding him to go further into his education to become a Third Class Power Engineer. Samuel highlighted that he is grateful for his employer, since many oil companies in the Wabasca area aren't as supportive in helping their employee's further their training and education. In these examples, both community members already had some post-secondary education and they were employed in professions where they could further their credentials. Receiving employer funding for education and training is therefore also connected class privilege; one has to already have some education to become steadily employed. In most cases employers cover training expenses applicable to the positions that permanent employees are already in.

Next I discuss the choices community members made in school, work and family within colonial structures and the agency. I focus on when these community members were teenagers and began actively pursuing their education.

6.3 JUNIOR HIGH AND HIGH SCHOOL CHOICES

One of the first choices community members made regarding their school and work experiences was whether they would attend junior high and high school and where, the local secondary school in Wabasca, or in a nearby town, or urban centre. For three of the community members the choice was made for them by their parents insofar as they already lived in the city with their parents; for them, their main decision was which high school to attend in the city.

Quite a few of the community members that moved away from Wabasca to pursue a junior high education or high school education in urban centres (mainly in Edmonton, Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, Slave Lake, and High Prairie) claimed they did so because they wanted a better education or their parents wanted them to have a better education. As Emily put it, at age 12 "I moved to Edmonton because my mom wanted me to go to… a junior high in Edmonton because she worried if I stayed in Wabasca that I would drop out of high school by the time I was 15". Johnny explains he left Wabasca when he was 13 years old, to live with extended family in a nearby town because he "wanted a better education". What is interesting about the narratives of community members is that Indigenous youth between the ages of 12-17 made the decision to pursue a "better education" at such a young age. Recall that many who left the community as teenagers lived with extended family members or with boarding families in urban centres. They made the sacrifice of leaving behind their parents, siblings, close friends and extended family networks for their education.

For most of the community members that left Wabasca "for a better education" in junior high or high school, it wasn't just one move in which they never returned. There was a pattern of trying out different urban areas before settling in one place for their senior high school years. For example, a student might move to Fort McMurray for one school year, then return to Wabasca for a year, then move to Edmonton for a year, and then perhaps move back to Wabasca. The reasons for moving between Wabasca and different cities during junior high and high school varied among community members. For example, Jacob dropped out for one year to work in the oil industry, lived with an aunt in Fort McMurray for one year of high school, the next year he moved to Edmonton to play high school football, and then moved back to Wabasca because he injured his knee and could no longer play football. Emily lived in Edmonton for junior high and Slave Lake for high school, both times living with extended family, but moved back to Wabasca for grade 12 because she was needed to be back home to care for a family member. A few explained that they fell into the wrong crowd of Aboriginal students in one city, and moved to another city for the next year to focus on their studies. Tracy describes moving around for school during her youth before settling at an Edmonton high school:

> My high school was pretty awesome. When I was in Fort McMurray, I kind of didn't know one person, not one soul. I moved with my sister and I met a couple Aboriginal people and… it was the wrong crowd and I got into trouble and my grades weren't up so the band cut off my funding and I had to go home… I had to finish the semester there. They said if I picked up my grades I could reapply to move out again, so I went home and I just worked my butt off. So then I reapplied and they gave me a chance so I came to Edmonton and I had a really good high school experience here.

One of the reasons Tracy was able to leave Wabasca for a better high school education was because she was a member of Bigstone Cree Nation and she was eligible to receive funding under the Boarding Home Program. Under this program, students may receive sponsorship to attend secondary school outside of Bigstone Cree Nation if they maintain passing grades and

maintain good attendance, and can show the educational programming at the outside school is not offered in the home community. Most of the people that left Wabasca for a better education in secondary school did not mention whether they were Bigstone sponsored students under the Boarding Home Program, but it was clear those that were able to leave either were eligible for Bigstone sponsorship, or the privilege of having parents that could afford to send them away, or the privilege of having family in urban centres that were willing to take them in. For a few of the community members interviewed in Wabasca, they are considering moving their whole families to the city when their children reach secondary school age so they can access better schooling. In most cases, the choice to leave Wabasca at a young age to get a better education elsewhere, involved either class privilege (having middle-class parents that could afford to pay for schooling elsewhere) or a Treaty privilege (having Indian Status as a member of Bigstone Cree Nation and eligible for sponsorship). In this sense, access was based on educational policies to education structured on racial identity and/or class privileges.

For those that stayed in Wabasca for their entire elementary and high school education, they didn't necessarily discuss their choice. They did mention they generally had a good educational experience at home. In the following quote, Sheila explains going to school in Wabasca:

> Well I actually went to Mistassiniy School from grade 1 to 12 and I enjoyed it there. The teachers were very nice… I thought they did have a good support system. I know there were years… in grade 6 or grade 7… they had study night so from 7pm until 9pm. So that was there.

For Sheila, going to school in Wabasca was a good experience because the school had a good support system for students. In regards to his choice to stay to go to school in Wabasca, Pete says "I guess it wasn't really a choice but it was a choice by my parents, I enjoy living here;

I actually love living in Wabasca." He went on to discuss how he enjoys the small community atmosphere and the outdoor activities available in the community. Jennifer mentioned her involvement in sports and fundraising for school trips, while attending school in Wabasca, as positive experiences that taught her the value of community support. Carla spent most of her entire elementary and secondary education in Wabasca; she mentioned attempting to move to Edmonton for a few months in high school, but she did not enjoy the large school in the city and became very lonely. Carla's loneliness for family and friends she had known all her life in Wabasca was too much for her to bear at such a young age. So those that stayed to go to secondary school in Wabasca generally discussed their positive experiences with the school system, and their feeling that they were too young to make the choice to move away for school at such a young age.

Examining where community members graduated high school further demonstrates the mobility patterns during secondary education. Out of the ten students that left Wabasca for a better secondary education in urban centres, seven eventually moved back for their final year to graduate from high school in Wabasca and only three remained in Edmonton. Those that stayed in Edmonton to graduate coincidentally all graduated from the same Edmonton Catholic high school, which was known for being a culturally diverse school with Aboriginal programming and supports. As well, there were three other individuals that graduated high school in Edmonton where they lived. There were seven community members that lived in Wabasca with their parents throughout their childhood from elementary to their high school graduation; of these, just over half eventually moved to the city to pursue a post-secondary education afterwards. One person moved to live with a parent in another First Nations community where he graduated high school. Of the 31 community members interviewed, about a third of them had left Wabasca to

pursue a better education in an urban centre during junior high and high school, but most moved home to graduate. Overall, about half of the community members in this study graduated high school in Wabasca, whether they had previously left or not. And only a handful that had moved away actually stuck it out and graduated high school in Edmonton. However, regardless of where they eventually graduated, it appears those that left Wabasca for a better secondary education did graduate high school and didn't drop out; it is unclear whether this is because they always had the personal motivation to complete their schooling and valued their education, or because experiencing an education outside of Wabasca was actually a better educational experience.

Of the 31 community members interviewed, there were ten that dropped out of high school. Of the ten that dropped out of high school, seven later received their GED or pursued high school upgrading as mature students, and four eventually completed a post-secondary education as mature students. Those community members that dropped out of high school cited different main reasons for leaving school. Three women cited getting involved with drugs and alcohol at a young age, which negatively affected their schooling so that they eventually dropped out (one of whom had attempted to move away to pursue a high school education in the city). There were also three men who dropped out of high school around the age of 16-18 to work in the lucrative oil industry in Wabasca (one of whom also cited drugs and alcohol as another major negative influence during his youth). Three cited personal reasons for dropping out of high school; for example, an abusive relationship with a boyfriend, growing up in the foster-care system, or struggling with bullying. One person did not cite a reason for dropping out of high school.

Although they appeared to move away or stay in Wabasca for different reasons, the common thread among these narratives was the community member's agency. For many,

moving away for school as teenagers was their own choice which the family and community supported, as if moving away for secondary school was a normalized educational milestone and was expected of those who valued education and wanted to eventually pursue a post-secondary education. A few of those that had moved away for secondary school mentioned they were academic high achievers. For example Emily, Brenda and Johnny all mentioned having high grades when they left Wabasca for school elsewhere. Jason discussed always striving to be at the top of his class while attending high school and university in the city. Even Tracy, who admitted to sometimes falling in with the wrong crowd during high school, mentioned how she worked her "butt off" in order to ensure that she graduated high school on time. As I look back at my own decision to move to the city for high school when I was 17 years old, I recall my desire to eventually go to university, and being told by family and teachers I needed to attend a city school to have a chance at entering university. As well, there was also a fear from my parents that there were too many negative influences on-reserve (drugs, alcohol, teenage pregnancy, and dropping out of school), and if I moved to the city I could focus on my studies. Even when I was approached to take my teenage niece so she could attend junior high in the city, educators from the community vouched that she was an exceptional student and that she needed to get out of the community before she became involved in negative influences.

So it appears those that leave the community as teenagers to pursue secondary school in the city do so based on not just their own choice to pursue an education but also based community support, specifically community perceptions that good students need to get out before negative influences impact their education. As well community members had the perception that schools in Wabasca, on reserve and on MD land, were problematic because of the low provincial achievement tests scores and the exodus of high achievers leaving the community,

not making it conducive to a successful learning environment. This perception was shaped by the past colonial injustices of the educational system and the current lack of funding on reserve and in northern communities. It seems Indigenous students are viewed as ticking time bombs. If they don't leave the reserve soon enough, they may succumb to negative influences and lose their chance at a good education. I am not sure if mainstream Canadian students experience this same urgency of moving away for a better education when they are teenagers, and whether they need to have the strength to make this decision to leave their home communities at such a young age. It seems the community perception is that the choice for a better education (and future post-secondary decisions and future employment), must be made by Indigenous students living in Indigenous communities between the ages of 13 -17. And yet, when actually looking at those that attended high school in the home community of Wabasca, many actually graduated and some even went on to post-secondary educations afterward.

6.4 POST-SECONDARY CHOICES

Another major choice community members had to make along their life paths was whether or not to pursue a post-secondary education, and where they would attend school. There were those that completed high school on time and immediately entered post-secondary institutions around the ages of 18-19. Then there were those who choose to pursue a post-secondary education later in life for various reasons, either after having children, after they had been in the workforce for a few years, or after going through a negative period of drugs, alcohol and/or abusive relationships. In the following discuss the various educational experiences of those that graduated from a post-secondary education, those that began a post-secondary education and didn't complete it, and those currently in post-secondary schooling.

6.4.1 Graduates of Post-Secondary Education

Of the 31 community members interviewed, 16 people had completed a post-secondary education. The following table provides a breakdown of the different levels of education levels achieved.

Table 4: Study Sample Characteristics: Highest Level of Education (N = 31)			
	Female	Male	Total
Highest Level of Education:			
Some High School	1	3	4
High School Diploma/GED	6	5	11
College Certificate (1 yr)	2	3	5
College Diploma (2 yr)	5	2	7
University Degree (4 yr)	2	2	4

Of the 16 with completed post-secondary educations, 7 went straight through from high school into post-secondary institutions, graduating college in their early twenties. For those that did not go straight through from high school to college, there were 5 people who pursued a post-secondary education after having children; they normally received a great deal of family support in order to complete their education. Four cited personal reasons for completing their post-secondary educations in their late twenties or early thirties (e.g. abusive relationships, periods of drugs and alcohol use, and previous failed attempts at moving away for school). One woman took a different path, receiving a college diploma in her early twenties, and then returning to earn a degree in her thirties after having had a child and being employed.

Most of these 16 community members earned their post-secondary educations at various institutions around Alberta including 7 in Edmonton, 3 at the local college in Wabasca, 2 through online distance education programs while living in Wabasca, 2 in Lac La Biche, and 1 in Fort McMurray. One person earned his post-secondary education in the United States. For many, the location where they decided to pursue a post-secondary program was based on where the specific program was located, for example the B.Ed. offered at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, or

the Licensed Practical Nurse program at Portage College in Lac La Biche. Considering half of those with a post-secondary education were fresh out of high school with no family obligations, they went where their desired program was located. Those young students who had strong family support networks that provided them with moral and financial support were able to complete their post-secondary educations on time. As well those that completed their post-secondary education at a young age showed they had determination to complete their education early.

Some had to return to high school to upgrade or complete a GED before entering a post-secondary program. In the following, Paulina discussed the challenges of upgrading mainly through distance education at Northern Lakes College, while living in Wabasca:

> The first two years of upgrading went fine. The only one thing was that there were no grade 11-12 math teachers so I failed math because I had no proper face to face instruction and I couldn't teach myself…I only have math 10… but I failed at my math 20 because I couldn't find anybody to help me. So that was just math, but everything besides that was smooth sailing and then Office Administration as well, I was the only one for the year. I was alone in class and it was all modules. I went to Slave Lake to see my instructor maybe two or three times out of the year. I didn't really like it because I was alone. Nobody to help or compare my work to… and too small of a class for anybody to have a teacher on site.

Although Paulina had a supportive family network while she was raising young children and upgrading in Wabasca, the necessary educational supports at the college made her experience challenging. This differed from those that moved to the city for upgrading. They had the educational supports to succeed in their upgrading and didn't discuss such challenges.

Those who went back to college after having children had to take into consideration their childcare needs. For example, Carla chose to do her Bachelor of Education degree through an Aboriginal Teacher Education Program offered through Northern Lakes College in Wabasca and Slave Lake. She could stay in Wabasca since her parents provided help with childcare. Samuel chose to go to Portage College because he had young children with his partner, and the college

offered family housing. On the other hand, Anika choose to complete her Bachelor of Education at the University of Alberta, since she could not find stable housing in Wabasca and she could live with one of her sister in the city; both sisters were university students with children and provided each other with a lot of social support.

For those that primarily cited personal reasons for going back to complete their post-secondary educations in their mid to late twenties, they seemed to experience several barriers and some even mentioned several attempts of going back to school before completing their education. For example, Louise experienced an addiction problem as a teenager, dropped out of high school, entered an abusive relationship, had a child and eventually went back to school after escaping to a women's shelter in the city. While at the women's shelter, Louise was encouraged to register for college as a mature student to upgrade her high school courses. She eventually completed her college diploma.

6.4.2 Began but Did Not Complete

Five community members began a post-secondary program but did not end up finishing. Three of those who dropped out were pursuing university degrees in Edmonton and Grande Prairie, and one was pursuing a skilled trades program in Edmonton. One woman went to university for one year after high school, but dropped out due to personal reasons, she has not been able to afford to go back after having a child and entering the workforce. Another woman went to university right after high school (transferring between three university programs), but she was offered permanent employment in an urban Aboriginal organization as an undergrad; although she is close completing her degree, her job is too demanding to return to university full time. One man began a university program but had to leave school during his first year because his sibling committed suicide and he needed time to grieve; he never returned to the program.

