

**Becoming Metis: The Relationship Between the Sense of Metis Self and Cultural Stories**

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## ABSTRACT

This research study explores the Metis self-creation process and the role that stories play in the ongoing creation of the self. Twelve Metis participants were interviewed about their Metis self-formation process (their sense of Metis self) and were asked to share stories depicting their experience of being Metis. A narrative methodology was used and theoretical literature was drawn from Aboriginal and post-colonial sources to provide context for the mixed-race experience of a colonized, Aboriginal people in Canada. The concept of the 'third space' was extrapolated from post-colonial theory to provide an explanation for being "in between." This model explains how the Metis live their lives moving between the various cultural spaces of the Euro-Canadian world and the First Nations world while residing in a separate Metis world.

The results of this study show that Metis people employ specific strategies for moving in and between the various cultural worlds. They activate strategic responses for coping with life challenges, complex identity issues, racism, and the difficulties they face as a result of being both mixed-race and Aboriginal in a non-Aboriginal society. One of these strategies of self-preservation involves spending time in Metis settings, sharing stories, developing a Metis-centered analysis of life situations, and simply being with others who understand the Metis experience. This insider process may facilitate the ongoing evolution of the Metis as a cultural community and a political nation in Canada.



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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my ancestors, and particularly to my grandmother, Mrs. Evelyn Oak, who left the earth two weeks before I completed the first draft of this dissertation. She was an important link to my Metis cultural past and will be sadly missed. Although she did not like to talk about being Metis, she was a living example of a Metis cultural past. Her stories will live on and continue to help my family remember what it means to be Metis.

## CHAPTER ONE: BEING METIS TODAY

This dissertation tells a story about being Metis. Within this story there are a number of different accounts of what it means to be Metis, and yet these accounts are all connected by numerous common threads. As researcher, I am the main storyteller, using a narrative methodology. This story contains a number of interviews of Metis people who have shared their stories and experience of being Metis.

One of the things that became apparent during the interviews is that Metis people appear to believe that they don't have Metis stories. I suspect there are two main reasons for this. Firstly, Metis culture is not always overtly celebrated and practiced in Metis families. Sometimes, cultural practices can be subtle or unidentified. Historical factors have served to weaken some of the more easily-identified Metis cultural traditions. For example, thousands of Metis no longer band together twice a year to hunt the buffalo. Nor do they tend to live together intergenerationally in large extended families. Today, many Metis live assimilated lives in urban centres where their neighbours are most often not Metis. The story of Canada is a story where Metis participation has been reduced to a footnote in a story written by the colonizers and by the dominant culture. Secondly, the Metis participants I interviewed in this study consider the term "story" to mean something much more grand than personal or family experience. They do not see the stories they possess and share about their life experience to be "Metis stories." In this story, I explain some of the reasons for these perspectives.

It is my hope that some of the ideas documented in this dissertation will spread and offer Metis people the possibility that their stories perform an important cultural function. Through the telling of these Metis stories, Metis identity and culture may be

portrayed and experienced as valid. Unfortunately we are not there yet. There is widespread ambivalence about what it is to be Metis today. This ambivalence is a dominating feature of being mixed-race and is an important part of post-colonial writings by theorists such as Homi Bhabha (1996, in Zou, 2000, p. 1). I will expand upon this ambivalence in later chapters, particularly when discussing the Metis experience and theoretical perspectives of being “in between.” While Metis people are engaged in their own self-creation process, they are often defined by others who are not Metis. This often includes government bodies and agencies that provide social services to Metis families. Being Metis today still means that non-Metis people don’t know who the Metis are and, therefore, try to categorize them in inappropriate ways. Sadly and resultantly, too often Metis people feel compelled to do that to themselves as well.

In this dissertation, or research story, I address a main construct which I call “the sense of Metis self.” Generally, this refers to the process of a Metis person creating and possessing a sense of self that is based in Metis culture. It is about Metis people seeing themselves as “Metis,” and integrating all of the various influences and ancestries that contribute to being Metis. In this study, I hope to contribute to the creation of new knowledge about how individual Metis people integrate these various cultural ancestries and ancestral influences in the particular ways that make them Metis. In this story about being Metis, I have adapted a number of formulations about how the sense of self is formed.

Some ideas borrowed from European philosophy and psychology are helpful in explaining the key self-formation processes in this study. These ideas complement some Aboriginal perspectives of self-formation. Important ideas stemming from the theory of

symbolic interactionism describe an ongoing, fluid self-formation process composed of analyzed and internalized life experience. Academics and theorists who employ symbolic interactionist ideas see the self as formed through an interactive relationship between the individual and society (Blumer, 1969; James, 1899, in Polkinghorne, 1988; Mead, 1934, 1977; Milliken & Schreiber, 2001). Narrative theorists believe that the sense of self is created through an interaction between the external and internal worlds – an interaction that results in a sense of self that is *storied* (Barthes, 1974, in Thody & Course, 1997; Bruner, 1987; Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Reissman, 1993; White, 2000). I explain this process with greater depth in Chapter Three.

Briefly, according to narrative theorists, the individual internalizes external experience which is then analyzed and edited. Through the sorting and analysis of the experience, a story is authored that organizes and explains the individual's life. Each individual exists in the context of a cultural environment, so the stories that take place and integrate aspects of the cultural world become “cultural” stories. This implies that threads of similarity may exist between individuals that share a culture, even though the plot lines may vary. The self is composed of the reinforcing cultural stories that one digests, as well as some of the negative stories that have a lasting impact. Generally, the Metis self is created and strengthened by digesting self-affirming Metis cultural stories.

Narrative psychologist Theodore Sarbin (1986) links turn of the century philosopher William James' notion of self with narrative notions in describing functions of the self as both *author* and *protagonist* in the life story. According to this formulation, the self is composed of both the “I” and the “me.” The “me” is the part of the self that goes out into the world and lives the experiences. This information, in the context of a

particular cultural environment, can be considered “cultural stories.” Narrative psychologist James Hillman (1975, in Randall, 1997) writes about the self-creation process using similar metaphors that describe “the in and out movement” and the importance of self-consciousness, which he describes as “the capacity to be conscious of ourselves being conscious of ourselves. . . . In posing the question, “What sort of psychological process is at work in making events into ‘soul’?” Hillman (in Randall, 1997, p. 64) proposes a soul-making process:

Whatever exactly events may be, moving them ‘from outer to inner,’ from existence to experience, takes time and energy. It requires a measure of reflection, examination, attention: some sort of psychological process. It requires a period of digestion (p. 63).

Importantly, he adds: “Even with these strategies [reflective practices], however, many of us lead relatively unexamined lives, which means we have more events than are experienced” (Hillman, 1975, in Randall, 1997, p. 64).

Hillman believes that not all external events become part of the evolving self. However, he advocates for the need to transform the significant events of our lives into experiences. When humans experience more than can be processed, for various reasons, a state of restlessness and untamed appetite may exist (Hillman, 1975, in Randall, 1997, p. 64). Although this phenomenon of restlessness, and the ensuing coping mechanisms that subvert restlessness, are not the subject of this study, this idea could account for the large numbers of Metis people and communities experiencing difficulties due to the lack of safety and comfort which facilitate reflective “meaning making.” Some of the statistics about Metis peoples’ lives illustrate current levels of social difficulty.

*Statistics of Suffering*

Statistical data (Normand, 1996; Siggner, 2001; Statistics Canada, 2004) provide some of the most current quantitative information about the Metis situation. Normand (1996) writes: "The Metis are less likely than the non-Aboriginal population to have a postsecondary education" (p. 31). Throughout Canada, the Metis experience unemployment at a rate of 40.6% across all areas of residence, while the rate for Canadians in general is 7.4%. In 2001, 12.1% of the Metis population had less than a grade nine education; 29.8 % of the Metis have not received a high school certificate, in contrast to the general percentage of 23%; 11.7% of the Metis have some postsecondary education; and only 4.9% of the Metis population have a university degree while the general percentage is 10.1%.

The median income for the Metis across all areas of residence is \$16,342 as compared to \$22,431 for the general non-Aboriginal population. In urban centres the gap is larger; the Metis earn \$17,621 while non-Aboriginal people earn \$24,066 (Siggner, 2001). Two thirds of the Metis population live in urban centres (Normand, 1996). According to a Metis needs survey conducted in Victoria, B.C., more Metis go to jail than to university, 50% are system-dependent (receiving social assistance, worker's compensation, unemployment insurance, old age pension), and 87% have an income of less than \$18,000 (Donahue, 1996).