One man went to university right out of high school, but instead chose a path of learning traditional culture from the elders and works as a successful artist and motivational speaker to youth. It appears that while these five individuals choose not to continue their post-secondary educations for various personal reasons, they benefited from the demand for educated Indigenous people in our communities. Four were able to remain steadily employed after leaving university/college, and were employed in positions that normally require post-secondary credentials (Oilfield Company Manager, Family Support Worker, Medical Benefits Analyst, and working Artist).

6.4.3 Current Students of Post-Secondary Education

There were four community members pursuing their post-secondary educations at the time of the interview. For example, Angus entered university in Edmonton right out of high school, where he is currently completing his business degree. One woman graduated high school in Edmonton; after working in various industries (oil industry and human services) she has decided to go to trades college in Edmonton because of the employment stability and lucrative nature of the profession. Besides the young undergrad who went straight into university, these students are primarily mature students who decided to pursue a post-secondary education to increase their employability after being in the workforce for a period of time and/or after having children.

There were also two people who worked in the oil industry and construction, and wanted to pursue apprenticeships in the trades. They never officially entered such a post-secondary program. Although they worked as carpenter's helpers or pipe fitter's helpers or welder's helpers, they were never official registered apprentices. The issue of difficulties encountered by Indigenous men wanting to enter the trades will be discussed further in a later section.

6.5 WORK CHOICES

Another normative life choice that needs to be made after completing an education (or not), is the choice to enter the workforce. For the community members there were three distinct paths that yielded different outcomes in work choices; those that left school early and immediately entered the workforce: those that went straight through, completing their education and then entering the workforce: and those who took different types of pathways, such as having children and then completing an education before entering the workforce. Then there were more complicated pathways for some individuals. For example, completing high school but not completing a post-secondary program, entering the workforce, having children, and then returning to a post-secondary program and re-entering the workforce while completing further credentials. This was the case for one Power Engineer. Whatever pathway community members in Edmonton or Wabasca seemed to take, it appeared completing an education at some point provided them with greater choices, and more stability in employment.

In Wabasca, five of the men interviewed worked in the oil industry, from truck driver to engineering to management, and the other three men I interviewed worked in local government for the First Nation or the municipality. Of the women I interviewed from the Wabasca area, three worked in local government administration, two worked in education, one worked in oilfield administration, and one was a college student. There are clear gendered differences in paid labour in the community of Wabasca, with men mostly being pushed to work in the oil industry (often lured by the lucrative incomes) and women working in administrative positions or local government. I will return to how men felt pushed to work in the oil industry in Wabasca and how this creates gendered differences in the labour force.

A gendered division of labour in the workforce for those community members employed in Edmonton was not so apparent. Most of the individuals interviewed in Edmonton had initially moved to the city to pursue a secondary or post-secondary education, and remained in the city once they began working. Due to their various educational backgrounds, these community members in Edmonton had various types of employment. Please refer below to Table 5 for a complete break of occupations of community members in the Wabasca and Edmonton samples. The gendered differences in employment for those community members in the city were not so apparent; in fact I interviewed a female pipefitter and a male nurse. There were also those in more gendered occupations, for example a female dental assistant and two men in construction. But overall, the genders were divided almost equally between different types of occupation in the city.

Table 5: Study Sample Characteristics: Types of Occupations (N = 31)			
	Female	Male	Total
Wabasca Sample (n=16)			
Oilfield Management	0	2	2
Oilfield Operations (Engineering, Truck Driver)	0	3	3
Oilfield Administration	1	0	1
Government Management	1	0	1
Government Administration	3	2	5
Water Treatment Technician	0	1	1
Secondary Teacher	2	0	2
Post-Secondary Student	1	0	1
Edmonton Sample (n=15)			
Health Care Professions (Nursing, Dental)	1	1	2
Aboriginal Organization Outreach/Family Worker	3	1	4
Skilled Trades Apprentice (Pipefitting, Carpentry)	1	1	2
Post-Secondary Student	2	2	4
Self-Employed (Small Business, Artist)	1	2	3

6.5.1 Leaving School Early To Work

For a few men that worked in Wabasca, they explained that they left high school early (around age 16-17), entered the oil industry, and have been working in the oil industry for about the last 15 years. Normally in their narratives, these young men entered the oil industry to work alongside their fathers and/or alongside their high school friends that also dropped out. I focus on the story of Kirk as one example of this pattern.

Kirk explains his experience of leaving high school early to enter the workforce in the oil industry: "I didn't finish high school…I only had like a month or two left and I friggin' got booted out of it. So then I worked in the (oil) patch ever since and I've been in the oilfield for fifteen years". He goes on to discuss how this was a similar experience in his school cohort: "my close friends that I went to high school with, there was four of us that didn't finish high school and we all got booted out within a month…". Eventually Kirk did get his GED when he was around 24 years old, in order to have more opportunities in the workforce. In the following, he explains his career path:

> Well when I first started in the (oil) patch it was just as a general labourer. I was shovelling sand and just doing painting those were my job duties to start with… I was there with them for probably three years and then I got working alongside a general foreman who was the pipefitter at that time and within those three years I tried welding, working as a welder's helper and then pipefitting, and then after that I did the electrical trade for… four years and there I was a third year electrical apprentice. I went to NAIT for my first and second year but then I ended up getting in an argument with my foreman and quit at that time and then I jumped over to (another company) and got on a maintenance crew there just doing pipefitting, and I moved up fast there. I was with (that company) for I don't know four years, five years and worked my way into the office there… I was looking after crews… of up to twelve, fifteen guys, welders doing isometric drawings… so then when I jumped here (to my current company)… I didn't come over to work in the office right away but that was the intent but I just kind of organized the guys here when I first came over and then worked my way into the operation manager position.

Along this career path, Kirk went from general labourer, to welder's helper, to pipefitter's helper, to electrical apprentice, to supervising and managing work crews. At some point during his career he was able to receive training to become a National Certified Safety Officer (NCSO), which is a Construction Safety Designation that requires a combination of three years field experience in construction and 13 courses, which is offered through the Alberta Construction Safety Association (Alberta Construction Safety Association 2014). Kirk's story is similar to the other men I interviewed that left high school to work in the oil industry. Most began as general labourers, and then began working alongside those with skilled trades. Due to the precarious nature of unskilled work, these men became interested in gaining credentials in order to secure more steady employment. I borrow the term precarious employment, as defined by Cranford, Vosko and Zukewich as "forms of employment involving atypical employment contracts, limited social benefits and statutory entitlements, job insecurity, low job tenure, low earnings, poor working conditions and high risks of ill health…the term "precarious employment" places emphasis on the quality of employment" (Cranford, Vosko and Zukewich 2003: 455). It is often minorities such as ethnic minorities and women who are more vulnerable to precarious employment conditions. Leaving high school to go work in the oil industry, these men were limited to doing unskilled work. Until their employers supported them in gaining some credentials (such as entering a trades apprenticeship to become Journeymen, or getting their Class 1 driver's license to become truck drivers) or they outright left the oil industry to go back to school.

Andrew had a similar career path as Kirk, leaving high school to work in the oil industry. One similarity he shared with Kirk was that he had tried different positions working alongside

different types of Journeymen, and at one point he became interested in entering a Pipefitter

Apprenticeship but as he explained this dream fell through.

> I tried to be a pipefitter, yet these guys who I try to apprentice under…they wouldn't sign
> my hours or they screwed me around, so I ended up back to being nothing, just a skilled
> labourer, a highly skilled labourer yet I don't get the wages to be paid to do pipefitting…I
> don't make the money I should be…I was going to go to school before I found a job to be
> a pipefitter, then I got laid off work there for a couple month... Everything fell through
> and I got screwed over again.

For Andrew, it seems he worked with different employers for a few months at a time, from three

months to a year as he described in our interview. Due to the precarious nature of work, he

bounced between different types of work, gaining enough experience in one trade but never long

enough to gain credentials. At one point he had the desire to become a Pipefitter Journeymen,

however despite apprenticing under a Journeyman, the company he was working for at the time

did not sign off on his apprenticeship hours due to a dispute.

In order to be an apprentice in the trades in Alberta one "must find an employer who is

willing and able to hire you as an apprentice" and one "must be a registered with Apprenticeship

and Industry Training" (Government of Alberta 2014). Once you become a registered apprentice,

your employer must sign off and submit the number of hours worked to Alberta Apprenticeship

and Industry Training (Government of Alberta 2014). In both Kirk and Andrew's situations, their

employers did not sign off on their apprenticeship hours, which prevented them from continuing

in a trade's apprenticeship. As well, by not signing off on their apprenticeship hours, these

employers were only required to pay them a lower wage as a general laborer. In Andrew's

situation, after losing out on his apprenticeship hours, he went to Bigstone ASETS which offers

employment guidance and funding to go to trades college. They rejected funding him because he

had previously received funding for Power Engineering, and he would have to wait one year

before applying for further funding. At that point, he decided to go back into Power Engineering and work as a student operator engineer. Even when he decided to work towards his engineering credentials again, he had the difficult decision of either working for an off-reserve company at a student operator wage or working for an on-reserve company making a general laborer wage tax-free. He said: "I chose experience over money at the time which was good because they kept me around". Since then he has worked as a Fourth Class Power Engineer for a couple years, and he has been able to find a position with an on-reserve company getting paid tax free and he is working towards completing his engineering program.

Although both Kirk and Andrew went back for their GED, and have begun working in more skilled jobs (NSCO and Power Engineering), their dropping out of high school and not continuing post-secondary programs meant they experienced unskilled work. Even when they attempted to gain credentials in the skilled trades, their employers did not support them, and they had to make difficult decisions between pursuing their dreams of gaining credentials or finding work elsewhere. As I listened to these stories of Indigenous men in the oil industry, I began to wonder whether they were being discriminated against based on race and whether their stories may be a more widespread issue.

Vincent felt he chose a different path than many men in Wabasca because he does not work in the oil industry and he completed his high school education. Vincent worked in local government for a bit before choosing to get a college diploma and becoming certified as a Water Treatment Plant Operator. With Vincent's credentials regulated by Alberta Environment, he has the choice to work anywhere in the province. He also finds satisfaction in his job maintaining water treatment plants, and training others in First Nations communities on water issues. However, he felt he wasn't pushed enough to go into a post-secondary education or pursue a

career outside of the oil industry. In his view, this streaming has a negative effect on the choices men have in the community:

> I always felt I did well enough just to pass…I felt the teachers didn't really push…they're sort of content with what you're going to become and what they strive for us, for people to keep continuing to work in the oilfield here, I think, and they should be pushing them to do other things… the programs they had were like work experience programs, pretty much getting (us) ready for the oilfield. I feel the men should have been pushed to produce advanced diplomas.

> …a lot of guys didn't finish high school. Well actually I see it as a bit of social problem too because…I think most parents would rather see their kids go to work than finish school around here. That's what I see. That's how the kids are set up, just to work, from both the schooling education system and from parents, I think.

Although there are a variety of jobs in the oil industry that require post-secondary educations (from trades, to engineering, to business and environmental sciences, etc.) and provide for greater job satisfaction and steady employment, it seems local Indigenous men are denied these opportunities when they drop out of high school to work. For local Indigenous men, the expectation is that they will leave high school early, not graduate and enter the oil industry as laborers. As demonstrated in Kirk and Andrew's narratives, when men are limited to work as general laborers, they are unskilled workers who earn a lower wage and they are limited to precarious contract work. And unfortunately, with this push for local Indigenous men to work in the oil industry, they are not pushed to consider other careers and industries.

This push for local Indigenous men to drop out of high school and enter the workforce in the oil industry has created a gendered and racialized life script in the community. Many of the men in the community spoke to how their life course followed this life script and how they made choices to follow a different path.

6.5.2 Completing High School and/or Post-Secondary

Completing an education seemed to ensure stable employment and/or career choices of where to work. This was especially true for those that followed the linear path of going straight through high school and straight through post-secondary education without any major breaks in their educational journey. There were some that completed their high school education on time and then immediately entered the workforce. Especially for those deciding whether or not to work in Wabasca's oil industry, having a high school diploma gave them choices of where to work. Jennifer, who works as an executive assistant at a local oilfield company, explained it's easier for her to get a job locally over others because she has a high school diploma. Since completing high school, she has been able to make the choice to work in Wabasca to stay close to family, and find steady employment, only taking periods off of work for maternity leave. She feels she may be more valued in the local Wabasca workforce because of her high school education: "I guess if I move to the city it would be really hard for me to find a job over there because I only have my diploma whereas in Wabasca where we live, not many people graduate every year". Although Jennifer could have had the choice to work deeper in the oilfield about an hour outside the community, she chose her job for its proximity to home and shorter commute. She explained she "loves" her job, where she is a part of "a little office family", and she gets to make the choice to work close to home.

Pete on the other hand did not enjoy working in the oil industry. After completing high school he entered the local industry to work alongside his father, as an oilfield operator. Pete discussed how he "absolutely hated" working in the oilfield. He says "I didn't want to wake up in the mornings because it's so terrible for me being out there all day driving around taking numbers and I felt a monkey could do my job". Despite the fact that he made a lot of money, his

job was not satisfying. He explains: "I made $25.00 an hour on my truck, that's ten hours a day and then I made $26.50 an hour for my personal wages and then if I used my gas monitor I believe their gas monitor makes $20.00 a day as well and I charged all my tools at $50.00 a day". By the age of 20 he was able to purchase a new truck and a house. But at one point he described crying to his girlfriend one night after finding out he had to go back to work in the oilfield because they were expecting a baby. So despite the financial stability his job offered, it was not worth such low job satisfaction. In addition to the social isolation and the menial tasks of his job, he did not enjoy the requirement of sometimes having to stay in a work camp. For this reason he said, "I always chose jobs where I could come home at night and I'm not going to go and sleep in a camp when I have a perfectly fine bed". Even though he explained that he could make more money staying in a work camp by collecting a camp allowance in addition to his wages, the money was not enough to keep him happy. Pete also mentioned how the oilfield industry is not always accommodating to men with families. He noted the difference between his current job in local government with his previous job in the oil industry:

> My job now where, I can phone my boss and say 'hey my son's sick at daycare I have to go get him' and my daycare is five minutes away. If I did that out in the field when I was an oil field operator my foreman would have said 'where's your wife or fiancée or girlfriend or where is she, why can't she take your son or call your parents you can't leave work' kind of thing…and then another thing too is leaving one day out in the oil field when a lot of these guys do what I did, I trapped myself with bills I got a whole whack load of bills and then I had to make all that money so if you miss one day it makes a huge difference out in the oilfield.

Pete's experience highlights the masculinist nature of oil industry work, of working long hours and making a lot of money, which is noted in other research on Alberta's oil industry (Dorow 2015). Eventually an employment opportunity in Wabasca came up where Pete was able to utilize his people skills. He got a job managing youth and recreation programs. He describes the transition from going from a job he was dissatisfied with to a job that he enjoys:

238

Yeah but being in the oilfield wasn't for me. It was not my speed. I was good at it but I felt it wasn't challenging me enough… I have a lot of people skills and other talents that I think I could be doing instead of driving around in the truck all day taking numbers and not being around as many people as I would like to be. I enjoyed working with the people out there but it wasn't enough… Like the money was fantastic but money isn't everything. If you're not happy then money is nothing. I can honestly wake up in the morning now and be really happy to go to work and look forward to going there and still be able to take care of my family which is really important so I have all the security of being able to financially take care of my family and I also have that happiness that I get from my job.

With his high school education and his experience working with youth, he was then able to turn his passion into a job. He got a call to apply for a job working in local government in recreation. He chose to leave a job that paid a lot of money in the oilfield to a job where he enjoys inspiring youth and working in recreation. Due to his high school education, Pete can choose work based on job satisfaction and not just on financial benefits.

Completing high school and a post-secondary education and then immediately entering the workforce, was a pathway that ensured permanent steady employment. This is another example of the influence of structure on community member's lives. The education system and the workforce are set up in terms of meritocracy (whether this works out in practice is debatable). Those that followed a linear meritocratic path of education were almost guaranteed to be successful in the workforce. About half of those that had a completed post-secondary education followed this pattern (7 out of 16). And among the community members interviewed, healthcare professionals and educators tended to follow this linear pattern. As well, they tended to wait to have children after a few years of being in the workforce, which allowed them to easily re-enter the workforce after taking a parental leave. As mentioned previously, the parents in the city tended to only have one child, which may be due to the fact that they waited to have children after completing a post-secondary education and entering a career.

Jason describes going straight from high school into university and right into the workforce. He mentions that he took a different path than other men in Wabasca. Jason never went through a period of working as a labourer in the oil industry; he went straight into management positions after finishing university. Jason also explains he was very studious in high school and university, and was involved in sports which kept him focused.

> Basically I went straight from high school right into university studies... And so I noticed a difference when I came back, you're coming back educated and you're getting right into the workforce into an office-type position. A lot of the guys my age that are from the community… they're labourers or they might be operators in the oil field…when I got back I was the Director for the newly created position. And from there I got to be involved with the (local government). And I went from a staff of just myself when I first started to a staff of about forty-five people working under me when I left the (local government) as a Service Manager at that time... So that's a big thing that I've noticed in the difference with the route that I took.

Jason recognizes going straight from high school to university to the workforce has given him the privilege to work in management positions in local government, and to remain steadily employed. He also recognizes other men in the community who did not take that path do not have as much agency in choosing work because they don't have the same credentials.

Two community members who worked in healthcare professions exemplify how completing a post-secondary education at a young age can result in steady employment. Both Emily and Greg went straight from high school and into college, both graduating college in their early twenties. Recall that Greg worked as a Licensed Practical Nurse primarily in Edmonton hospitals for the past decade. Emily has worked a Registered Dental Assistant for a short period on reserve but primarily in private practices in Edmonton for the past decade.

Greg believes his post-secondary education is probably similar to others who go to college, "you have to leave home and you have this fixed budget and you're focused on school and work hard to accomplish your post-secondary". He believes his work experience differs from

other Aboriginal men in the community, "because I have a career so my work experience is focused on my career and I have a permanent job". He explains that many of his Aboriginal friends in the city don't have that stability in work because they don't have the education: "They don't have stability so they work different jobs, short term jobs like retail, sales or labour where it's not, it's not guaranteed every day because they don't have post-secondary education". For Greg it is very straight forward, you get a post-secondary education and you get permanent employment. Over the past ten years Greg has worked for two of Edmonton's largest hospitals, working in acute care and rehabilitation units. Although his area of speciality has changed, he has remained continuously employed. Since he has a post-secondary education in a healthcare profession, Greg has a choice to work where he is most satisfied with his work. He explains "working in the city I have choices of different areas in the hospital that I would like to work in and if I worked back home I wouldn't have those choices and I wouldn't use all my skills". He feels that were he to work back home on the reserve; he would be stuck working in home care. In the city in large hospitals, the possibilities of utilizing all of his skills and being exposed to a variety of work is endless.

Over the past ten years Emily has also worked continuously in her profession as a dental assistant. Due to the demand for dental assistants, she has been able to work in a few different types of practices before settling down in a specialized practice. Since her profession is in demand, she has chosen to work in the city over working for a dental practice on reserve. She explains that in the city, there is "more variety, different types of procedures, different kinds of patients, just different in everything". As well, working for a specialised dental practice in the city in comparison to dental practices on reserves, she explains, "I find it's more of a professional setting" in the city. She found working on reserve there were too many community

politics, which led to "disorganized" and "dysfunctional" practices, with questionable management of resources. Working for a large practice in the city, she is able to be a part of a large healthcare professional team and she enjoys the variety of work she is exposed to on a daily basis.

Both Greg and Emily have been steadily employed for the past decade. Their main concern is not whether they can find work, because in their professions they are able to remain steadily employed, but they are able to think about the job satisfaction offered by different positions and the professional development they will receive.

There were others that had followed a pattern of completing a post-secondary education at a young age, and then were able to go back for more advanced post-secondary educations after being in the workforce and after having children. Scenarios like this will be discussed in greater detail in the following section on the impact having children has on choices of school and work.

6.6 FAMILY CHOICES: THE IMPACT OF CHILDBEARING ON SCHOOL AND WORK

In the following section, I will discuss what life course approach researchers call 'early childbearing', which generally refers to women who have children at a young age, and normally meaning a teenager giving birth to a baby before reaching milestones such as completing a high school education and/or a post-secondary education (Cooke 2013). Cooke's analysis highlights that mainstream research shows that early childbearing will have negative impacts on future life course trajectories (Cooke 2013). Those women who have children young will be more likely not to complete their education, more likely to experience poverty, and more likely to be marginalized in the workforce. These negative life course trajectories as a result of early childbearing can be even more exacerbated for Aboriginal women (Cooke 2013), because she is

more likely to have experienced an "accumulation of disadvantages" (Cooke and McWhirter 2011) as a child or teenager such as abuse, poverty, coming from a family of lower levels of educational attainments, or racism and marginalization in the educational system.

Nevertheless, motherhood is a sacred gift in Indigenous communities and as women we must respect this gift and care for each other when we receive this gift.

> Our high teen pregnancy rates may be due to our acceptance of pregnancy, our reverence for the sacred, and the place of children in our societies…we must re-examine these traditions and reconstruct the values behind them so that they fit our modern lives. (Anderson 2000: 195)

> Aboriginal peoples across Turtle Island have come through wars, slaughter, smallpox, forced relocation, starvation and assimilation. I believe that both conscious and unconscious efforts have been made to keep our families alive by continuing to produce children and replenish the population in times of great loss. (Anderson 2003:175)

In his analysis of the life course of First Nations parents who experience early childbearing Cooke explains that: "Different First Nations family formations and cultural attitudes toward parenthood may lead to fertility decisions that do not appear rational from a non-Aboriginal perspective, but may well make sense within the context of First Nations communities" (Cooke 2013: 4). According to Cooke, it is important to consider the experiences young parents have and the resources they have available to them: "The presence of social or other supports for childbearing may reduce the social and economic costs of early childbearing, and may also make it possible to reconcile early childbearing with other life course goals" (Cooke 2013: 4). It is clear that there are higher rates of early childbearing in Indigenous communities[xii], but what are more important to try to examine are the Indigenous cultural understandings of parenthood and the social supports available in our communities. In the following narratives community members discuss their experiences and understandings of early

childbearing (and childbearing in general) and the resources available to them while they pursued school and work as parents.

In this entire research project, the most impressive example of resilience and agency were the community members who discussed their ambition and determination in completing their education while parenting children and often working at the same time. This was especially the case with the educated Indigenous women I interviewed; they possessed the strength and ability to overcome many challenges, while balancing competing priorities along the way; such as dealing with the demands of childcare, working, college courses, and financial responsibilities. Five of the seven mothers I interviewed in Wabasca had their first child between the ages of 19-21, meaning they were mothers while pursuing a post-secondary education. Of the seven mothers I interviewed in Wabasca four had completed a post-secondary education, one had a high school diploma and two were currently attending Northern Lakes College.

I interviewed six Indigenous mothers in Edmonton. Most of these mothers had one child, which they normally had in their mid-twenties to early thirties. One Edmonton mother was an exception, in that she began having children in her early twenties and had three children at the time of the interview. Five of these Indigenous Edmonton mothers had a post-secondary education, most having their child after or while completing their post-secondary education. It seems in general, the Wabasca mothers and Edmonton mothers had different life courses. Wabasca mothers having children in their early twenties then pursing a post-secondary education after childbearing; while Edmonton mothers pursing a post-secondary education in their early twenties, then having one child after completing their education or while in the midst of their post-secondary education. Mothers from both locations took different journeys in their twenties,

but arrived at around the same point of achieving both motherhood and an education in their early thirties.

Since many of these Indigenous women discussed taking time out of their career journeys to bear children, their interviews addressed their responsibilities for managing childcare while they were working or were in school; because of this I will mostly discuss the mother's experiences. I did interview two fathers in Edmonton, and seven fathers in Wabasca, but for the most part the men did not highlight having children as a major milestone that created challenges in their schooling experiences and in their workforce experiences. These men mostly discussed the financial responsibilities of having a family, which is why they choose certain career choices. There were also a few men who mentioned finding family oriented communities when deciding where to live when pursuing a post-secondary education. In the following section, I will discuss a few narratives to highlight how having children and childcare responsibilities influenced schooling experiences and working experiences.

To begin I will discuss Brenda's life course narrative; her experiences of being a working mother while pursuing a post-secondary education speaks to the strength and determination of Indigenous women. Brenda had her first child around the age of 21 and by age 23 she moved to the city to earn a two-year college diploma in Environmental Technology. After finishing college, she began working in land management. While working she began taking distance-learning courses on land management through the University of Saskatchewan. She described commuting between Wabasca, Alberta and Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, while taking courses, which is a full day's drive. She explains that for one year, "I lived in Saskatchewan two weeks out of every month". At that time she had a "brand new" baby, a few months old and she would bring a babysitter with her to Saskatoon to watch the baby and leave her two older children in

Wabasca with their father and grandparents. Every month, she would pack up her baby, the baby

supplies, and a babysitter and live in a hotel for two weeks. This was a very rigorous work,

school, and family schedule.

When I asked her how she managed this type of schedule, she mentioned that while she

was currently going to school, and working full-time, she was also a parent, and a housewife "24

hours a day, 7 days a week". Brenda proudly proclaimed she works full time with four children

while continuing university, because "We're women! Native women! Cree!" She identifies her

tremendous work ethic and work-life balance because as Native women we are able to do all of

these things; we are hard workers.

Carla also spoke to the challenges of being a mother while pursuing a post-secondary

education. Carla has a Bachelor's of Education Degree and she states "getting the degree was

difficult at times because I had (my daughter) and she was six months old when I decided to go

back to school and that's when I went to the college…" At the time she went to college she was

20 years old and she wasn't sure what she wanted to major in, but she knew a university

education would improve her life course. She was eventually introduced to the Aboriginal

Teachers Education Program (ATEP) through Northern Lakes College, which was an intense

program designed to educate Aboriginal teachers while living in their northern communities. For

Carla, she had a baby and wanted a post-secondary education; the program worked for her

because she was able to stay close to family while getting her degree. Having a baby and

working towards a degree, which sometimes required her to travel to a campus over an hour

away had many challenges. She explains how difficult it was to earn her degree and how she

often wanted to quit, but with the support of family she was able to finish:

> Because all of it, having a baby, sometimes having not enough time to complete this
> assignment or even wanting to go watch hockey. I remember how many times I would sit

246

up all night to finish an assignment just so I could have the weekend off and to go watch hockey or whatever. My life revolved around school and at times it was so difficult to do anything, or my baby was sick and an assignment would be due… it was difficult for me…

Carla recognizes that the tremendous family support she received allowed her to complete her education. While she was in school, her husband worked in the oil industry to pay household bills and Carla received a living allowance as a sponsored student through Bigstone Education Authority. As well, towards the end of her degree, she had a second child, so she was able to continue having children while in school because her family provided a great deal of childcare support. In comparison to Carla's family support, she noted one of her classmates in the ATEP B.Ed. program had to drop out because she was a single mother with no childcare support or financial support from family, and the childcare responsibilities in addition to the course load became too much for this classmate.

Both Brenda and Carla had the support of their spouses and their parents, and also their female siblings who shared in childcare responsibilities; they were able to get an education while living in Wabasca because of all the family support. Of the six mothers I interviewed in Wabasca, five had spouses or common-law partners, so this scenario of having supportive partners and parents was a common theme. The one single mother I did interview in Wabasca was Marie, she was upgrading at Northern Lakes College and she lived near her parents and female siblings who provided moral support and childcare support.

In contrast, another woman named Melissa described her life as a natural progression from graduating high school, getting married, having children, going to community college, getting a job, and putting her kids in hockey. Melissa explained how women in the community have children when they are teenagers and she didn't have children until she was 21. She

explains these differences: "in my age group, most of my friends had their children earlier. I didn't. I had my children and then went back to school a couple of years ago…when I go to school, I would see the same age group there also attending, well it's not so different I guess". She describes many of her friends had children when they were ages 16, 17, or 18. However, she explained while in community college some of her classmates where those woman that had dropped out of high school to have children, so although these women may have had children younger than she did, these were her classmates when she attended college.