Across British Columbia Aboriginal children comprise 25-40% of the total children in care. In the Capital Region (Greater Victoria and surrounding area), this figure is 25%. Of the 652 Aboriginal children in care in this region, 100 are Metis, a

number that represents the largest tribal population (R. Donahue, personal communication, October, 2004).

Overall, the Metis continue to experience life challenges at rates comparable to First Nations people and at higher rates than those of European Canadians. Statistics can tell a generalized, non-personalized story about the Metis situation in Canada.

### *The Storied Self*

Both in Hillman's model and the symbolic interactionist model, when the "me" has participated in an outer-world experience, it then brings the stories back to the "I." The "I" then performs the functions of analyzing, sorting, and integrating the experience into the current self. Thus, the sense of self is continuously evolving with the integration of new information. The "I" assimilates the experience or event, and the self is involved in an ongoing shaping. In this way, the sense of self is constantly created and recreated.

There is some variation in the exact nature of the storied self. There is general agreement between theorists that the self is informed and shaped by culture and cultural information shared through stories (Adams, 1995; Bruner, 1987; Deloria, 1992; Howard, 1991; Barthes, 1974, in Thody & Course, 1997; White, 2000). Theorists see the self as created, or carried into existence through the process of storytelling (Madigan & Law, 1998; Smith, 1999; White, 2000). Some theorists believe that the sense of self is held together by stories (Chandler, 2000, 2001; Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Polkinghorne, 1988) or is embedded in them (McAdams, 1993). Others assert that we are our stories (Bruner, 1987; Hopcke, 1998; Randall, 1997; Sarbin, 1986). Aboriginal writer Thomas King (2003) asserts that "stories are all we are" (p. 2). Randall (1997) suggests that there are complex differences between *having* and *being* a story and dedicates his book to this

distinction (p. 4). Human beings experience a sense of being held together by stories, as representations of historical, genealogical, or biological realities.

Without the cohesion of these stories we may feel alone and isolated in the world and wonder if we are part of something meaningful. Stories help us to understand that we are embedded in a life-long narrative, existing since time immemorial as part of an ancestral chain. Stories describe our world and our place in it. They describe how others have lived their lives and provide examples of what is possible for us. Overall, there is a consensus among narrative theorists that the sense of self is influenced by stories, but there is divergence in belief about how this influence works.

The story that I relate in this dissertation tells about a number of things. In Aboriginal style, I would tell the story and let the reader take from it what is most relevant at the time. In European style, I would introduce the outline, the agenda, and document what others have said about the topic so the reader can anticipate what is next. In the Metis way, I do both. The story of this research process will explore the relationship of personal stories, cultural stories, and the sense of the Metis self. Particular questions are at the root of this inquiry, such as *How do Metis individuals arrive at their sense of Metis self? Where does the sense of Metis self come from? How do Metis people become aware of themselves as cultural beings? What kinds of Metis stories have Metis people been exposed to throughout their lives? How do Metis cultural stories inform or influence the sense of Metis self? Is there a connection between the sense of Metis self and broader Metis cultural stories? If so, what is the nature of this connection?*

There are a number of ways to begin a story. Native storyteller and Massey lecturer Thomas King (2003) recommends “You’ll never believe what happened . . .”

(p. 5) as a good way to start.

*You'll Never Believe What Happened!*

In Canada, the story of the Metis people can be compared to Dr. Seuss' (Geisel, 1961) tale of *The Sneeches on the Beaches*. In this story, two kinds of creatures (called Sneeches) live together. One type of Sneech has a plain belly and the other type has a star on the belly. The star-bellied creatures try to convince the population that having a starred belly is more desirable than a plain belly; therefore, they reason that star-bellied Sneeches are superior to plain-bellied Sneeches. Although the plain-bellied Sneeches do not believe this discourse, they can see the social merit in having "stars upon thars," and thus seek to have stars tattooed on their stomachs. A travelling salesperson with a star machine kindly obliges for a price, and the price continues to increase as the silliness advances. A frenzy of star-tattooing and star-removing ensues and, in the end, no one can remember who is who, starred or unstarred. The business of star-altering is not entirely unlike the business generated from the Aboriginal land transfer in Canada, as outlined in Cole Harris' (2003) book *Making Native Space*.

Sneech-like behaviour has not served the Metis people. In fact, the Metis have been treated disparagingly by both of their parent cultures, the European Canadians and the First Nations, based on the notion that being mixed-blood, half-breed, or hybrid, is inferior to being a "full-blooded" person (Lawrence, 1982). Although these terms originated in colonial discourse, this type of terminology continues to be used today. Many Metis, like Sneeches, have spent their lives searching for an acceptable identity. Many Metis continue to search for their true identity. This dynamic is outlined nicely by mixed-race writer Heather Green (1994):

As a person of mixed race, I embody some of the most unresolved contradictions in current human relations. Beyond just the mixing of physical traits, there's the fact that my blood has ancestry from two different continents. This means that, even before the experience of being born and raised in a land which is not my own, I have two or more vastly different histories, heritages, belief systems and ways of life which exist in my soul, in my spirit, in my DNA, in my heart of hearts – whichever you prefer (p. 291).

As we move through the dissertation, I provide further examples of these practices of exclusion and denigration, as well examples of how the mixing of these social factors have influenced the Metis. I explain how the Metis have straddled these worlds and have existed in the in-between spaces.

In addition to introducing some of the social conditions surrounding the Metis, it is equally important to first explain who the Metis are. This explanation must include both who the Metis themselves think they are, and who others think they are. It is important to provide both these perspectives because the Metis are so powerfully impacted by other people's definitions, and because of this, often spend time being what others think they are, so they can survive to become themselves.

### *Who the Metis Are*

I am Metis, but my Metis grandmother is not. Although she had a deep understanding of her cultural background, she chose not to define herself as Metis. As her descendant, I claim the right to identify culturally as Metis. For the purposes of this study, I define Metis as someone who has both European and First Nations ancestry, who defines themselves as Metis, and who experiences some connection to a Metis community. The formal definition of Metis is highly contested in Canada, primarily by political organizations.

I will now present an overview of some of the explanations of Metis that I have found in written documents. Josée Normand (1996) introduces the Statistics Canada profile of the Metis, produced by the federal government, by saying:

The Metis people are a historically, legally, politically, linguistically and culturally distinct Aboriginal people. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the term Metis was used to identify people of both Indian and European ancestry who did not regard themselves as being either Indian or White (p. 9).

Today, there are some Metis who may also identify as First Nations, particularly if one parent is a “non-status Indian” according to the federal government. A person may be Metis but refer to themselves as “White” if they have white skin. There is no simple identity explanation.

The definition of Metis is problematic, contested, and complex. Some of these definitions have been imposed upon the Metis and do not accurately explain the people they describe. In the 2001 Canadian census, 292,310 Canadians reported possessing Metis ancestry out of a total of 1, 319, 890 people reporting Aboriginal ancestry (Siggner, 2001). The *Oxford Canadian Dictionary* (1998) defines Metis as “a person of mixed Aboriginal and European descent” (p. 912). *European* is defined as “a native or inhabitant of Europe and/or a person descended from natives of Europe” (p. 480), and *Aboriginal* is defined as “of peoples inhabiting or existing in a land from the earliest times or from before the arrival of colonists” (p. 4). The *First Nations* are described as “people in Canada of an Indian band, or an Indian community functioning as a band but not having official band status” (p. 522). *Indian* refers to “a member of the Aboriginal peoples of North or South America, or their descendants” (p. 717).

A Metis magazine entitled *The Sash* documents that “in September 2002, the MPCBC (Metis Provincial Council of British Columbia) was proud to join in the

unanimous passage of the National Definition of Metis, passed at the Annual General Meeting of the Metis National Council” (The Sash, 2003, p.4). That definition reads:

The Metis Nation is distinct within the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. The Metis are distinct from First Nations and Inuit and are the descendants of the historical Metis who evolved as a people with a common political will and consciousness (MPCBC, 2004, par. 1).

The new constitution of the Metis National Council states that “there will be a standard definition of Metis for citizenship – the same definition that is used all across the Historic Metis Homeland” (The Sash, 2003, p. 8). Consequently, the limited nature of this definition, based on Red River ancestry and *scrip* (Metis land documents) as key criteria, exclude many Metis people. Many Metis originating from regions outside of Red River are concerned that their continued feelings of exclusion are now intensified by their own people.