Another woman that differentiates herself from women who experienced teenage motherhood is Tracy. She explains she always knew she wanted to live in the city when she grew up, and she wanted a life different than the other girls she knew on reserve:

> I had no kids. I always worked, so I had money, and I just wanted to explore. And watching my friends back home having kids at young ages and being frustrated and sometimes stuck on welfare, I just didn't want that…

She describes a life course of young women on reserve, of having children at a young age and being stuck on reserve and living on social assistance. Somehow at a young age she knew she wanted something different, to avoid a life course of early childbearing and poverty, and she made the choice to go to school in the city, and have no children. In this sense both Melissa and Tracy differentiate themselves from a gendered life script they have seen on reserve in which woman are expected to experience teenage motherhood and experience poverty later in life.

Of the six mothers I interviewed in Edmonton, four were single mothers. Many of these single mothers in Edmonton had a post-secondary education, and they did not receive nearly as much family support as those mothers in Wabasca. All of the Edmonton mothers either had a high school diploma or a college diploma (with one mother recently completing her university

degree). Most of these Edmonton women had left Wabasca to pursue an education in the city, so for the most part they were working in their chosen professions at the time of the interview.

One woman that went into detail about the daily challenges of being a single mother in the city was Anika. She already had a college diploma and a child when she decided to go back to school to get a degree in her late twenties. Since Anika was in university at the time of the interview, she discussed the day-to-day challenges of mothering, working, and going to school full time. Anika worked as a part-time casual at the university daycare, she worked casually at a group home for teenage mothers doing night shifts, she taught Cree language labs at the university, and she tutored first year Aboriginal students at the university. Since all four of her jobs were casual part-time and mostly on-campus, she was able to incorporate them into her class schedule so she could continue to focus on her studies. In order to manage her studies and jobs, she described treating her studies like a job; she goes to the university every day as if it's her job and when she came home, she focuses on family. She explains this schedule:

> This is my job and when I'm done at 5:00pm I'm done, I go home and do what I'm supposed to do, I don't want to worry about anything else too much, because I think when you have a kid you really have to think about how much time you're giving them… I get home… me and my sister takes turns cooking… whoever cooks the other one cleans. And then I have to make sure I get him bathed and get to bed by 8:30pm so my nights are busy… by the time I'd ever get to do homework would be 9:00pm.

As a mother in university, Anika has to keep a very organized schedule. When I asked Anika how she balanced such a busy schedule, she explained:

> …when you're a parent you just make things work, it's all about shifting things around but it always works out. 'I kind of don't have a choice' you have to think like that, you get so used to it you don't even realize what you're doing.

She goes on to explain, that although some women may not choose to get an education and maybe "marry men with big jobs where they just support them" that seems like the "easy way out" and that easy path just wasn't for her. Anika believes that "as women we have to be more

powerful… I wouldn't want to depend on somebody to take care of me". Through her education she wants to become successful and she explains "a lot of women I know now at school…have jobs and school and children". For Anika womanhood and motherhood are strong, powerful roles, in which we can take care of our children, get an education and work all at the same time. However, despite her claim that women can do it all on their own, Anika has the benefit of depending on the help of her sister quite a bit, for moral support, splitting of financial responsibilities and childcare responsibilities. Anika is able to do it all, because she is lives with her sister who is also a single mother and university student.

The findings of this study correspond well with other studies on early childbearing in Indigenous communities. In Cooke's exploratory qualitative study where he examined the life courses of 11 First Nations parents (9 mothers and 2 fathers) living in the city (but most raised on reserve) who had children between the ages of 14 and 20. He found most of the women had dropped out of school and were not working before their first child's birth which "indicated they had made use of some combination of social assistance and the support of family, either in a First Nations community or the city" (Cooke 2013: 10). In this case family support was an important resource for providing care for their children, which included, "living with cousins, siblings, parents, or others" (Cooke 2013: 10). He also found that most of these young parents had experienced disruptive and highly mobile childhoods, which included experiences of substance abuse and violence, and early home leaving and disrupted schooling. Similar to the parents in my study, many of the young parents in Cooke's sample "were able to return to education and find employment" (Cooke 2013: 12), but in generally after the children were schooled age, whereas in my sample some of the mothers returned to school when their children were still infants. The resources that allowed them to make these successful transitions included "the support of family

and community members, social programmes, and educational funding" (Cooke 2013: 12). In my sample young parents relied on spouses, parents, siblings, cousins and close friends to help with childcare, financial support, moral support and emotional support as they transitioned back to school and into the workforce. In addition, young parents in my sample were able to draw on different types of educational funding to help them in pursuing schooling.

In her analysis of census data on First Nations teenage female lone parenthood, Quinless introduces the concept of "networks of care," which "refers to the interrelated cultural and social system provided by extended families members and friends to support female-led First Nations teenaged lone parent families" (Quinless 2013: 3). In her analysis "this system of support is characterized by factors, such as income support, care and nurturing of children, and participation in unpaid housework, provided to multiple family households by extended family members" (Quinless 2013: 3). In her analysis she examines the differences between teenage parenthood of those living on-reserve and those off-reserve. Of the on-reserve teen mothers 88% lived in multiple family households, and the remaining few were single-family households. Of the off-reserve teen mothers only 12% lived in multiple family households, meaning the majority were single-family households (Quinless 2013: 6). This suggests that those living on reserve rely on a system of support while living among extended family networks, and those living off-reserve "may rely on informal support systems to complement more formal supports, ranging from salaries to social programming to childcare assistance" (Quinless 2013:6). This finding is similar to my sample in which young parents relied on networks of care to care for their children, in order to pursue schooling and work. In this study those on reserve tended to have their first child around age 20 and they rely on extended family networks for support, and those in the city tended to only have one child after they completed their education and could rely more on formal

supports for childcare. In the Cooke study, the Quinless study and in my analysis here, early childbearing in Indigenous communities seems to rely on family support and networks of care in order for young parents to return to school and work after having children. And in all three studies, Indigenous understandings of childbearing seem to prevail, in which children are considered a gift from the creator and a blessing to the community.

6.7 SOCIAL FACTORS THAT CREATE OBSTACLES TO ACHIEVEMENT

Many of the community members in this study faced many challenges and disadvantages along their life courses. They faced these even when chowing personal agency and resistance to gendered life scripts to reach achievement in school and in the workforce. In the following, I discuss the social factors that created obstacles along the pathways of academic and occupational achievement, such as race and racism, and the negative influences of drugs, alcohol, and abusive relationships. As well, I discuss the social factors that helped community members maintain personal agency in resistance to these obstacles, such as strong family support networks, families that valued education, and participation in extracurricular activities.

6.8 RACE AS A POTENTIAL OBSTACLE IN EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

One of the potential barriers to academic achievement was how Indigenous students experienced racism while they were in school. Some experienced overt racism while in school because they were part of a minority of Indigenous students, especially those that left Wabasca to go to school in towns and cities. Some Indigenous students experienced internalized racism from fellow Indigenous students, especially those that moved back to Wabasca after going to school in urban centres. Some Indigenous students described going to schools in the city where multiculturalism and diversity were respected, and they felt accepted as an ethnic minority among several minorities in diverse schools.

6.8.1 Overt Racism

For those community members that left Wabasca and moved to rural communities or urban centres, they faced overt racism as they moved from being the majority in an Indigenous community to being a minority among primarily white classmates. Johnny described moving to a small town in northern Alberta in grade 7 and being the only Aboriginal student in his school, and experiencing racism. He describes this experience:

> Aboriginal people are stereotyped, as thieves, drunks, like filthy! … (The town) was not a very large community at all, there would be times I'd be sent to go grab whatever from the local store and the owner worked in his store and he would follow me around, thinking I was going to steal something from his store…. And then volleyball season came around, guess who was captain of the team? I was …I wanted a better education and while in school there I had skipped grade eight; I did placement testing so I went from grade seven to nine. And I don't think I would have lasted if it wasn't for the two former instructors from back home because they were actually my support... I would go back to volleyball, that's when I really started meeting new friends and then they basically had a different perception of Aboriginal people.

Johnny described how it took a few months to gain acceptance in the new school, but in the end how those experiences made him a stronger person. He went on to describe how he remained involved in volleyball during college, and how he used volleyball as a means of connecting with other two-spirited youth. It seems for the community members in this study, those that choose to leave Wabasca to go to junior high or high school in small Northern Alberta towns, which were primarily white communities often adjacent to Aboriginal communities, faced the most overt racism. For Johnny, he was able to move beyond the stereotypes of Aboriginal peoples by participating in sports and through the support of two teachers from Wabasca who believed in him. Johnny was able to overcome the negative stereotypes of Aboriginal people, by demonstrating himself as an exceptional student and athlete. However, had he not been a high achiever the outcome of this story may have been much different.

Tracy also left Wabasca for a better education, where she attended a multicultural high school in Edmonton. She discussed being involved in the school's "multicultural fashion show" which brought her a lot of pride, because she was chosen as one of four Native students to represent her culture in the event. However, she explained, there was a time in high school when she was embarrassed about being "from the reserve" because of the racist bullying she experienced. Tracy described incidents in which "an Italian girl kind of tried to bully me" but she wouldn't stand for the bullying and once she stood up for herself she explained, this bully "would never say anything to another Native woman again".

She begins the bullying story by describing how unofficially labeled doors for different ethnic groups had racially divided the high school students:

> The Italian doors, the Spanish doors, Caucasians and Natives kind of had the whole front main doors, and you had the Polish in the back doors, and everybody had their certain doors. For me I didn't care. I had a couple Polish buddies and I used to date a Spanish guy and… an Italian guy that was in the 'in' crowd and we were great friends. So I never saw that, I never saw color. My dad said we all have the same blood…

> I was actually running late for class and I run up these doors and she bumped me and pushed me. And she was pretty competitive in Physical Education and we were really competitive so we kind of had it stem from there. And my locker was right by their doors too so I run up and she pushed me like nudged me and said "use your own f-ing doors you frigging dirty Indian". I would have stopped and argued but I was running late for class. And so that was the first time I ever had anything racial that I can remember. And that wasn't the only time, she did it a few times…and she kind of left it because I mouthed her off I think the second or third time she said anything to me… Then in grade 12 she said something really horrible… I think she called me a squaw. Our lockers were close to each other and I hit her, I gave her a black eye and I never fought but I sure gave her a licking and she got suspended, I didn't. That was because she was being racist.

> And then it was this whole thing and there were a few Natives there and it was this whole, "it's our land and get off our land and go back home frigging immigrant" and so it was just a horrible scene but the vice principal… he wasn't very friendly to Native people, nobody liked him… but anyways he's vice principal and he was just an arrogant prick and he was kind of like "Oh no Miss Tracy has an attitude problem". And the Aboriginal guidance counsellor and the Principal and the school constable… they vouched for me and they said "No Miss Tracy I can't see her doing that.

Tracy remembers how she faced the possibility of suspension from the incident, which would have jeopardized her ability to graduate on time. The fear of this did not sit well with her. However, Tracy said after that incident "I would never let anybody win that". She would never let anyone make her feel that way again. Overall she described her high school education as a "good run" and she "loved it", and it was a place she made lifelong friendships.

Tracy's story shows many of the complexities of Indigenous students attending a large multicultural urban school. Although the school had a reputation for being racially diverse, this didn't stop the divisions between different racial groups or bullying. However, Tracy explained how the positive relationships she had built with the Aboriginal guidance counsellor, the Principal, and school constable helped her when she was facing racist bullying in school. Similar to Johnny's story, Tracy was able to overcome this experience with racism in school with the support of Aboriginal educators and with her desire to complete her education despite being marginalized at times.

Jason attended that same ethnically diverse school as Tracy. He described the racism he experienced while playing sports when he was in high school.

> It's almost like you're trying to prove yourself a little bit. That we're just as good as anybody else… In hockey when I started playing in Edmonton I was the only Native person in the entire league not just in my team…you definitely wanted to be one of those top players… so the biggest thing for me is I wanted to be good at what I was doing… I never, ever had problems with teams that I played on… I was always a very valuable person on the team.

> Opposing teams knew how to get under your skin and you'd hear things like 'wagon burner'. I remember some of the games I'd be playing and…the name-calling would get so much to a guy that during the intermission I'd go into the washroom and I'd lock the stall and I'd sit in there and be crying in there by myself. You wash your face and you come out for the next period and you're trying to keep your emotions intact and just play the game. I remember getting a lot of that.

I was alone living in the city. Well I didn't have a parent there. That's one thing I always remembered is everybody's parents were there for every practice and every game and I never had anybody ever… It was different but it made a person have to be strong...

In addition, to being the only Native person in his league, he didn't have family support to help him when he experienced racism during hockey games. Although Jason presents himself as a strong athlete that played through the mental pain of experiencing racism in sport, he was indeed alone in dealing with the discrimination.

The students that experienced racism in school all mentioned that it was a difficult experience but that it made them stronger. Racism didn't stop them from completing their education. They knew they were a minority in school, and that they inevitably would face marginalization or racism.

The ability of these students to overcome racism may have been influenced by the fact that they were high achievers in school, excelled at sport and often had supportive teachers or parents. Had I interviewed students that experienced racism and dropped out, it might have been a different story. What these students here had in common was that they had the agency and determination to do well in school and graduate, and they had the mental perseverance to continue their schooling despite overt racism.

6.8.2 Internalized Racism

Some of the students described moving away for school and then coming back to their Indigenous community of Wabasca for school, where they experienced internalized racism from fellow Indigenous students. As well, they described how they felt a loss of Indigenous culture when they attended school in Wabasca, and they were unsure of where they belonged.

Emily describes the difficulty she faced when returning to Wabasca after spending much of her junior high and high school education in urban centres. During her time away, she would

live in the city during the school year and come home for the summer to live with her parents.

She discussed the difficulty she faced when she returned to Wabasca for grade 8 and then again

for grade 11:

> People gave me a hard time; there was a lot of jealousy, and I got called names. I kind of always felt like I didn't belong I guess… Or I was different. I got called things like; I'm not going to say but "B" from the city, stuck up, even my own relatives called me *moniyaw*… I don't even know how old I was, probably as young as 6 they'd call me that because I spoke English and didn't speak Cree and I spoke differently from them…I really don't have as much of an accent as them I guess… I was actually in Wabasca for grade 8, and I was 13. I hated it! I got called names all the time I got teased because I actually did well in school… I was called nerd; people gave me a hard time. And it was almost like they were jealous because I was trying to make something of myself, not that I thought I was better than other people but that's just the kind of impression I got from other people that they thought I thought that of myself but I never thought that! So yeah I didn't like going to school there! I went from like having honours to my grades dropping just within that one year.