The Metis are a people “between two worlds” (Harrison, 1985). Metis writer Emma LaRocque (2003) remarks in her paper “Native Identity and the Metis: Otehpayimsuak Peoples” that “the Metis are often defined for what they are not (p. 1).” The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP; Government of Canada, 1996) says, “Metis are distinct Aboriginal peoples, neither First Nations or Inuit” (p. 199). The Metis have also been defined as “half White, half Indian” persons or “halfbreeds” (LaRocque, 2001). Although many people refer to Metis as those with European and First Nations ancestry, others make a distinction between the Metis whose family origins extend back to the Red River area. This definition is becoming popular with Metis political bodies seeking to limit membership for the purpose of a future land claim.

Although many mixed-race European and Aboriginal people call themselves Metis, RCAP (Government of Canada, 1996) articulates a definition that is based on culture as a criterion for identification:

It is primarily culture that sets the Metis apart from other Aboriginal peoples. Many Canadians have mixed Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal ancestry, but that does not make them Metis or even Aboriginal. Some of them identify themselves as First Nations persons or Inuit, some as Metis and some as non-Aboriginal. What distinguishes Metis people from everyone else is that they associate themselves with a culture that is distinctly Metis (p. 202).

Within the Metis community itself, definitions are also problematic. Perhaps as a residual form of the colonizing process known as lateral violence (Duran & Duran, 1995), fighting about definitions of Metis is common in Metis communities.

Current political debates exist around the issue of Red River ancestry as a prerequisite for being Metis. This debate implies that some Metis are more authentic or rightful than others. Recently, a small group of Metis leaders have suggested identifying Red River descendants as “the Michif nation” (Matas, 2002). Some organizations require a scrip document or genealogical proof of Red River ancestry before an individual may access Metis privileges. Other definitions are more inclusive and include the mixed-race descendants of First Nations and Euro-Canadians. The 2001 Canadian census contains a category entitled “Multiple and Other Aboriginal Identity Responses,” in which 30,080 Canadians place themselves. This category could also contain people who identify as Metis in addition to other ancestries (Siggner, 2001).

In a local Metis agency, people who self-identify as Metis are provided access to services. Although it is a source of pride for Red River Metis to be a descendant from an early fur trade marriage, the term Metis is often applied to the children of present day Aboriginal children of mixed-race parentage. Being Metis includes a component of self-

identification. More and more Metis are starting to identify as such. The 2001 census demonstrates that the number of Canadians identifying as Metis has increased 43% in the period from 1996 to 2001 (Siggner, 2001, p. 5). The reasons for the increase in Metis identification will be explored in this dissertation, specifically in Chapter Three in the discussion of Metis self-formation.

The census posits a number of explanations for the rapid growth of the Metis population. These reasons include greater cultural consciousness and pride in being Metis, various judicial court decisions, government policy changes, and possible improvement in census coverage (Siggner, 2001).

### *The Word "Metis"*

The word Metis is related to other words for mixed-race people, such as Mestizzo/Mestizza. However, the Metis are a singularly Canadian phenomenon. Although there are mixed-race Indigenous people throughout the former European colonies, the evolution and recognition of the Metis as a separate, mixed-race people is uniquely Canadian. Metis people who moved to the United States from Canada are subject to American laws about what constitutes a Native American person. The former Canadians would not be classified as Native American under the USA's categorization based on blood quantum (Duran & Duran, 1995; King, 2003).

One of the main differences in outcome for the Metis in Canada was due to Canada's colonial history, which was based on commerce as opposed to conquest. Canada's fur trade economy depended upon the participation, not the extinction, of the First Nations and Metis people (Mackie, 1997, Van Kirk, 1980).

Metis is a word derived from Latin, meaning “to mix,” and the verb *metisser* has been used historically to describe a process of weaving with threads of different textures. In a European story from Greece, Metis is presented as the Titan wife of the Greek God Zeus. The figure of Metis and the episode of her being swallowed by Zeus also (in addition to Hesiods) appear in the Orphic theogonies known as those of the Rhapsodes (Detienne & Vernant, 1974, p. 133).

In Hesiod, Metis is a goddess whose role, necessarily a subordinate one, is inconceivable unless related to the male deity whose companion and acolyte she is, namely Zeus, the Father and King. True, Metis is certainly indispensable to Zeus, first by her presence at his side and later within him, but only to perfect the supremacy which is the particular characteristic of the sovereign of the gods and of which, throughout the history of his actions he has shown himself to be a complete master. When Zeus swallows Metis, at the end of the Theogonic myths, he is completing the process by which, through the various stages of his battles against the primordial powers of disorder, there gradually emerges from the original chaos an organized, differentiated and hierarchical cosmos which from now on is stable (p. 134).

This story of Metis, with its transcultural and archetypal relevance, provides an interesting parallel to the situation for the Canadian Metis.

The Metis are a people who, despite their resistance, were consumed by an all-encompassing colonizing process. The unique historical and sociopolitical situation of the Metis has rendered problematic the creation of a healthy sense of Metis self in a situation where cultural ancestry is often attacked, hidden, or denied.

I consider *self* to be a compilation of the various aspects of one’s being, including the mental, the physical, the emotional, and the spiritual. A *cultural* self refers to the sense one has of being interconnected, interdependent, and embedded in one’s culture. The two are not different, except for the explicit acknowledgement of the cultural context in the cultural self. Thus, the formation of a healthy Metis sense of self is challenging,

and this challenge is characteristic of being Metis. Both the Metis and non-Metis have had difficulty deciding who the Metis are and how they should be identified and addressed.

### *What the Metis Call Themselves*

Metis people did not traditionally use the term Metis to describe themselves. Historically, the French-speaking Metis have called themselves *les Canadiens/les Canadiennes*. If you ask a Metis person who they are (culturally) they might have traditionally answered “we are ‘the people.’” This self-definition implies, “we are the people living here (e. g., Lac Ste. Anne) who are like each other, and are neither White nor Indian (R. Donahue, personal communication, 2002). Some French-speaking Metis were defined by their profession as *les Voyageurs* – a term which many Canadians do not recognize as Metis. An English speaking Metis person was historically called a “halfbreed,” defined by Oxford as “a person of mixed race (offensive)” (p. 633). The English-speaking Half-breeds were later referred to as Metis when “halfbreed” was considered either too pejorative or too inaccurate. The language of the colonizer and the imposition of value-laden categorizations on the Metis have contributed to a problematic and complex sense of Metis self for this population. Imposing new names, categories and social values was one of the hegemonic privileges of the newcomers to Canada during the colonial period, when European values were firmly implanted.

### *Other Terminology*

The term *dominant culture* refers to the mainstream Canadian, White ruling-class society composed primarily of Canadians of European ancestry. This dominant cultural

space is also referred to at times in this study as the *first space* and at times to the *settler/invader* society. I refer to the First Nations society as the *second space* and the Metis society as the *third space*. Both the second and third spaces are Aboriginal spaces composed of different Aboriginal nations. A critical factor in this study is that so many Canadians have been denied information about their Metis ancestry. This has meant that the sense of self for Metis people has typically been “thinly informed” (Geertz, 1988) and has resulted in compromised psychological health.

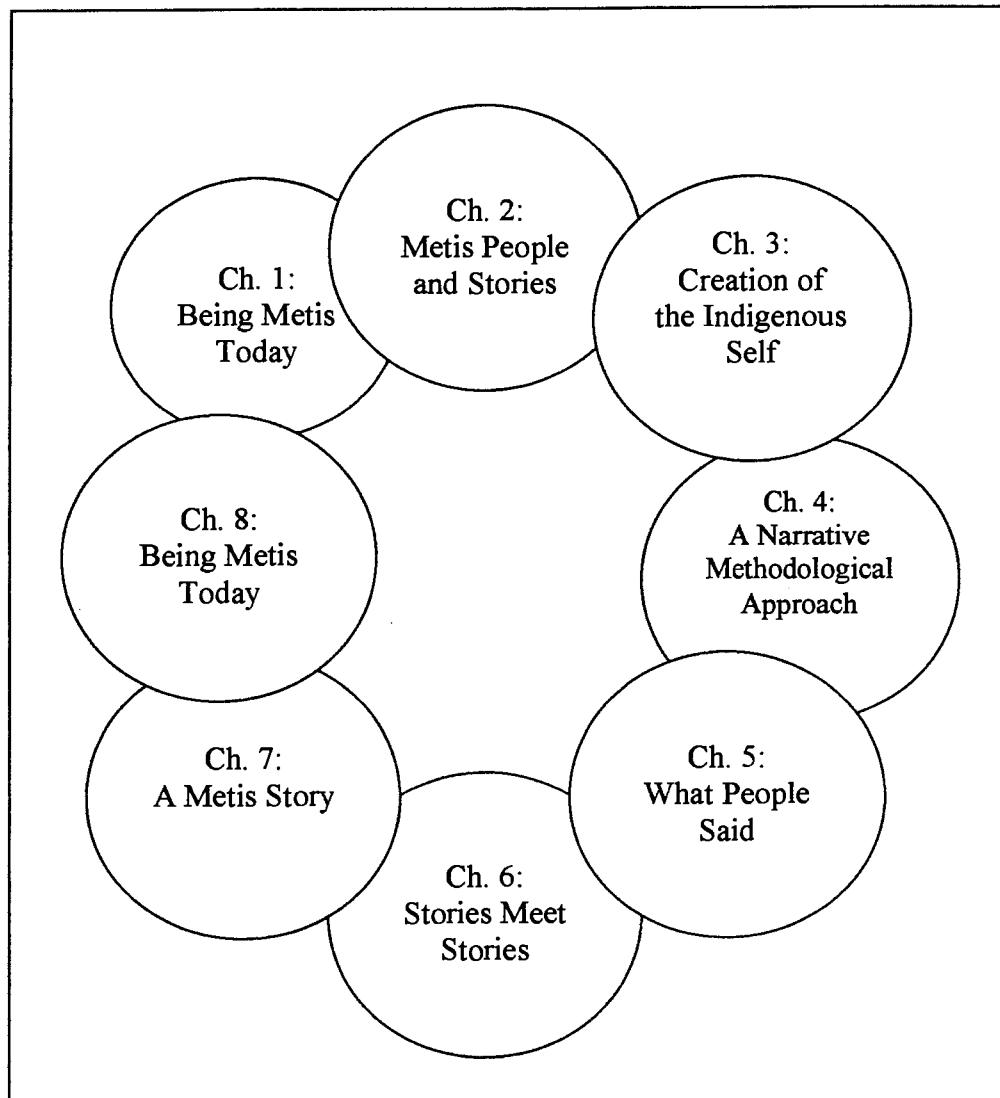
For the purposes of this study, I interviewed individuals who are Metis, who identify as having a sense of their Metis self. Many of the Metis participants are affiliated with the Red River Metis community but, in some cases, are affiliated with other Metis communities. Not all Metis participants had genealogical evidence linking them to the Red River settlement. However, these participants see themselves as Metis and believe the definition wars to be largely political as opposed to meaningful for their lives. I will explain and explore key terms and processes of the sense of Metis self in the following chapters. I will also explore Metis cultural stories in the following chapters addressing the theoretical concepts that inform this study.

In this study, I assess the relationship between Metis participants’ stories and the theoretical literature in the analysis section of this dissertation. Through this process I create knowledge about the role of cultural stories and historical narratives in Metis self-formation. In doing so, I implement a narrative approach to research, designed to highlight the interconnections between events, personal stories, social and historical context, and the construction of self in the process.

### *Chapters in the Study*

This dissertation is composed of eight chapters, laid out as shown in Figure 1.1.

*Fig. 1.1: Diagram of Chapters in the Dissertation*



These chapters provide a lay of the land and a setting for the story of Metis self-creation. The first chapter presents the situation of the Metis self and locates this issue historically and socially in Canada today. The second chapter talks about Metis people and their relationship to stories. Here, I provide a rationale for using stories in a process

for Metis research. In the third chapter, I present a literature search and appropriate theoretical ideas about the formation of the Metis self.

In the fourth chapter, I explain the historical evolution of narrative as a methodology within the realm of the social sciences. Here, I explain my position as researcher and the steps I took in carrying out this study. As well, I explain the steps that were taken in conducting the study and the layout of the dissertation. In the fifth chapter, I explain *what people said*, and provide an analysis of the research data. In the sixth chapter, I conduct an analysis and look at the relationship between Metis participant stories and the theoretical literature.

In Chapter Seven, I share a sample of Metis stories that were shared in the interview process. Some of these stories were passed down in families while some illustrate the participants' experiences of being Metis. Finally, the eighth chapter is representative of going full circle, and discusses a number of concluding thoughts and observations about the research process. As well, Chapter Eight contains some recommendations for possible future use of this research, and poses some follow-up research questions that emerge from the study. I will now discuss the way in which Metis stories help to shape the Metis self.

## CHAPTER TWO: METIS PEOPLE AND STORIES

Before delving into the story of Metis self-formation, it is important to address the importance of storytelling as a cultural tool. This chapter will set the stage for the story by addressing how and why stories are important shapers of self. The transformative power of stories is reminiscent of the Native belief in *shapeshifting*. Many stories and legends talk about beings changing shape from one form to another. In some ways, stories help people to change their form, or identity. This dissertation story is designed to transform the state of knowledge about the Metis self. It is appropriate to set the stage for a story before beginning the narrative itself, to prepare the listener. Thomas King (2003) believes that “one of the tricks to storytelling is never to tell everything at once, to make your audience wait, to keep everyone in suspense” (p. 7).

What the participants said, perhaps the most important part of this dissertation, is not presented until Chapter Six. The preliminary chapters provide the narrative build-up, and put into context the key information about Metis people’s lives. At this point, I now “set the stage,” and provide the background and theoretical orientation for the story of Metis self-formation.

One interesting thing about stories is that they can be *cultural* and transmit important cultural information. However, culture and ethnicity are usually identified as “cultural” when they do not refer to the dominant culture. Again, the way the Metis see themselves is quite different from the way they are perceived by the dominant culture. The following excerpt demonstrates this perspective as looking at something “Aboriginal” as being different or ethnic, while the European side is seen as central or

normal. Here, writer Louis Owens (2001) is referring to mixed-blood people in American photographs. He reflects:

Few looking at these photos of mixed-bloods would be likely to say 'but they don't look like Irishmen,' but everyone seems obligated to offer an opinion regarding the degree of Indianness represented (p. 91).

This perspective shapes many of the dominant culture's stories. The subject of questioned identity and cultural affiliation shapes many Metis stories. The stories that European North Americans have told about Metis people tend to highlight their differences as being caused by their Aboriginality. Their potential normality or sameness is attributed to their European parentage. This view is a foundational theme of the Metis story.

The Metis are considered by European Canadian society and First Nations society as "half-okay and half-not." Throughout this document I will provide examples of this half-okay, half-not phenomenon. This is a main thread in the Metis cultural story. This quotation resonates with the Aboriginal comic irony enjoyed by inverting stereotypical questions, such as asking White people "How much White are you"? Often assimilated or disenfranchised Metis people have difficulty locating their tribal ancestors in the same way as European Canadians may have difficulty determining if they are Saxons, Britons, Normans, or Celts in origin (Mackie, 2002).

Cultural stories are the shared stories that make one cultural group unique from another (Howard, 1991). According to narrative theory, a story is a sharing of information in a narrative form, through telling, within a culture in a multitude of forms for a multitude of purposes. These forms include: novels, nursery rhymes, folktales, myths, newspapers, commercials, magazines, educational and scientific texts, cinema,

literature, and art. In Aboriginal tradition, stories are transmitted orally. More recently, Aboriginal stories are being written and recorded on television and on-line, with the use of modern technology.

In Aboriginal oral culture, telling a story was and is a way of providing information to witnesses so that it will be recorded in the memory of the community and become part of history. Author Sylvia Olsen (2003) describes the witnessing of Aboriginal stories as historical record in the following way:

It's the way oral societies, ones that don't write stuff down, do things. In the old days there was no government office for registering someone's birth or name, or a death or marriage. The old people didn't write history books and teach the stories in schools. When something happened in their family they invited the community to a gathering and asked the people to act as witnesses, to hold onto the history and the knowledge. That's why the speeches are so long – each person tells the stories they've heard, so our history stays alive (p. 198).

Stories provide moral explanations for human action. They educate young people. They explain creation and the reason for human existence. They may share information about the natural world and appropriate interaction between humans and other aspects of creation. Stories are shared orally; they are spoken or sung. Stories can be medicinal and soothe in times of pain. They form a theoretical prescription of how to behave within the parameters of the culture. Thomas King (2003) writes the following about stories and ways to behave: "Stories assert tremendous control over our lives, informing who we are and how we treat one another as friends, family, and citizens" (p. 9).