Moniyaw is Cree generally means white person, and that is something you do not want to be

called living in a Cree community, unless you actually are a white person living in a Cree

community. The term signifies your racial background and that you are different. But when you

are a Cree person who is called moniyaw, it is a label that means you are different from other

people in your community; it means you are not necessarily a *nehiyaw* (a Cree person) but that

you are more of a white person. And often as in Emily's case, being called a *moniyaw* means you

are acting like a white person and you think you are better than others in the community, even

though Emily did not feel that way at all. Being called a *moniyaw* can also mean you have an

English accent when you speak Cree, that you "sound white", which was the case in Emily's

experience. In fact, several of the community members I interviewed discussed their desire to

speak better Cree or learn to speak Cree, but their family and elders in the community would

laugh at their attempts because they sounded like a *moniyaw*. Ironically, I would consider Emily

to be one of the few fluent Cree speakers I met living in Edmonton and she even improved her

Cree language skills through university Cree courses. She is not a light-skinned Cree person, but a brown-skinned dark haired Cree, and she did not look like a moniyaw. So perhaps it was her desire to do well in school that caused her to be labeled a *moniyaw* as a teenager. Emily was discriminated against by other Indigenous peoples for not being Indigenous enough because of her desire to excel academically.

In Anika's experience she grew up with her siblings and parents in the nearby town of Slave Lake, not realizing she was any different than other students until she was a teenager when she began to stick out for being one of the few Aboriginal students:

> I grew up in Slave Lake and the people we grew up with from Kindergarten even right from when we were 3 years old in playschool we've known these people. Probably out of our class of 100 friends that we knew there was maybe 5 Aboriginal students and so I guess I never really grew up knowing anything about who I was as an Aboriginal person, I just saw myself as everybody else but then as we got older like 13, 14 that's when kids started to become a little bit racist towards the Aboriginal students…like not very many native students in our class so we were the minority and that's the way they treated us. It was when we started getting older and we would tell our parents we just don't want to be here and so they kind of moved for that reason so that maybe we would feel comfortable around people that were Aboriginal too… And I guess going to Wabasca, I still felt the same, it never really changed anything only because there is so much of the real Aboriginal identity that is lost, our culture and language is really lost in Wabasca and now that I'm in Edmonton I'm actually becoming more involved. I came to university to learn Cree, it's a different dialect that I'm still learning and there is more opportunity I think in Edmonton to become in touch with our culture.

Anika didn't feel she belonged in either Slave Lake or Wabasca, since Indigenous culture and identity were not celebrated in either school system. She didn't feel acceptance of Indigenous culture and identity until she attended university. She studied in the Faculty of Native Studies where a decolonizing of education and Indigenous culture was celebrated. In university, she was finally able to study the Cree language, and attend cultural activities such as sweats and round dances. It seems Anika was explaining is that while Indigenous students overtly face marginalization and racism in small towns, even in Indigenous communities their culture could

be overshadowed by colonization and cultural genocide; that neither place celebrated the revitalization of Indigenous culture.

6.8.3 Indigenous Programming

As Anika's university experience exemplifies, some of the community members discussed positive experiences of race in school in terms of having specific programming or supports for Aboriginal students. For example, Tracy mentioned having an Aboriginal guidance counsellor and Aboriginal school constable, who supported her when she was facing racist bullying in school. As well, she discussed how the guidance counsellor helped her change the route she was taking in high school and to focus on her studies instead of getting involved in the wrong crowd. In her narrative, it seems these Aboriginal school staff took the time to get to know Tracy and supported her in succeeding in school.

Growing up in the city, Angus describes his experiences of being a minority in high school and then going to a university where he was exposed to Aboriginal culture. He described the contrast between attending predominantly white Christian private schools and attending university where Aboriginal student services were available:

> I attended a Christian school my whole life and being Native made me a major minority, besides me and my (siblings) there was only like a couple other Native kids in the entire school so it was a predominantly white school. It didn't hold me back because it wasn't the same as going to a public school. I felt that the Christian school was more open and understanding but I also felt like I didn't learn anything about my people there or anything about my own culture. I would learn more about their culture and the Christian culture.

> I went to the University of Alberta for two years and that was one of the places that opened the most doors to me and seeing the different parts of my culture. And having the Aboriginal student services and I got to meet a lot of people and go to a lot of events that were just with Natives. And I got to meet a lot of Native people and just see the different way they interact and the different way they react to situations is just completely different just based on their culture, it is like I felt a sense of family with them and a sense of welcome with them. And I understood things about myself that I got to learn there …

Having attended Christian schools for most of his life where Indigenous culture and history weren't taught, Angus experienced a sense of belonging at the University of Alberta through spending time with other Aboriginal students and attending Aboriginal cultural events. It was as if he had a personal awaking about his own culture when he was finally around other Aboriginal students. He described experiencing a sense of family and welcoming. As well, he began to understand aspects of Aboriginal culture, such as his peoples' easy going attitude and sense of laughter. The importance of familial relations and humour are actually a part of Cree culture. He sensed these traits when he was around other Aboriginal people at university.

6.9 NEGATIVE INFLUENCES: DRUGS, ALCOHOL, AND ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

A few of the community members interviewed discussed going through negative periods in their youth, which often involved drugs and alcohol use, and sometimes abusive relationships. Most of those that described such negative periods in their late teens and into their early twenties had experienced some sort of trauma in their childhood. For example, Johnny explains being sexually abused and struggling with his sexual identity as a teenager, before going through a period of drinking as a youth and eventually entering a relationship with a physically abusive partner. Louise describes growing up in foster care, and experiencing abuse as a child before falling into addictions and abusive relationships. Rachel addresses a childhood in which she lost her mother at a young age, and then grew up being shuffled between aunts in different cities, before going through a period of drugs and alcohol as a youth. Leah describes growing up with an abusive mother, then being sent to live with her father on another reserve, where her father left her to be raised by her paternal grandmother. She eventually entered an abusive relationship as a young woman. Rebecca describes being raised in a middle class home by a very controlling

father, and suffering from depression in her twenties, and going through a period of heavy

drinking as a young woman. At the time these community members were interviewed in their

late twenties or early thirties, they were no longer abusing drugs and alcohol, and they had left

their abusive relationships. In fact, a few had worked with youth in the Aboriginal community as

youth care workers to help others who had similar stories.

Louise had a childhood of being bounced between parents and also being in the foster

care system. As an Aboriginal Outreach Worker Louise feels her history of addictions and

abusive relationships are common to Aboriginal youth. She explains:

> Well my story is similar with all Aboriginals and how I know that is because I hear it. You know a lot of the students we get are that age and we deal with a lot of life skills so we have to go right back to their childhood. It's surprising how high (the percentage is) with the Aboriginal population with everything like addiction problems and abuse and so it's very similar. Especially with people that are still in the community like on reserves and can't get out and that cycle keeps going and going…I went through a lot of abuse when I was a kid and which followed with the addictions and abusive relationships…

When I asked her how she was able to escape that negative life path and if her story was similar

to other Aboriginal women, Louise explained: "not if they are stuck in these communities and…

that's a tough question because I don't know if it just depends on the person, I guess wanting to

actually do it". For Louise a lot of the abuse and addiction problems continue in a cyclical

manner for those that stay on-reserve or in their home Aboriginal communities, and in order to

change they need to leave those unhealthy situations in their communities. Louise "grew up in

the foster care system for a lot of years" and then went to an addictions treatment center at the

young age of 16. A pivotal moment in her life came while attending a treatment centre that used

traditional Aboriginal healing methods. She was able to attend traditional ceremonies, something

she had never experienced before. The care she received from the youth care workers at the

centre made her realize her calling, she said: "I knew right away I wanted to work with kids".

After attending the treatment centre she unfortunately fell into an abusive relationship. However, when she left that abusive relationship and attended college in the city, she eventually reached her dream of working with Aboriginal youth with similar stories. In order to stay grounded, Louise continues to attend sweats and ceremonies, and sees a traditional elder regularly for spiritual guidance. For Louise her own agency to leave an abusive relationship, and get an education has allowed her to stop that cyclical path of drugs, alcohol and abuse. As well, her efforts to seek out traditional Indigenous healing practices and maintaining Indigenous culture in the city, have allowed her to be resilient.

One of the community members interviewed did not describe any traumatic family experiences as a child. In fact Andrew described very supportive parents. However, he felt negative influences in the community caused him to go down a path of drugs and alcohol. Andrew explains as a youth living in Wabasca, "You get caught in that; 'you don't care' is the mentality, you see other kids not going to school, not caring, stay at home, drink, do drugs, find out where a party was I guess". As well, he'd "screw up" school and miss his final exams, and end up working in the oilfield in the summers. Going down this downward spiral Andrew describes the choice to leave school, "I didn't go to school after age 16 and my dad got tired of me throwing my life away, not doing too much…so either I go to school or work, I decided to go to work…" Eventually Andrew as a young adult he left the reserve for the city, he discusses the reasons in the following: "You get tired of the reserve…all the abuse of alcohol and using drugs, kind of got sick of it, so I decided well I'm going to try to start something new and moved to Edmonton when I was 21 and that was hard". When he was 21 he got his GED while attending college in Edmonton and he began getting out of that negative mentality.

For Andrew living on reserve is associated with drugs and alcohol. As a child his parents moved their family away for a better life, so his parents could go to college, and so their children could have access to better schooling and extracurricular activities. Andrew explains, "my parents didn't really believe in living on the reserve because all the situations you get into and all the drugs and alcohol abuse and they kind of wanted us children to stay clear from it". Now as a parent Andrew has the same fears for his own children. Right now he feels content because both he and his wife have good jobs on-reserve, but eventually they are considering moving for the sake of their children:

> I guess I'd stick around for the children but it's kind of hard we're on reserve…they don't have enough education or... after-school activities or programs for them, we got nothing to do except "let's drink, let's smoke, let's do some drugs", that's what I fear, that's how I ended up doing those things because I had nothing to do after I was done school.

In listening to Andrew's story, I came to understand that as a youth he became involved in drugs and alcohol because of peer pressure, and he felt that is all that youth are left to do on reserve. But while listening to him make comments about the negative influences of living on reserve; I almost felt he was generalizing that all youth on-reserve become involved in drugs and alcohol. I began to wonder how much of this was true or how much was based on a stereotype of Indigenous people being more prone to addictions. I understood his own negative perceptions of life on-reserve were due to his own negative experiences of drugs and alcohol in the community.

The similarity in all of these stories of drug and alcohol abuse, and sometimes abusive relationships was that although these negative periods may have taken community members off of their path to getting an education, they had the agency to move beyond these unhealthy life choices and make healthy choices. As well, most of these community members went down these negative paths, because they had traumatic experiences as children such as abuse, violence,

families torn apart by the foster care system, and death of family members. Many of these traumatic experiences they faced in their childhoods were a direct result of colonialism and the dismantling of the Indigenous families. These were often examples of the intergenerational linked lives of parents who had experienced violence and abuse, and lateral violence where their relationships with peers continued cycles of violence, abuse, and addictions. Their families were in cycles of abuse and torn apart due to colonial structures. Yet, these community members were able to make the choice to get an education and leave behind drugs, alcohol, and abusive relationships. As well, some worked in resistance to these cycles of abuse and in resistance to the colonial dismantling of Indigenous families, several of these community members worked within the Aboriginal community to help youth move beyond these cycles of abuse by promoting Indigenous cultural and healing practices. And some worked in resistance to the colonial dismantling of the Indigenous family by making the choice to raise their own children within healthy stable family networks.

6.10 SOCIAL FACTORS THAT FACILITATE ACHIEVEMENT

Negative social factors could have set these individuals on negative life course trajectories filled with further cycles of abuse, poverty, low educational attainment and employment instability. However, there were certain factors in these community member's lives that allowed them to resist these negative life course trajectories, and change the paths of their life course, to lives of resilience and success in schooling, success in employment and meaningful healthy family relations. These positive factors included participation in extracurricular activities and sport in school, supportive family networks, and families that valued education as a means to the self-determination of Indigenous peoples.

6.11 EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND SPORT

One of the most positive social factors in educational achievement discussed by Indigenous men from the community was their involvement in sport. These men discussed how their involvement in organized sports from grade school to post-secondary school kept them focussed and how their involvement in the sports community within their educational system broadened their opportunities. These Indigenous men were involved in a variety of organized sports, such as hockey, volleyball, basketball, football and a general appreciation of sport. Of the 15 men interviewed in this study, 6 mentioned sports involvement as a major positive influence in their education. Of these 6 involved in sports 4 graduated high school on time, and 5 have either completed their post-secondary education or are currently in the midst of completing their post-secondary education. Two of these Indigenous men involved in sport were actually top athletes in the City of Edmonton during their high school sports careers and recognized in the city for their sports achievements. One young Indigenous man from the community has actually played organized sport at the post-secondary level. In addition, several of the community members interviewed described possibly moving away from Wabasca or having left Wabasca for the city, so their own children could become more actively involved in organized sports in the city.

Angus for example, describes how his involvement in basketball and the basketball community has broadened his perspective and helped him excel in school. He explains the post-secondary institutions that were interested in recruiting him were in Edmonton, he says: "I found those were the best opportunities I had for playing basketball and being in Edmonton just kept me close to my family".

He describes how his involvement in sports and having a university-educated mother involved in the local Aboriginal arts community has exposed him to many opportunities:

> I think I've been blessed with the opportunity to maybe learn or be a part of things some other people would not have had the opportunity to learn and I contribute a lot to who I've been able to access because of my mother or because of sports. Those are like the two things that have opened the biggest opportunities to me. So with basketball I've been able to meet all kinds of people. I've been able to coach and give back to the community. I've been able to learn from people that have been very successful with education and having basketball as something that pushed them to do that or have been very successful in basketball alone. So it's allowed me to meet a lot of different people and my mother has been a part of a lot of different groups and that has broadened my perspective on everything.

Angus has had the opportunity to be mentored by others in the basketball community who have used sport as a springboard to move them along in their education. He was successful in high school basketball, which allowed him to move to the next level and play college basketball, so while he plays basketball he is able to work towards a Bachelor's of Commerce degree. As well, Angus has been able to give back to the Aboriginal community in Edmonton by being involved in coaching youth in an Aboriginal basketball league and summer basketball camps. Also his mother's involvement in the Aboriginal music and arts has exposed him to other positive mentors in the community.