Barthes (1974, in Thody & Course, 1997) believes that every culture has a story: "The narrative is present at all times, in all places, in all societies; the history of narrative begins with the history of mankind. There does not exist, and never has existed a people without narrative" (p. 14).

Metis stories are especially important for guiding Metis people back to their culture. Due to the fact that the Metis must live in non-Metis worlds (Euro-Canadian, First Nations), stories offer important information about how to act in other cultural spaces, and fortify the self in its experience of being Metis. Stories provide a map that can help navigate the bumps in the road. This idea will be discussed further in the postcolonial literature review and in the discussion of Indigenous approaches to research. Here, I will continue to explore how cultural stories relate to one's sense of Metis self.

### *Stories and the Metis Self*

When understanding the setting of the story, it is important to understand that Metis people have been, and still are, colonized, marginalized, and cast as 'other' in relation to the dominant Euro-Canadian culture. The Metis are generally half-okay, half-not in the eyes of both parent cultures. Metis people continue to hide their Metis ancestry out of fear of the rejection and racism that cultural identification may bring. To exemplify this point, I share a personal story from Howard Adams (1989): "One of my maternal aunts has refused to allow me in her house or to speak to me because I stated publicly that my mother was of Cree ancestry" (p. 145).

Although this statement was made over fifty years ago, this fear still exists for many people. My own grandmother was haunted by this fear because of her own ill-treatment as a Metis person. However, she has never spoken about it and denies she is Metis, so I have never heard that story. I have heard her story of living in the woods, trapping, hunting, and making clothes from animals. This is a Metis culture that is not presented as Metis culture but rather as "bush culture." It is not presented as a Metis

story, although it is one. In fact, the story of Metis people choosing to not speak openly about their ancestry may be the most common thread in Metis stories.

Many people in the local Metis community continue to share the stories of racial prejudice that cause people to be cautious. At a Victoria Metis gathering, Metis elder and scholar Fred Storey (2004) began his presentation by playing the song “Halfbreed” (Dean & Capps, 1974) to set the stage for the definitive Metis experience:

Halfbreed, that’s all I ever heard  
 Halfbreed, how I learned to hate the word  
 Halfbreed, she ain’t no good they warned  
 Both sides were against me since the day I was born.

The Metis are persecuted for not having a recognized culture, and for practicing their traditional bush culture in Euro-Canadian settings. For example, on a recent visit from the north, my Metis cousins said they wanted to try some crab. While I assumed they wanted to go to a restaurant, they bought a crab trap, went to the beach, and caught their dinner. Fortunately, they were not questioned about having a licence or a status card. They did not have anyone’s permission to harvest shellfish. Metis songwriter Seaborn (2004) uses humour to capture the transferring of Metis traditional culture into urban settings:

One day I built a wigwam in my yard  
 My neighbour came and looked at me real hard  
 He said ‘I can’t believe I’m seeing what I see’  
 I said ‘I’m free to be me ’cause I’m Metis.’

This type of cultural displacement is a main theme in the Metis story and I will give many examples of this as the story unfolds.

### *Metis Themes*

Metis themes tend to come in strands that are closely woven together. In some aspects, it is difficult and inappropriate to separate these threads. For example, themes of exclusion, denigration, and resistance tend to be found together. Themes of healing, learning through stories, and finding belonging are woven closely together. Although I sometimes explore one particular theme, it is with the understanding that any particular thread is closely connected to several other threads. In this way, it is impossible to study the Metis without studying historical themes, cultural themes, and the areas where history, culture, politics, and environment intersect.

One theme of the Metis story is that Metis people were subject to ill-treatment and, as a survival strategy, decided to stop talking about being Metis. This situation leads to the next major theme: many Metis don't know they are Metis because their family hasn't told them. This relates to the next theme: when Metis people discover that they are Metis, it is often "by accident," yet not surprising.

Some Metis individuals become suspicious when the family stories they are given don't quite match up. Searching for one's ancestry and one's past then becomes the next major theme. Finding and learning about Metis culture become the next important themes in the Metis story. All of these themes weave through the lives of Metis people and their stories, and influence the formation of the Metis self. These themes are very often what being Metis is about – the Metis way. The Metis are often caught in the ironic position of not recognizing themselves culturally. There are some variations in the levels of overt cultural activity.

### *Cultural Activity*

The largest numbers of Metis continue to live in the prairie provinces, closer to the land of the Metis beginnings. While the Statistics Canada survey (Normand, 1996) reported 9,030 Metis living in British Columbia, Metis Community Services estimates 22,500 in B.C. Manitoba reports 33,230, Saskatchewan, 26,995, and Alberta 38,755 (1991). At the time of confederation, the Manitoba population was 90% Metis (Mackie, personal communication, June 17, 2004).

While many would say that the Metis way is hunting, trapping, skinning, fishing, and making clothes from animals, this way of life is only a part of traditional Metis culture. Most Metis (65%) now live in city centres where their cultural activity must adapt itself to take place in drop-in centres, around coffee tables, and at folk festivals (Normand, 1996). Still, Statistics Canada's *A Profile of the Metis* (Normand, 1996) states that while two-thirds of the Metis in Canada live in urban centres and seem to practice some forms of Metis cultural activity:

in 1991, 40% of all Metis aged 15 and over reported participating in traditional activities such as hunting, fishing, trapping, storytelling, traditional dancing, fiddle-playing, jigging, and arts and crafts. As well, 13% had lived on the land away from home in the twelve months prior to the survey (p. 7).

### *Metis Employment*

Traditionally, the Metis were self-supporting. Today, being Metis or identifying as Metis can be problematic when seeking employment. The Metis remain marginalized in the workforce, and openly identifying as Metis often impairs the chance of getting a job. The census reports that in 1991, 57% of Metis men (aged 15-64) were employed as compared to only 47% of their female counterparts (Normand, 1996). At the same time,

Metis women were more likely to be employed in professional jobs while Metis men were most often doing manual labour (45%).

Many Metis continue to support themselves financially through activities outside the formal labour force. Similarly, in 1990, 10% of Metis were involved in unpaid activities such as fishing or hunting for food, cutting wood, or trading for food and other services (Normand, 1996, p. 7). In cases of affirmative action hiring, the Metis do not always look “Native enough” to satisfy employers wanting to hire an Aboriginal person. At the same time, a Metis person may be hired at a job because the employer does not know that the applicant is Aboriginal from their appearance. I was told at one hiring that the employer was looking for a traditional Aboriginal person with an affiliation to a tribal culture. I wondered about the effect and fairness of this policy in respect to urban and disenfranchised Aboriginal people. Metis singer Andrea Menard (2001) tells the story of unmet expectations of who she is as an Aboriginal person:

I was born the privileged skin  
 And my eyes are bright, bright brown  
 You'd never know there is Metis blood  
 Raging underground  
 Let me tell you a story about a revelation  
 It's not the colour of a nation that holds a nation's pride  
 It's imagination  
 It's imagination inside (p. 32).

Metis writer Warren Cariou (2002), in his story *Lake of the Prairies*, tells about the reaction of his friends when they find out he is Metis:

As some other members of my family began to go public with our family secret, though, I started to feel a little more comfortable with it. One of my cousins informed me that she had joined the Manitoba Metis Federation, and my uncle Vic started to become active in Saskatchewan Metis politics. Most of my friends in Toronto were quite excited to learn about my Metis ancestry. Some even treated me with a certain amount of awe, perhaps because they had only met a precious few real Native people, or because they believed that being Aboriginal

was somehow inherently valuable. Others were confused by the contrast between my appearance and the revelation of my background. I don't 'look Native,' if there is such a look. Nonetheless, some of my acquaintances claimed to be able to see it in my cheekbones (p. 223).

The theme of being "not enough of one thing or the other" often arises. If not countered by one's own cultural stories, the Metis fall prey to the stories of others who tell them who they are. For example, in school I was told that Louis Riel was a crazy rebel. I suspect I'm not the only one who heard that story.

To the Metis people, Louis Riel (1825-1870) was a visionary. Riel could sense what was coming when he saw the rights of the Metis being eroded, and then militarily challenged by the Canadian government. He could see what was coming when he saw Aboriginal and Metis lands being confiscated and then given to the settlers the government had recruited from Europe with the promise of free farm land. He could sense what was coming when he composed the following prayer, delivered at the Battle of Batoche on May 9, 1885:

O mon Dieu! Ne permettez pas que l'Angleterre l'emporte sur moi. Car elle m'aneantirait avec ma nation. Sauvez moi de sa Puissance. [O my God! Do not let England get the better of me. For she would annihilate me together with my nation. Save me from her power] (in Day 1997, pp. 50-51).

Louis Riel's story, although often distorted, is the one Metis story that most Metis people, and most Canadians, know about. The story of the Red River Rebellion, which the Metis call the Red River Resistance, was taught in Canadian public schools. In the same way that Metis people often do not recognize their own stories as Metis stories, many assimilated Metis did not know that Louis Riel's story was about them. If they did know it was about them, they didn't admit it. Today, part of being Metis includes seeing

oneself as part of the Louis Riel story. Stories help link the Metis self with the Metis nation. They are a living example of the belief that the personal is political.

### *Cultural Continuity and Discontinuity*

Research conducted by Michael Chandler (2000, 2001) and Chandler together with Christopher Lalonde (1998) represents some important work on self-continuity which indicates that First Nations youth view their sense of self in narrative terms, meaning that self is held together by cultural stories. Their study looked at a number of First Nations communities across British Columbia. For this population, the absence of cultural connection has been a major factor in suicide rates that are 200 to 400 times higher than the rates for youth in the mainstream population. However, these suicide rates are inversely related to the level of political and social control exercised by the youth's First Nation. Chandler and Lalonde's (1998) research makes a strong statement about the importance of self-direction and sovereignty of Aboriginal nations. In accordance, many First Nations and Metis communities believe that their child and family services are most effective when run by their own communities. Many Metis service providers believe that the needs of the Metis have not always been met by mainstream or even pan-Aboriginal social service delivery agencies (R. Donahue, personal communication, 2002; Seaborn, 2003). Other groups make different, often inappropriate, assumptions – tell a different story – about what Metis people need and how they should be included. “You can't understand the world without a story” (Vizenor, 2003, in King, 2003, p. 32), and different stories receive different levels of support (resources and funding) depending upon who they can move. Metis cultural stories play a crucial role in helping “new” Metis (those who have been denied their culture) to recreate their sense of self. This relationship

between the sense of Metis self and cultural stories includes important processes, such as the rediscovery of the Metis community and the re-authoring of the self through new experiences.

### *Stories are Medicine*

Stories have been called a form of medicine (King, 2003, p. 92). Stories fight illness and death (King, 2003, p. 92) and counter other stories that are bad. Good stories are ones that reinforce the sense of belonging and identity. Bad stories are the ones that make people feel bad for being Aboriginal. Many Aboriginal stories have a long introduction that talks about the White man coming, the historic sharing and educating, the development of mutually beneficial commerce, things going wrong, greed taking over, the colonial coup, the 'coup de grace' land grab, institutions euphemistically called residential schools and resembling work camps, the Department of Indian Affairs, the continuing overrepresentation of Metis children in child welfare, and the loss of Aboriginal culture. King (2003) believes that putting all this history up front in an Aboriginal story is one way of saying "once upon a time" (p. 29).

Some historical researchers (Adams, 1989; Van Kirk, 1980; Mackie, 1997) have documented that the Metis way of life was not seen as a threat to the European fur traders in Canada, but was abhorred by the more xenophobic settlers who arrived from northern Europe. King (2003) documents this progression in *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*, writing:

Living together would be another matter, and, as exploration gave way to settlement, the European reaction to Indians hardened, and the language used to describe Indians intensified. Particularly among the English (p. 75).

Widespread cultural suffering for Metis people began around the time when the fur trade was nearing its end and the colonial period was beginning (Mackie, 1997). Like others surviving in harsh Canadian landscapes, the Metis struggled, over time, to succeed in their agricultural endeavours while also trying to maintain a hunting/gathering lifestyle on their traditional lands. Today only 1% of Metis live on land specially allocated for Metis people (Normand, 1996). When crops failed and people were hungry, they coped through the mutual assistance that was possible through living together in community.

After the displacement from their land occurred, this mutual support was no longer available. When the Metis were required to demonstrate proof of land title for the land they had been given by the Canadian state, and which they had been farming for generations, they were often unable to do so. They were later evicted from their land by the federal government through the use of force (Adams, 1995).

Historical events such as the Red River Resistance (1869-70) epitomize the new land threats for the Metis, and Metis persecution can be dated back to this period. My ancestors, George and Charlotte Flett, occupied river lots 22 and 23 in the Red River Settlement, near Charlotte's father Jean-Baptiste. I do not know what happened to them after 1870. My great-grandmother lost her land in Edmonton on the North Saskatchewan River, where the legislature stands today, due to her inability to pay the taxes. Although this event occurred over one hundred years ago, I heard the story only recently. When cultural stories remain hidden and untold, they tend to disappear, at least temporarily, leaving one with a void of information about the self. With this void questions arise that ask "How did I get here?" "Where do I belong?" and "Where is the land of my ancestors?" Stories are the medicine that fill in the gaps of the self and show us who we are.

*Stories are the Cornerstones of Culture*

Without stories it is hard to know what's what and who's who. Many Metis babies are born with "Mongolian blue spots" on their buttocks. There is a story in many Aboriginal cultures about children who were removed from their parents because medical and social workers didn't hear the story about the blue spots and presumed that babies were being harmed by their caregivers. Without cultural interpretations of such phenomena, important information can be lost or misinterpreted. Without hearing the Cree interpretation of the Mongolian blue spots (told in Chapter Seven), part of my own cultural story was missing.

As I have mentioned previously, one of the Metis themes is hiding one's ancestry and not identifying culturally as Metis. Another theme is withholding that important cultural information from the children. The next of kin are not notified. This decision to "pass" in the dominant, First Nations, or other immigrant cultures, is a common Metis survival strategy – an attempt to avoid the negative effects of racism and bigotry.

Stories about passing make up a large part of the Metis canon. Metis writer Joanne Arnott (1994) notes that "passing is one of the very few options for survival of a mixed-race people in a virulently racist society" (p. 59). The decision to withhold important information about cultural ancestry is one that causes pain and suffering in the long term. Deepak Chopra (1995) identifies five causes of human suffering and lists the first as "ignorance of our real nature." Although he may specifically be referring to the self as a spiritual being, I believe this may also be applied to the human realm where ignorance of our cultural or ethnic origins also causes suffering.

Dr. Martin Brokenleg (in Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2002) has designed a model of youth wellness called the “Circle of Courage.” Belonging makes up one section of the circle. Metis cultural stories provide Metis people with the links to culture and cultural community that promote belonging. Without these stories, Metis people find themselves adrift in a psychological no-man’s-land. This not-belonging is another major theme in the Metis literary canon.

### *Moving From Not-Knowing to Knowing*

There are a number of experiences a person may incur when moving from not-knowing to knowing about Metis ancestry. These experiences include knowing in the midst of not-knowing, dreams, visions, Metis ancestry as a family secret, side comments and jokes, coming out of the closet, validation of the self, renaming the self, and re-creating the self through connecting to cultural stories. These processes can serve as indicators of Metis ancestry.

In my experience, children who are being lied to can often sense the incongruence in the stories. Metis people often know they are something other than what is being presented to them, but may not have the vocabulary to define what is happening. In the wake of an ambiguous explanation about family ancestry, there are often bits of contradictory information and disjointed stories that sound metaphorical alarm bells for people. There are always cracks in a false story and these cracks grow over time. Unacknowledged inconsistencies have been described as an “elephant in the living room” (Seaborn, 2003). Generally, people know it is there but refuse to talk about it. Denying its presence becomes a tacit agreement.

One of the experiences that Metis people commonly report is that when they found out they were Metis, it made complete sense and elicited a feeling of relief. Metis people have told me things like, “Suddenly, a lot of things fell into place”; “All my life I have been interested in Native things, and now I understand why.” They say they experience a moment of epiphany and realize that, in some deep way, they knew all along. Some Metis report a kind of metaphysical knowing about it. My mother said that she just knew it in her heart.

I recently did some work with a young Cree man who has a young child. This man was cut off from his family and does not speak the Cree language. This surprised me when he told me his child’s name – a widely used Cree word. When I asked him about this he, too, expressed surprise, as he had no conscious awareness of the meaning of his child’s name.