One of the Indigenous men interviewed was so involved in organized sport that the mention of hockey came up in regards to his family life, his educational experiences, and his career choices and in his community volunteer work. As a child his mother passed away, and throughout his childhood his father moved them around to different communities for work. Growing up he lived in different northern Alberta towns, Metis Settlements and in First Nations communities, yet he was able to maintain consistent friendships through his participation in hockey. He explains, "again hockey was a nice shoe-in in regards to meeting people" when he moved around as a child. Then when he was a teenager he moved to Edmonton on his own to go

to high school, while there he played in the hockey league. He describes a very studious high school experience in Edmonton, which focussed on hockey.

> When I was there I went there with no friends. And so basically I go to the school, I do my school work, I go home. And I was probably playing hockey four or five nights of the week… I didn't really have much of a social life…By the time I graduated… I probably had a handful of friends that I hung out with a little bit but for the most part I was closer to my hockey friends than I was with my school people, just because with hockey and tournaments and league games. I was with those hockey people, with them four or five times a week.

After high school he moved to Slave Lake to do two years of university studies at the local college, he describes this period of his life as a "coming home" experience. While in Slave Lake he lived with an uncle's family, and he reunited with hockey friends from his childhood and he played in the senior hockey league. Jason explains that the life lessons he learned through his educational experiences and involvement in sports, has given him the desire to bring those lessons back to Wabasca after returning from university. In addition to being involved in hockey, he graduated university with a degree in Physical Education, which he has used in his community work in Wabasca. Through his involvement in organized sport Jason wants to teach local Wabasca children the life lessons of teamwork, commitment and respect that come from sport. As well, he sees the positive impact sport has in encouraging youth to be physically active and avoiding negative lifestyle choices such as drugs and alcohol. Through his volunteer work and political involvement in the community he has been able to make sports programming a priority for the municipality. Jason recognizes the positive impact sport has had on his own life course and he is passing this onto the children of our community.

6.12 FAMILY SUPPORT AND FAMILIES THAT VALUE EDUCATION

> Extended family networks that include grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins are highly valued for their contribution to family life because they both support schooling and offer ways to understand culture and identity within an Indigenous framework. Despite the impact of colonization on Indigenous families, whereby historical and

267

contemporary policies and practices of schooling and child welfare undermine Indigenous family and community structures, family networks continue to be a source of strength and modeling that youth can draw upon. (Hare and Pidgeon 2011:105)

According to Hare and Pidgeon, for Aboriginal youth in high school "family represents a primary cultural concept within their Indigenous knowledge system". The family is actually a source of cultural identity and knowledge for those in school, and this contradicts "deficit-based research that youth are not supported at home and that the way to improve achievement is to demand that youth assimilate into an individualistic, white, middle-class norms" (Hare and Pidgeon 2011:105). As is the case in this research maintaining Indigenous understandings of extended family networks allowed community members to have the necessary resources in order to be successful in schooling. As Steinhauer points out in her research on the parental involvement of Indigenous parents, "relationality", that is relationship building in the educational experience, is a key to the success of Indigenous students on-reserve and off-reserve (Steinhauer 2007). In the following Steinhauer's concept of relationality is explained:

> Positive relationships formed through warm, sensitive, and responsive care help children feel valued and gain more from their learning experience. Relationships between teachers, families, peers, and even to place are important and help to build environments that nurture children's growth and development…Whether their children attended school on-reserve or off-reserve, all parents wanted their children to have an affirmative school experience and asserted that this could be accomplished only if their children were given the opportunity to develop and build positive relationships with all those around them – "teachers, staff, relatives, and peers". (Steinhauer 2007: 200).

Indigenous researchers such as Steinhauer, and Hare and Pidgeon, recognize that Indigenous students often experience racism and marginalization in the educational system whether off-reserve or on-reserve, and Indigenous understandings of extended family networks and the importance of relationality are a means to successful educational experiences for Indigenous students. These researchers point out that Indigenous parents and families can play a key role in the success of student's educational achievements. Truly, the Indigenous extended

268

family network and family relationships are a sign of the resilience of Indigenous peoples, and are one of the key social structures within our societies that support educational achievement and success in the labour force, which ultimately ensures the self-determination of our peoples.

As already alluded to in this chapter and in the previous chapter, family support was a major factor of success for the educational achievement of community members, and once they entered the workforce these community members often continued to rely on extended family networks for support while they participated in wage labour. Many of those living in Wabasca discussed staying in the community because they received a lot of support from extended family networks (mostly through spouses, parents, and siblings). And for those living in Edmonton, they often talked about the importance of maintaining contact with their extended family in Wabasca, and participating in the revitalization of culture and developing relationships within the Indigenous community within the city. However, those that were able to complete a high school education and/or a post-secondary education discussed how their close-knit family networks provided them with support while they were in school. They discussed how they received financial support, moral support, emotional support, and childcare support from their extended family networks while they were in school.

Part of the reason these individuals were able to achieve an education was because their families' valued education. Families valued education across generations; some watched their parents go back to school while they were children, and as children they were socialized to value education as a means to self-determination. Generations shared the value of education in that grandparents and parents often passed on the value of education as Indigenous self-determination, and children modeled what they learned from their families, those with educated families were more likely to become educated themselves. For example, Andrew discussed how

his parents moved away while he was teenager so his parents could go to college, and when he was an adult he himself moved away to get his GED, and then he moved away to support his wife earned her degree. Some discussed their older siblings had received a post-secondary education and they followed in their siblings' footsteps. For example, Anika who grew up with several siblings mentioned, "my parents always encouraged us to leave, to go to school". Anika noted that her older brother had attended university and "I think it started with him that we were able to see him go so then the rest of us thought wow" and followed suit. As well, when she was in university, Anika and her sister were able to live together and provide each other with support, sharing household bills, chores, and childcare responsibilities. For Indigenous communities, it seems it takes a whole village to create a college graduate. In order for one person to receive an education, family support could come at all levels; it came from parents, from spouses, and from siblings.

Family support networks ensured the success of many of the educated Indigenous men and women in this study. Ironically, one of the things that had to be sacrificed for some was family relationships in order to get an education. Jason tells the story of how his father wanted to teach him the value of an education and when he was 16 years old he worked for his father in the logging industry, and spent the summer in a work camp. In the following Jason explains how he had to make the choice of education over family at an early age:

> He wanted to show me basically the value of education he said 'I want you to see what a person with no education has to do with their life', so for the months of July and August I was a saw man. I was working with the power saw for his logging company and definitely it was a very big learning experience for me and seeing the hard labour side of things. We were sitting around at the campfire there one evening and getting close to the end of the summer. And he asked me what I thought about moving to Edmonton for my schooling as well as better hockey. I said "yeah that sounds like that would be a nice idea". And basically that following weekend, we didn't even go back home, just went straight from our work camp. When in the city he got me set up with an apartment, registered me into the high school there… and got me the furniture that I required and

dropped me off. And there you go you're living in Edmonton all of a sudden at 16…So that was a very, I guess life-changing experience; it was such a change of life for me... I was actually roommates with an extended family member who was going to university as well… an extended family member that I didn't really know…. And it was like I never really even said bye to my friends or my brother but that's a whole different issue. But my brother and I were very close because we were growing up through all these changes all the time just the two of us and all of a sudden at age 16 I go straight from that camp to Edmonton. But after that we've just never been the same between me and my brother. We went from being like two peas in a pod to just two very different people and we've never really had a close relationship since then.

Jason's father wanted to teach him the value of an education, by making him work hard labour for one summer, and then at the end of the summer he gave him the option to move to the city for high school. Jason learned the lesson and chose to value education over a life of hard labour, but at the time he didn't realize he was sacrificing his family for his education. Jason and his brother lived through the loss of their mother at a young age, and they were raised by a single father. Throughout his childhood his father moved them around to different Northern Alberta communities in order to find work. So for Jason being separated from his brother when he was sixteen was a major sacrifice. Even as an adult he discussed the difficulty of trying to rebuild the relationship he once had with his brother now that they both live in Wabasca.

Both Jason and his wife now have large extended family networks in Wabasca, and they rely on their families for a lot of support in raising their family. So although at one point in his life he had to choose education over family, as an educated adult he has chosen to raise a family that values the large extended family networks in Wabasca.

6.13 STRUCTURES, CHOICES, AGENCY AND RACIALIZED GENDERED LIFE SCRIPTS

School and churches have been described as ideological state apparatuses (Althusser 1971). It is argued that these institutions play a significant role in producing and reproducing ideologies about what it means to be a man or a woman or a family, not through force but common-sense ideas that are enacted in everyday practices like going to school, courting, getting married and giving birth" (St. Denis 2007: 41-42)

Aboriginal people live for the most part in a western capitalistic and patriarchal context: it is that social, economic and political context that irrevocably shapes our lives, and denying this or minimizing these conditions will not change it" (St. Denis 2007: 47).

Throughout this chapter I have discussed how community members made choices in school, work and family. These choices were made in the context of colonial structures in education, and further shaped by gender and racial identity. One of the major themes in these narratives was racialized gendered life scripts. Community members kept in mind while they made their choices. In this sense, the secondary questions of this research project were answered. This chapter went into depth in examining the context of gender differences experienced in the process of Indigenous peoples living between Wabasca and Edmonton, and the context of the choices that young Indigenous adults have to make in terms of education and entering the labour market at this stage in their lives.

For Indigenous men, the racialized gendered life script that resonated in the community was that they were expected to leave high school early and enter the oil industry. For some this meant being stuck in the oil industry, in unskilled precarious jobs, where there may be low job satisfaction, and stress associated with a demanding industry. There were some men who followed this gendered life script, but made the decision to leave the industry to gain an education and credentials in order to gain more permanent positions and greater pay. Some men choose to go in a completely different pathway and choose an education and career outside of the industry oil, working in professions such as nursing or water treatment. For Indigenous women, the racialized gendered life script that resonated in the community was that they were expected to become pregnant early, and would be unable to get an education or enter the workforce in meaningful professions, and end up in poverty on reserve. The potential negative impacts of childbearing stayed in the back of these women's minds as they made choices for school and

work. Some women left the reserve early in order to pursue an education in the city, to avoid such as fate as being young lone parents living on reserve. For some women who did have children early or had children in the midst of pursuing an education, they still choose to get an education, often depending on extended family networks for childcare support, moral support and financial support. As well, part of these women's understandings of Indigenous womanhood and motherhood is that we are strong powerful beings that can balance family, school and work with a tremendous work ethic. Either way, these women and men's narratives spoke to how they made choices in school, family and work in relation to the racialized gendered life scripts that were expected of them as Indigenous peoples.

For both men and women that completed an education, whether it was a high school diploma, a college diploma or university degree, they had agency in the work that they chose. With an education they could choose where they worked based on job satisfaction, rates of pay, working conditions, and what accommodated their family responsibilities. The agency educated Indigenous peoples have in choosing where to work and how to apply their skills, allows for the self-determination of our peoples as individuals, as families and as a community.

However, the choices that community members were able to make along their life course were framed by the institutional structures within society, such as the educational system and labour force. Through this research project it is clear that race and gender greatly shape the relationships community members have with these institutions. Those with Indian Status and Non-Indian Status had access to different types of funding and resources in the educational system. For example, First Nations funding is only available to those with Indian Status, while Non-Status or Metis have access to different types of training and educational funding. In fact, the way funding arrangements are set up with communities for ASSETS funding is based on

location (on-reserve, off-reserve, rural or urban) and on the racialized identity of community members that are served (Status Indians, Inuit or Metis). And there is no consistency to the amount of funding that Indigenous peoples can access for education and training development, and most often these programs are underfunded. Funding sources from the federal government, provincial government and industry initiatives all operate along lines of racial identity and location.

In addition, the gender identity of community members shaped how they made choices in school and work. There was a clear gendered division of labour for those in Northern Alberta working within the oil industry region, with men having greater access to employment opportunities in masculinized jobs directly in the oil field (constructions, the trades, management, engineering, etc.) while women primarily worked in administrative positions in the industry or in local government, education or human services. For those that moved to the city, it did not seem their choices in work were based on a gendered workforce. For example, in the city there was a woman in the trades and a man that worked nursing. The racialized gendered life scripts, which community members discussed, clearly showed men were streamed for the oil industry while women were streamed towards early childbearing and poverty.

Community members faced many challenges and disadvantages along their life courses. They faced obstacles along their pathways of academic and occupational achievement, such as race and racism, and the negative influences of drugs, alcohol, and abusive relationships. The racialized educational experiences they had and the impact of drugs, alcohol and abusive relationships were a direct impact from the colonial history of the cultural genocide of the residential school system. However, certain social factors helped community members maintain personal agency in resistance to these obstacles, such as strong family support networks, families

274

that valued education, and participation in extracurricular activities. These social factors, acted as resources for community members to be successful in their education. The greatest resource for many community members was their extended family networks that valued education and encouraged them to participate in extracurricular activities, and have a passion for learning. Throughout they showed that personal agency and resistance to gendered life scripts can allow them to reach achievement in school and in the workforce.

One of the clear implications of this research is that there needs to be more decolonizing and Indigenizing of education in earlier levels of education. These community members described experiencing racism and internalized racism in their secondary school education, and then finally experiencing an acceptance of Indigenous culture and specific Indigenous programming at the university level. In my interviews with other community members, there was even the mention of the specific memory of entering elementary school in Wabasca, where they stopped speaking Cree and had to learn to primarily speak English. It seems whether community members went to primary or secondary school in their Indigenous community of Wabasca or moved away to nearby towns or cities where they were a minority; they faced a marginalization of Indigenous culture in their educational experiences. This implies that there needs to be a revitalization of Indigenous culture in the educational system in Indigenous communities and in educational systems in urban centres. There needs to be a decolonizing and indigenizing of the educational system on-reserve and off-reserve. Students cannot wait until the post-secondary level to finally learn about Indigenous culture and to finally feel accepted as Indigenous students; this needs to begin in primary school and secondary school to ensure higher rates of high school completion. Those interviewed in this study were high achieving Indigenous students with strong family support networks who were able to build the mental strength to resist racism and remain

resilient in a marginalizing educational system. However, students who may not be as resilient and may be more vulnerable will need Indigenous culture, curriculum and programming in school in order to achieve.