Explanations from Aboriginal philosophy would accept metaphysical knowing as a normal part of life, attributing these experiences to visions, to ancestral knowledge, to contact with the spirit world via rituals, dreams and meditation. Okanagan storyteller Jeannette Armstrong (1998) states that “through my language I understand I am being spoken to, I’m not the one speaking” (p. 181). Chief Seattle of the Squamish passed this story on to his people in 1853:

At night, when the streets of your cities and villages are silent, they will throng with the returning hosts that once filled them and still love this beautiful land. The White man will never be alone. Let him be just and deal kindly with my people. For the dead are not powerless (cited in Highway, 1998, p. 1).

An elder once told me that stories and cultural practices are not lost. They are waiting in another realm for the right person to dream them and reintroduce them. The ancestors are waiting to pass them on to the right person.

As early as 1668, the Jesuits were documenting the importance of dreams in Native American culture (Duran & Duran, 1995, p. 46). Authors Duran & Duran suggest that the terms *soul, psyche, myth, dream* and *culture* can be understood as part of the same continuum – one that makes people’s experience in the world their particular reality (p. 24). Rorty (1992) suggests that “once we give up metaphysical attempts to find a true self for man, we can only appear as the contingent historical selves we find ourselves to be” (p. 62). The Aboriginal cosmology does not separate the mind from the body or from the spirit, and all forms of knowledge acquisition are respected.

*Metis Ancestry as a Family Secret and the Subsequent Family Dynamics: Mixed Messages*

When Metis cultural ancestry is kept secret in a family, certain dynamics come into play. Native ancestry has been seen to be socially hazardous and may prevent one from succeeding in a racist society. This fact has been experienced as important enough to cause generations of Metis people to attempt to hide this ancestry from friends, acquaintances, and even their children. In a typical Metis family, the older generation has differing views about the potential danger of the secret being exposed. While not mentioning their Metis ancestry directly, some family members will share revealing information with their younger generations, while some remain silent and deflect any requests for cultural information. Later, when Metis ancestry is revealed, some family members embrace the news with interest while some try to dismiss, downplay, or erase the new information. There are often some family members who claim the right to dictate “the truth.” Others may serve the roles of distracters and deflectors, while others will still seek the truth about family ancestry.

### *Side Comments and Jokes*

Many Metis experience an undercurrent of jokes and humorous references to Aboriginal ancestry in their families or communities before they are consciously aware of their ancestry. Vita Sackville-West (1931) encapsulates this dynamic in a piece of Edwardian literature: “And now that the joke had become a reality, the reality gained in impressiveness for having been anticipated by a joke” (1931, p. 18).

A Metis woman once reported that comments were often made in her family regarding lateness, attributing it to the “Indian blood,” or being on “Indian time” (D.L. Seaborn, personal communication, 2002). This incident of teasing relates to differences in worldview regarding time: where the dominant society is concerned with punctuality, Aboriginal society may be more concerned with possessing a sense of timing and cycles in the natural world. It is generally acknowledged that different cultures may have different perceptions of time (Deloria, 1992). When it became apparent that Ms. Seaborn was Metis, the prescient quality of the humour was experienced.

### *Coming Out of the Closet*

The Metis secret is most often exposed when an elder is ill or has passed on. The elder may feel the time has come to tell someone that she is Aboriginal. It is this event which precipitates many Metis adults contacting a Metis organization to gather more information about both the culture and the process of assimilating such information. Sometimes this new information is acquired when speaking to a distant relative about the death. This is the kind of event that often precipitates a Metis individual seeking some counselling to talk about identity issues and the confusion that is provoked by such a disclosure. The range of reactions is large.

Some people are excited and curious when they learn they are Metis. Others may be confused as their current identity is challenged. In my experience as a counsellor in a Metis social services agency, the discovery of Metis ancestry commonly occurs when the individual has just lost a grandparent or family elder. Commonly, this information was shared with the family just before the elder's passing. Many Metis turn to a Metis organization for guidance when they discover that they are, in fact, Metis by heritage. This appears to be the second-most common reason an individual may enter a Metis social service agency. The most common reason is that a Metis family has had their children removed by child welfare authorities.

#### *Validation of the Metis Self*

After a person's Metis identity has been revealed, the individual often seeks more information. Metis genealogical records are often quite accessible, especially if any ancestors received scrip, were employed by the Hudson's Bay Company, or were members of a church (where records are intact). In August 2004, a church in the Northwest Territories burnt down, destroying all the important documents needed to pursue a land claim. Many Metis seek the help of the Mormon church, which has amassed a great store of genealogical information for religious purposes. It is generally easier to find information on Metis men.

Many official documents state ancestry as either Indian, White or Metis. Aboriginal women were often listed as Indian women. There are published genealogical records of all the families from Red River. Once a family name is identified, the search for ancestors becomes easier. It is then possible to ascertain if one's family was issued scrip (see Fig. 2.1 on page 38 for an example of scrip document). The frequently intense

interest of “new” Metis in this genealogy is likely a compensatory behaviour intended to create a solid connection to a lineage that is finally real and acknowledged. The self can then be recreated with the integration of the new information that is received.

Fig. 2.1: Example of Scrip Document

**Declaration by Annis Hylee (nee Hylee)**  
 Concerning her claim to participate in any grant to Half-Breeds who were residents on the 1st July 1878 of that portion of the North-West Territories ceded by the Indians under treaty with the Government of Canada.

1. What is your name and 7 C. address? *Annis Hylee - Port Chipewyan*

2. Where and when were you born? *Port Chipewyan - in 1851*

3. What was the name of your father? *George P. Hylee*

4. What was the name of your mother before her marriage? *Charlotte Sourangeau -*

5. Was your father a Half-Breed or an Indian? *Half-breed*

6. Was your Mother a Half-Breed or an Indian woman? *Half-breed*

7. Where have you been living and your place of birth? *Statement was made 10 years ago on the 18th July, 1878 the place of residence of the persons at that date should also be ascertained*  
*Always lived here at Port Chipewyan -*

8. What has been your occupation? *Wife of William Hylee -*

9. If married, when, where and to whom? *married - May 16th - 1866. at Port Chipewyan to William Hylee*

10. How many children have you living? *seven*

11. What are their names, dates of birth and names of the place?  

<i>William</i>	<i>born Oct. 2nd 1867</i>	<i>at Port Chipewyan</i>	<i>married</i>
<i>John</i>	<i>Aug. 2. 1869</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>do</i>
<i>Robert</i>	<i>Apr. 11. 1871</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>do</i>
<i>Edward</i>	<i>Sept. 1. 1874</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>do</i>
<i>Emma</i>	<i>Apr. 4. 1876</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>do</i>
<i>Lisa</i>	<i>June 22. 1878</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>do</i>
<i>Mary Ann</i>	<i>June 24. 1880</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>do</i>

12. What are the names of their respective mothers or the same may be? *Same the mother and William Hylee is the father.*

Form No. 102 A.

### *Giving a Name to the New Self*

For some of the reasons discussed in the section on “Terms of Metisness,” many Metis people have not known what to call their new self. In some ways, this may become both easier and more complex due to the current move on the part of Metis political organizations to define terms more clearly. Metis people are seldom told “You are Metis.” The news is more often delivered with terms such as, “We are *part Native, part Indian, part Metis*; grandma was. . . *Indian, Native, Haida, Metis*; grandma had. . . . *Indian blood, Native roots, a Cree mother,*” etc. Terms are often vague and sometimes depict ancestry in percentages or degrees (e. g., she was 1/8th Indian). Seeing the self as parts of various ancestries generally reflects European worldview and thought – a Cartesian need to quantify and compartmentalize. “New” Metis people in this situation often feel like imposters, or fear being seen as “wannabe Indians,” opportunists, or in some way a traitor to the earlier lifestyle and social position.

A sudden shift in the cultural self can be difficult to explain to those who have not experienced a sudden shift in identity. Sometimes Metis people in this position realign their friendships to protect the new and vulnerable sense of Metis self until they feel strong enough in their new identity to explain the process to others. Although an entire family may receive the news of Metis ancestry around the same time, people tend to react differently to the same information. New alliances may be formed based on receptiveness to the new information. Metis individuals may actively approach other family members to seek the support they need to embrace the new reality, and take steps to gather more information.

Once the Metis individual has made contact with other Metis people or a Metis community, exposure to Metis cultural stories begins. It is likely that, before this point, any Metis stories have come from a mainstream documentary on the History Channel, or from a high school textbook. Mainstream depictions of Metis history, until recently, have not provided “a social criticism that bears witness to those unequal processes of representation by which the historical experience of the once colonized comes to be framed in the west” (Bhabha, 1983). The new Metis may experience a disjunction between mainstream and Metis versions of the Metis story and will need to negotiate the cultural biases and hegemonic forces at work behind the stories. The Metis individual may experience a shift in perspective and loyalties with the outrage that can come with the new identity, and may feel outrage at the way his or her newfound ancestors were treated by the mainstream (colonist) society. This search for identity may be complicated if the Metis person has ancestors from both the colonized and the colonizing cultures.