Chapter Seven: Identities in Resistance and Life Long Learning

In this chapter I will conclude by discussing my primary research question on how location impacts Indigenous cultural identity, and my secondary questions on the gendered and racialized experiences in the educational system and labour force. I highlight how Indigenous men and women develop an identity based on their personal agency to create pathways in resistance and resilience against oppressive racist and gendered structural institutions. I will conclude by suggesting that in order for social policies on education, training and employment to be successful in combating racialized gendered life scripts within Indigenous communities we need to building on an Indigenous model of lifelong learning. This lifelong model of learning is based on relationships of family and community, while incorporating a holistic understanding of learning which includes emotional, physical, spiritual and intellectual learning. This model of lifelong learning is based on Indigenous understanding of the life stages. Learning is lifelong from the stages of infants, toddlers, children, youth, young adults, parents, grandparents, and elders. Throughout life there are roles and responsibilities associated with each stage, in which all forms of learning are valued.

7.1 COLONIAL AND CAPITALIST STRUCTURES AND GENDERED WORK

> First Nations and Metis youth also face numerous contradictory messages – that social and cultural networks are important but they must leave their communities to pursue education and/or find work; that they must stay in school to succeed, but can readily get jobs as camp attendants or labourers without a high school diploma to succeed; that they will be supported in education and training by schools and employers, but only if they can prove themselves worthy of the investment. (Taylor and Friedel 2011: 832)

Taylor and Friedel (2011) highlight the troubling effects of neoliberal governance of First Nations and Metis people in the tar sands region of Northern Alberta. Many of these same contradictory messages were voiced by the young adults in this study, in which they had to balance the sacrifices between family and community relations, and attaining education and

employment. Taylor and Friedel return to the query as to whether Indigenous peoples must "sacrifice their cultural soul and political principles at the altar of capitalism" (Taylor and Friedel 2011: 832). For those that stayed in the community of Wabasca they were often able to have children while going to school and while working in the community because of the support they received from extended family relations, but they needed to contend with the push to work in the local oil industry. For those that left the community to go to school and work in the city of Edmonton, they often left behind family relations back home, and they had fewer children, but they had greater choices in the types of work they did because of their education and the variety of work available in the city.

The community seemed to combine varying gender relations to create balance in families, from those more Indigenous egalitarian gender relations to more western mainstream gender relations. Further research needs to be done into how the oil industry influences the gender relations of Indigenous families, to determine whether the capitalist gendered nature of the oil industry in the region, is creating more western family relations in Indigenous families in which men primarily participate in the wage labour of the industry and women are left responsible for most childcare responsibilities.

As previously mentioned, community members felt the local oil industry in Wabasca pushed men into the oil industry at a young age. Many also felt this push for young men to enter the oil industry was supported by the local educational systems which encouraged them to enter technical trades and careers in oil and gas. In my analysis, I noted that the community of Wabasca seemed to have a gendered division of waged labour, in which men worked in the oil industry, often relegated to precarious contract employment, and women tended to work in administrative type positions in the oil industry or else working in local government or in human

services. These gendered differences in waged labour were not apparent for those community members that lived and worked in Edmonton.

For community members discussing their educational and employment experiences there were underlying racialized gendered life scripts for Indigenous men and women. Women discussed how they needed to leave the reserve in order to get an education to avoid becoming pregnant at a young age and not having a chance at an education. Some women, who completed their high school diploma and/or their post-secondary education at a young age, were proud they avoided this fate of early childbearing and poverty. A few of the women even compared themselves to others in the community who followed this path of early childbearing, women who they described as not going to school or work, who end up in poverty. Some women in the study who did have children when they were young (mostly around the age 19-21), discussed how they were determined to get an education and avoid a life of poverty for themselves and their children.

Men on the other hand, discussed how the oil industry and the educational system in Wabasca expected them to leave school early to work in the oil industry. These men sometimes discussed how they entered the oil industry alongside their fathers and alongside some of their male peers, as if it was a rite of passage. Some men even discussed how they purposely choose to complete their educations early and choose careers outside of the oil industry in order to avoid a life of being stuck in unskilled labour positions for the rest of their lives. Some men discussed how they did enter the oil industry at a young age, often as teenagers who dropped out of school, and then in their twenties made the choice to further their education to gain more permanent skilled employment either in the oil industry or to enter a completely different industry. For those men who entered the oil industry as high school drop-outs, who were unable to leave the industry

(i.e. because they now had families to support or didn't have employers that supported further training), they recognized they were being marginalized as unskilled workers in the oil industry. The Indigenous men and women in this study made choices regarding their life courses in relation to these racialized gendered life scripts, some showing the agency they had despite capitalist and colonial structures that worked to marginalize them in terms of race and gender.

7.2 INDIGENOUS IDENTITIES IN RESISTANCE AND RESILIENCE TO COLONIALISM

In this study there were community members that lived on Bigstone Cree Nations Reserve, those that lived on the Municipal District of Opportunity in Wabasca and those that lived in the city of Edmonton. Indigenous identity was shaped by these migration experiences between reserve, rural and urban area. This identity was often one of resistance and resilience to colonial, patriarchal and capitalist structures. Community members defined their identity, in opposition to colonial, sexist and racist definitions of what it means to be Indigenous in Canada. Most of the community members in this study exceeded all odds and were able to complete their education and gain steady employment despite challenges they faced due to colonial structures and gendered structures. As discussed in earlier chapters, colonial structures such as patriarchy introduced by the church, residential schools, the sixties scoop, and the foster care system, all helped to dismantle the Indigenous family. As a result of the colonial intergenerational dismantling of the Indigenous family, some of the community members in this study experienced an "accumulation of disadvantages" (Cooke and McWhirter 2011) and what I consider an "accumulation of traumas" in early life. Some had traumatic experiences in childhood such as abuse, the death of a parent, and being separated from family due to the foster care system. Some experienced periods of drugs and alcohol abuse as youth, as well some entered abusive

relationships in their youth. Others had traumatic experiences in adulthood, for example the death of siblings or experiencing major illnesses (e.g. depression and other major health conditions). In addition, many experienced racism and marginalization in the educational system, often they knew they were minorities in the classroom and recognized they would have to overcome such marginalization to succeed. Men had to face stereotypes that they were destined to be high school drop-outs stuck in unskilled labour in the oil industry, and had to work hard to gain credentials to enter skilled work. Women faced the stereotypes that early childbearing would result in poverty, and they had to work hard to avoid these destinies, and some completed their post-secondary educations while working and caring for children. Indigenous men and women had to work against these stereotypes and create new pathways to success in order to achieve their educations and steady employment.

A major factor in the resiliency of community members that faced an accumulation of colonial traumas across their life courses, were the extended family networks that they relied upon for moral support, financial support and childcare support, as well as a strong sense of belonging and cultural identity within the Indigenous familial community. In addition, the community members in this study had amazing tenacity. Despite facing many disadvantages and traumas across their life courses, the resiliency in their personal agency to choose to move beyond crushing colonial structures which could limit them to racialized gendered life scripts was truly amazing and their personal determination to complete an education, remain steadily employed and maintain healthy family relations showed resistance to life courses potentially marginalized by racist colonial ideologies, and they were able to carve out their own pathways to success.

A major aspect of this resistant and resilient Indigenous identity was the maintenance of Indigenous understandings of family and community, and by extension Indigenous understandings of the life course. This model of Indigenous family was based on the child being central to community, grandparents and siblings as co-caregivers of children, elders as traditional transmitters of knowledge and caring, mothers and fathers as respected roles in the community, and maintaining the autonomy of men and women who carry out equal but sometimes different roles. From Indigenous ways of building family, community became defined by extended family networks which valued sharing, caring and systems of reciprocity. In this way, individuals could draw upon community resources such as the moral support, emotional support, spiritual support, and financial support of extended family networks. When families and community did not maintain healthy relations, and the cruel impacts of colonialism caused relations of violence, abuse or trauma, community members choose to move away to build healthy family relations as a form of resistance. Part of this building of healthy family relations was the building of community and cultural revitalization as community members took up traditional healing practices, and Indigenous language and ways of knowing. One of the major aspects of Indigenous identity in this community was the maintaining of roots with family and cultural practices. Drawing from these cultural roots individuals could learn from elders and pass on knowledge to their children. As Indigenous peoples move between reserve, rural and urban areas, they can build on these roots by re-shaping understandings of identity which are based on more Canadian models of meritocracy, education and participation in the labour market.

7.3 LIFE LONG LEARNING AND INDIGENOUS MODELS OF LEARNING

In her discussion on economic development and resiliency in Indigenous communities, Wanda Wuttunee emphasizes that young people must be supported by all members of the community in order to succeed:

> Young people are the future of the community. If they are unable to develop skills and contribute for whatever reasons, then the future of the community is limited… A robust and resilient community, able to meet the challenges of its environment, demands the commitment of all community members in this generation and among the generations yet to come. (Wuttunee 2013: 4)

It seems in order for our young people to be resilient and move forward, all members of the community must work together and contribute to the resistance of the damaging effects of colonialism. In my opinion, Indigenous understanding of family and the drawing together of resources through extended family networks in community is key to the resiliency of our peoples. In discussing the issue of early childbearing, Wuttunee discusses how community must take up a holistic support system specifically for our young women to succeed:

> If our young women are not in a position to become educated, raise healthy families at a time in their lives when they have matured and are strong in mind, body, and spirit, and be able to join the economy if they desire, then the prognosis is dismal. It is not a question of young Aboriginal women becoming mothers. Rather, it is a question of whether personal resilience, as well as family and community support and resources, are available to them when they become teenage mothers. (Wuttunee 2013: 4)

I would add to this in order for our young men to be set up for success, we need to recognise the specific gendered marginalization they face. Specifically our Indigenous young men must be supported to prevent life scripts of dropping out of high school and being forced into precarious unskilled work in natural resource extraction industries. As Wuttunee suggests, we must not set up our youth for failure by having "low expectations" of them, we must develop high expectations by creating resources and supports for them in our communities. Drawing on Indigenous understandings of family and community, and working towards building healthy

family networks will help provide these resources so our youth can pursue success in school and work. If our young people are allowed success in school and work then our children and elders will be cared for adequately. In the following section I recommend we use an Indigenous model of lifelong learning in order to ensure successful life course trajectories, so that gravity and shocks or an accumulation of traumas experienced by our young people can be buffered by creating supports for a holistic understanding of learning and growth.

By using Indigenous understandings of family, community, agency, resistance and resiliency community members in this study carved out life courses that allowed them to move beyond the many disadvantages and traumas they experienced due to colonial histories. In an effort to create educational policies and understand Indigenous perspectives on learning, Indigenous educators have begun to incorporate a more Indigenous understanding of a life-long learning model. According to the Canadian Council on Learning, current measurements of educational success focus too much on western understandings of the life course and learning:

> Current measurement approaches typically focus on the discrepancies in educational attainment between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth (in particular, high-school completion rates) and often overlook the many aspects of learning that are integral to an Aboriginal perspective on learning. As a result, conventional measurement approaches rarely reflect the specific needs and aspirations of Aboriginal people. (Canadian Council on Learning 2009)

A new model of understanding Indigenous learning, and as I argue, in understanding the Indigenous life course, need to be incorporated into understanding the various milestones and various pathways Indigenous peoples take. The CLC has developed the Holistic Lifelong Learning Measurement Framework, which is based on the underlying structure of the First Nations, Inuit and Métis Holistic Lifelong Learning Models. Within this framework, there are three main components, which are defined as follows:

Sources and Domains of Knowledge, are "from which an individual learns from and about: people (family, Elders, community), languages, traditions and ceremonies, spirituality, and the natural world. Western and Aboriginal knowledge and learning approaches also exist within this component"

The Lifelong Learning Journey "includes a wide range of formal and informal learning opportunities that occur in a number of settings (in and out of the classroom) and throughout four life stages: Infants and Children (0–5), Youth (6–18), Young Adults (19–34), and Adults (35–64) and Elders (65+). (

Community Well-being "includes the social, physical, economic, spiritual, political and health conditions that influence the learning process. This component depicts the individual and collective conditions that reflect an Aboriginal perspective on community well-being" (Canadian Council on Learning 2009: 14)

Within this model, learning is understood from Indigenous epistemologies of learning, family and community:

Aboriginal learning is a highly social process that nurtures relationships within the family and throughout the community. These relationships serve to transmit social values and a sense of identity, and also help to ensure cultural continuity. As a result, the value of individual learning cannot be separated from its contribution to the collective well-being. (Canadian Council on Learning 2009: 11).

Learning is understood to be holistic, incorporating emotional, physical, spiritual and intellectual learning, connected to the land and to the Creator, in which all types of learning are equally valued. Learning is understood to be life-long, from the stages of being an infant until one is an elder, one is never done learning and growing, learning comes in different stages of the life-course. Unlike, western models of learning which value formal institutional learning, which often means once you are done high school and you are done university, you are done learning, but this arrogant attitude to learning does not follow Indigenous epistemologies which view learning as a life-long process.

In her book on "Life Stages and Native Women", Kim Anderson discusses the eight life stages based on the Midewiwin framework; "infants, toddlers, children, youth, young adults, parents, grandparents, and elders" (Anderson 2011: 10). This model follows an Indigenous

pathway of lifelong learning, from which learning begins at infancy and continues until old age. An understanding of Indigenous life stages, allows for a holistic understanding of lifelong learning, in which the learning of individuals is meant to serve the collective, to ensure community survival and the passing on of teachings to the next generation. Anderson explains that the roles and responsibilities of these life stages "demonstrate how teachings can change over time as circumstances and audiences change; they change in response to the need of the people and the times they serve" (Anderson 2011:10). As Indigenous peoples are a part of modern society which requires participation in formalized educational systems and entry into waged labour, such teachings can adapt to these changes, allowing for Indigenous ways of knowing and learning to be incorporated into Canadian educational and training systems.

In this particular study, community members primarily discussed the transitions they experienced from youth, to young adulthood, to adults, transitioning between school, work and building their own families. Anderson refers to the life stages of childhood and youth, as the "Good Life" and "Fast Life" as these are the stages of learning and transitions. Childhood and youth "is a time of preparation, in which all members of the community have a hand in ensuring that their upcoming members learn what they need to know. Community health and well-being is dependent on this education" (Anderson 2011: 95). As such, our educational systems and parenting should incorporate such an understanding of learning, in which our children and youth in school should be nurtured and prepared as members of our communities, to which the wellbeing of our communities depend.

The adult years are a time to carry "the responsibility for the continuation of the collective as a living, viable community" (Anderson 2011:125). For young adults and adults, the "training they received as children in terms of the Indigenous work ethic was now fully applied,

and the commitment to family and community that had been fostered in them underpinned their ability to meet the responsibilities of these adult year". Highlighted during this time are the responsibilities of parenting, which is "a time of sacrifice" (Anderson 2011:125). Our family relations and communities should be designed to empower young adults who are carrying out parenting roles, as well as building careers in wage labour to sustain our communities.

Even when we enter the stages of grandmothers and elders, the responsibilities continue. Those that lived a good life and lived all the previous stages, gained a level of authority as elders, and they became "masters of relatedness" (Anderson 2011: 126). As one elder put it, old age is "a very productive stage of life" (Anderson 2011:127). During the elder stage, our old people have various roles and responsibilities which include "leadership and governance; teaching; managing the health of the community; and being doorkeepers to the spirit world" (Anderson 2011:127). The power and value this model holds in elders as our teachers and "masters of relatedness" demonstrates the importance of the lifelong learning model, in which we are continuously learning and passing on knowledge. The lifelong learning model of Indigenous life stages from infancy to elders, shows how all members of the community carry important roles and responsibilities at different stages, which allows for a holistic understanding of learning in which emotional, physical, spiritual and intellectual learning are all valued.

This understanding of Indigenous holistic life-long learning fits well with the life courses of community members in this study. A few of the community members in this study followed a more western meritocratic life course, they went from high school, to university, to the workforce, to marriage, and then to having children. But this was not the case for most of the community members in this study, due to the colonial histories and structures in our community, these Indigenous peoples followed various pathways, often affected by disadvantages and

traumas, such as childhoods with unstable family relations and abuse, youths where there were periods of drugs and alcohol and abusive relationships, death of family members or dealing with illness, early childbearing, sometimes dropping out of high school or not completing post-secondary programs.

However, instead of focusing on the deficits in these community members lives, what speaks more loudly is the resistance and amazing resilience despite these many life course disadvantages and traumas. Most of these community members were able to be successful in school, in careers and in building stable healthy families, due to their indigenous understandings of extended family networks and a social commitment to community. They learned from their parents the importance of learning across the generations, and valued the relationships between grandparent and child, and valued the roles of parenting to their own children. Learning and growth is based on the collective well-being of the community. These community members focused on their individual success in school, work and family as a means to self-determination for the community. As well, although they may have faced challenges along the way, such as having children at a young age or having children while they were in school, they did not view this as a deficit, but as a sign of strength and used their personal agency to care for their families while pursuing careers. Or even if they dropped out of school early to go to work, or didn't complete a post-secondary program to care for their family, they used these learning experiences to further themselves, and to focus on an Indigenous understanding of strong work ethics. The community members in this study took various pathways to get where they are today, those in Wabasca tended to have children young and pursue their education afterwards, those in the city tended to pursue an education and then start a family afterwards, but they all arrived at the same

place. Many of the community members discussed maintaining strong family relations, and

maintaining traditional cultural practices as important aspects of their life courses.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Explanation of Interview Guide: (Read to interviewee before interview)
This interview is divided into three sections, the first is about your experiences of where you live now and where you have lived in the past, the second is about how your life choices affect where you live, and the third is about your understanding of Aboriginal identity and how it is connected to location. Each question is meant to get at understanding of Aboriginal identity and migration experiences. Throughout the interview I would like to get a glimpse of your life story. In Cree there is the idea of acimowin (telling a story), in this interview I want you to feel free and achimostawin (tell me your story).

Section 1: Migration/Movement Experiences
Key Question: Tell me where you live and how you have come to live there?
Have you lived in the city previously? How long?
Have you lived on the reserve previously? How long?
What do you think is the main reason for you moving around?
What do you think is the main reason for you staying on reserve?
Would you like to reflect on how moving or staying on reserve have affected your identity?

Section 2: Life Choices
Family:
Key Question: Tell me how your family has influenced where you live?
What does community mean to you?
How do you think your experiences have been different (or similar) than other men/women in your community?
Schooling:
Key Question: Tell me about your educational experiences
What is your highest level of education?
How has your choices to pursue (or not pursue) a high school education affected where you live?
How has your choices to pursue (or not pursue) a post-secondary education affected where you live?
How do you think your educational experiences have been different (or similar) than other men/women in your community?
Work :
Key Question: Tell me about your working experiences?
Where do you currently work?
How has your choice in work affected where you live? Or do you choose to only work where you currently live?
How do you think your work experiences have been different (or similar) than other men/women in your community?
Housing:
How has your housing situation affected where you live?

Section 3: Identity, Home, Belonging
Key Question: How do you identify yourself as an Aboriginal person?
As an Aboriginal person, how would you specifically describe your ethnic/cultural background? (Metis, Status Indian, Treaty Indian, Cree, etc)
What does this (ethnic/cultural) mean to you?
Do you speak Cree or any other Aboriginal language? How does speaking or not speaking the Cree language make you feel about being an Aboriginal person?
Do you feel Aboriginal people have a strong connection to the lands of their traditional territory? How so?
Do Aboriginal people who live on reserve have a strong connection to the land? How so?
Do Aboriginal people who live in the city have a strong connection to the land? How so?
Do you think Aboriginal people belong on reserve? Why or why not?
Do you think Aboriginal people belong in the city? Why or why not?

Where do you feel you belong? The city or the reserve or both?

Where is home to you? The city or the reserve or both?

Optional: I designed this interview based on the Cree concepts of Niwahkomakanak, meaning all my relations, highlighting the importance of family in Aboriginal cultures. If at any point you did not feel you could not adequately speak about your cultural family history, you may refer me to a family elder whom I can interviews with a modified version of this interview guide. If you would like to refer me to a family elder we can discuss this further after I have turned off the recording device.

Thank you for taking the time to contribute to this study.

Appendix B: Consent Form

Date: May 16, 2011

Study Name: Aboriginal Life Experiences and Questions of Cultural Identity and Location

Researcher: Angele Alook, PhD Candidate, Sociology, York University, aalook@yorku.ca

Purpose of the Research: This is an ethnographic study of the Aboriginal community from Wabasca, Alberta and the Aboriginal community in Edmonton, Alberta, using an indigenous methodology. The focus of the study is to explore the life experiences of young Aboriginal adults who live on reserve or between the spaces of the reserve and the city. The study is carried out as a PhD dissertation in Sociology being conducted by Angele Alook. This research aims to ask: How does the life experience between the reserve and urban areas affect the co-participants understanding of Aboriginal identity? I will explore this question in the context of gender differences experienced in this process, and in the context of the choices that co-participants have to make in terms of education and entering the labour market at this stage of their lives.

Risks and Discomforts: We do not foresee any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research.

Voluntary Participation: The interview will be conducted as a face-to-face open-ended interview, which could last up to an hour or two hours. The interview will be tape-recorded and then transcribed. Please understand that your participation is entirely voluntary. All information will be held confidential except when professional codes of ethics or legislation require reporting. If there are any questions that you do not wish to answer, you don't have to answer them. You have the option to stop the interview at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study all information gathered as a consequence of your participation will be destroyed.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You: This research has been designed with the needs of the community in mind, and an ongoing dialogue with co-participants in the design and outcome of this study.

Questions about the Research: If you have any questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact Angele Alook, the Principal Researcher at 780-249-6023. This research has been reviewed and approved for compliance to research ethics protocols by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee of York University and conforms to the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. Should you have any ethical concerns regarding the research you may contact the Office of Research Ethics at York University, 5th Floor, York Research Tower, 4700 Keele Street, Toronto, Ontario, M3J 1P3, phone 416-736-5914. You can also contact the Graduate Program in Sociology at York University, 4700 Keele Street, 2075 Vari Hall, Toronto, Ontario, M3J 1P3, phone 416-736-5013.

Confidentiality: Recordings and notes from interviews will not be associated with identifying information. All information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. The data will be collected through handwritten notes and a digital recording device. Your data will be safely stored in a locked facility and only research staff will have access to this information. The data will be stored for ten years and then destroyed by shredding of all paper files and permanently deleting all
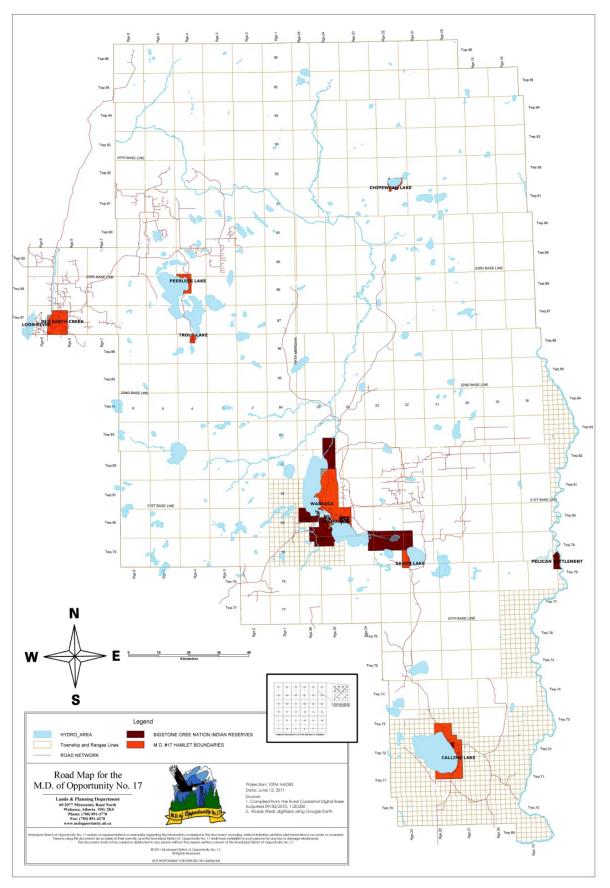
computer files. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law. This research will be presented in my dissertation, in conference presentations, in journal and other academic publications.

DECLARATION

I give permission to be interviewed and for the interview to be tape-recorded. I understand that the final results will be published as an PhD dissertation and that the researcher may also publish articles for academic journals and related conferences. The key findings of this study will also be used to design a booklet which will be shared with the community.

I agree that I have read and understand the above information. I agree to participate in the above study about my migration and life experiences between the Aboriginal community in Wabasca and urban areas conducted by the Department of Sociology at the York University on behalf of Angele Alook. I understand that the information given by me will be kept in the strictest confidence by the researchers.

Signature_____   **Date**_____
Co-Participant

Signature_____   **Date**_____
Principal Researcher

Appendix C: Municipal Boundary Map

Legend

- HYDRO_AREA
- Township and Ranges Lines
- ROAD NETWORK
- BIGSTONE CREE NATION INDIAN RESERVES
- M.D. #17 HAMLET BOUNDARIES

Road Map for the
M.D. of Opportunity No. 17

Lands & Planning Department
60-2077 Mistassiniy Road North
Wabasca, Alberta T0G 2K0
Phone: (780) 891-3778
Fax: (780) 891-4278
www.mdopportunity.ab.ca

Projection: 10TM NAD83
Date: June 15, 2011
Source:
1. Compiled from the Rural Cadastral Digital Base
   Acquired 09/30/2010, 1:20,000
2. Roads (Red) digitized using Google Earth

Kilometers
0   10   20   30   40

CHIPEWYAN LAKE

PEERLESS LAKE

RED EARTH CREEK
LOON RIVER

TROUT LAKE

WABASCA
DESMARAIS

SANDY LAKE

PELICAN SETTLEMENT

CALLING LAKE

ENDNOTES

[i] The Cree names of the different plots of reserve land are based on a telephone correspondence I had with Bigstone Cree Nation Land and Estates Department in February 2014. As well, in the Bigstone Cree Nation community on reserve, there is signage with these names as you enter each different reserve area.

[ii] The Fraser Institute is a right-wing think tank which is known for not always producing unbiased data. I don't cite this source without some apprehension, however when these results were released community members were aware of the negative image this created for the community.

[iii] Average Incomes are calculated by the Census for the population with income.

[iv] Census Metropolitan Area (CMA): "Statistics Canada defines a CMA as a geographical area "consisting of one or more neighbouring municipalities situated around a major urban core. A census metropolitan area must have a total population of at least 100,000 of which 50,000 or more live in the urban core." Edmonton's CMA includes area as far north as Redwater, as far south as Kavanagh, as far west as Seba Beach and as far east as Cooking Lake. While we primarily use City of Edmonton information, it is important to note that many of Edmonton's Aboriginal service delivery organizations service clientele who live outside the city limits" (Anderson 2009, 6). The Edmonton CMA includes large urban areas such as the Edmonton, Leduc, Fort Saskatchewan, St. Albert, Strathcona County, and Sturgeon County.

[v] According to Statistics Canada, 'Aboriginal identity' includes persons who reported being an Aboriginal person, that is, First Nations (North American Indian), Métis or Inuk (Inuit) and/or those who reported Registered or Treaty Indian status, that is registered under the *Indian Act* of Canada, and/or those who reported membership in a First Nation or Indian band. Aboriginal peoples of Canada are defined in the *Constitution Act, 1982*, section 35 (2) as including the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada.

[vi] This is not intended to be a comprehensive list, but an example of Aboriginal programming offered.

[vii] The UAPS was carried out in Ten Canadian Cities, including Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Thunder Bay, Toronto, Montreal, and Halifax. The main survey was carried out among First Nations, Metis, and Inuit in these cities on the urban Aboriginal experience; in addition a second survey on Non-Aboriginal peoples in these cities was done to understand their perceptions of Aboriginal people.

[viii] UAPS defines the following different type of Aboriginal residents in the city: "First generation" residents are those born and raised in a community, town, city or reserve other than Edmonton; "Second generation" are those born and raised in Edmonton whose parents and/or grandparents are from another place; "Third generation" are those that are born and raised in Edmonton whose parents/grandparents are also from Edmonton (UAPS 2010, 18).

[ix] "The City of Edmonton distinguishes between 'Inner City' and 'Suburban' Traffic Districts. These are geographical designations and thus, should not be associated with 'ghettos' or poor areas in general. (Anderson 2009, 23)

[x] Some of the women interviewed described camp jobs as working in administrative positions at the front desk or working as cleaning staff. These work camps house a few thousand workers (which are primarily men) who are part of the community's 'shadow' population from the oil industry.

[xi] Prior to 2010, this program was formerly referred to as the Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy, in which Aboriginal organizations could receive five-year Aboriginal Human Resources Development Agreements (AHRDAs).

[xii] "Between 1996 and 2004, there were about 100 births per 1,000 First Nations women under 20 years old, compared to about 14 per 1,000 among all Canadian women under 20" (Guimond & Robitaille 2008, in Cooke 2013: 1).