In the midst of this shifting ground, the Metis person must decide what to call him or herself. This choice can be supported and reinforced by the cultural community. In the beginning, the Metis person may tend to identify him or herself in parts – *I'm part French and part Cree*. This type of identification has often been imposed by the outside world, and the Metis have often internalized those voices that ask, “How much Indian are you?”

Depending upon the nature of the cultural information received, the Metis person might decide to identify as First Nations exclusively. Some people may choose to identify as both First Nations and Metis; it is the federal government that requires people to choose one of the two. Typically, an Aboriginal identity disclosure is not accompanied by enough information to connect the person to a particular First Nations community. Often

the cultural mixing took place generations back; thus the likelihood of using the broad term 'Metis' increases. Once used only in reference to French-speaking Metis, this term has been expanded to include the people who were earlier called the "halfbreeds," primarily of Scottish and Cree origins.

The more the Metis person is exposed to cultural stories, the more the sense of Metis self is strengthened. This process assists the Metis person to, at some point, identify as a whole hybrid person, a Metis or mixed-race person, as opposed to a person who is part this and part that. This may or may not be a result of the shifting perspective, as one becomes an Aboriginal person as opposed to a Euro-Canadian with some Native blood a few generations back. All of these experiences are documented in Metis literature. As the Metis population becomes more literary, personal stories are more frequently becoming written stories, which become literature, which is more respected in mainstream culture than the oral tradition from which the stories emerged. The experience of becoming a Metis person is an important part of the Metis story.

### CHAPTER THREE: CREATION OF THE INDIGENOUS SELF

In the story of Metis self-formation, the Metis protagonist receives messages from the outside world. These messages help the protagonist to decide who s/he is in the eyes of others. These outer perceptions are then mitigated and adjusted in accordance with one's own view of self. This flow of information comprises a life-long self-formation process and forms an important part of the plot line in Metis stories. Narrative psychologist McAdams (1993) refers to the relationship between the inner and outer world as a collaboration: "Identity is something of a collaboration between the story and the social world. The two are together responsible for the life story" (p. 95).

As Thomas King says, before delving into a story it is best to keep the reader in suspense. Before the reader can fully understand the Metis story, it is important to look at what the theorists, academics, and thinkers have said about how the self is formed. How have all the inaccurate things said about the Metis affected the Metis? And how have Metis individuals responded internally to these misconstrued, biased, or prejudiced perceptions? If people view the world through their particular lenses, what lenses have been used to view the Metis? And how effective have the Metis been in advancing their own perceptions of themselves in a political structure that doesn't listen to the Metis?

In this chapter I describe how a Metis sense of self can be created and how symbolic interactionism and narrative theory can work together with a post-colonial view of the Metis experience. As I explore these concepts, I will show how they work together to help explain Metis self-creation. I begin with the theory of symbolic interactionism.

Symbolic interactionism is a philosophy based on the belief that the individual self (one's sense of who one is) is created through ongoing interaction with the larger

society (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934, 1977). Symbolic interactionists describe a model where the self is formed through a non-linear process of living, reflecting, and integrating experience and information. Theorists of symbolic interactionism conceptualize two aspects of the self – the “I” and the “me” (James, 1899, in Polkinghorne, 1988). The “I” serves a role of observation, reflection, and integration while the “me” is the active participant of life in the external world. According to symbolic interactions, the “me” gathers experience and information to which the “I” assigns meaning and value. The “I” then sorts and integrates experience into the ever-evolving self, merging with those experiences which reinforce or enhance the existing self or move towards the *desired self*. Those experiences that do not resonate with the desired self are not integrated. In this way, the individual is provided a regular opportunity to recreate the self in accordance with his or her beliefs and goals.

### *Terms of Reference*

In this chapter I use both the terms *self-formation* and *self-creation* because they position themselves differently on a continuum of active engagement in the project of the making of the self. The making of self involves various levels of personal agency and conscious participation; as individuals we are constantly creating and recreating our sense of self, but we take varying degrees of responsibility for the creation. While some individuals see themselves as more passive victims or unconscious responders to life’s events, others see themselves as active participants in their self-creation. The term self-formation implies a greater level of passivity in the process, while self-creation implies conscious action and a good deal of self-awareness and “sculpting” in the project.

Others have defined various synonyms for self-creation, with which self-creation can be either connected or confused (Randall, 1997). Self-construction implies a constructivist approach and “constructing carries connotations that creating does not” (Randall, 1997, p. 37). It implies the assembly of pre-existing materials according to an established design. A building is constructed. A self can be constructed in a similar way, involving the adapting of “a cliché here, a slogan there, a partial imitation of this role model and of that, etc., and eventually patch together a life” (Randall, 1997, p. 37).

Self-invention requires an inventor and implies a mechanical process. Randall (1997) believes that invention and creation can be quite similar, but invention involves a contrived process, whereas creation may involve an unconscious process (p. 37). When talking about stories, I rely on the *Oxford Canadian Dictionary* definition of story as “an account of imaginary or past events; a narrative, tale or anecdote”; “the past course of the life of a person or institution”; “facts or experience that deserve narration” (p. 1432). I assert that Metis people see themselves and their lives in a “storied” manner. This means that life events are not seen as random but as connected aspects of a storyline or a plot. As well, I believe that stories play a vital role in the forming of the self.

### *Philosophies of Self*

In Aboriginal philosophy, the self is viewed as being holistic and comprised of four main aspects: the mental, the emotional, the physical, and the spiritual (Bopp, Bopp, Brown & Lane, 1984). The mental relates to intellectual processes such as problem solving, memory, and reasoning. The emotional relates to the spectrum of subjective feeling. The physical relates to the body and movement. The spiritual relates to Wakan

Tonka: The Great Mysterious, the spirit or the soul and the connection with “All That Is.” The Metis often refer to this presence as “Gitchee Manitou,” which is Cree for Great Spirit. Although these four aspects are presented as distinct, it is understood that there is overlap. In addition, Aboriginal teachings acknowledge the connection of the self with all other things. These views were and are part of life for most Aboriginal people in North America.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, European philosopher William James (in Polkinghorne, 1988) critiqued the Cartesian model of the mind/body split and presented a different concept. He posited an “I” as the interpreter of experience and a “me” as the self known by the “I” (p. 7). These two inseparable parts of the self provided an early framework for symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934, 1977). While this intellectual activity was occurring in Europe, the Metis were working to legally secure their land in the Canadian prairies.

The Metis of the Red River negotiated with Canada and created the Manitoba Act. One clause in the Act granted the Metis the 1.4 million acres comprising their traditional territory. The method chosen by the government to distribute the land was scrip, which was distributed in 1870. Fifteen years later in 1885, the Metis were displaced from this land militarily. After the battle at Batoche the Metis dispersed in a westward diaspora, towards B.C. and into the United States. Families were often separated in this relocation process. The Metis everywhere began hiding their Metis ancestry in an attempt to avoid persecution.

The scrip documents could be exchanged for land or money. Metis scholar Fred Storey (2004) has conducted extensive research about the way the Metis were swindled

out of their scrip entitlement. Con artists and thieves accompanied the government representatives into Aboriginal communities and the Metis, who were largely illiterate, were defrauded of their land title. Their land was then sold, or often given away, to European immigrants. Widespread advertising in Britain and eastern Europe attracted many settlers to Canada, enticed by the offer of free land. They were given parcels of previously Aboriginal land to farm, soon to discover that they needed the adjacent land in order to make their farming profitable. Those parcels were for sale by a subsidiary of the Imperial Bank for an elevated price. The intermediaries in these prairie land sales became very wealthy. The timber industry in B.C. was fuelled by the large profits generated from the resale of Metis and First Nations land (Mackie, 2002; Seaborn, 2003; Storey, 2004).

Historian Gerhart Ens (1996) believes that the Metis were not duped, but rather chose strategically to sell their scrip documents to land speculators as a cunning short-term financial move, sensing that the government would not honour its financial promises. In contrast, geographer Cole Harris (2003) believes that the Metis were largely deceived in the process, and that there was a broader plan at work to eject the Metis from their land base as part of a colonizing movement. The land swindle, coupled with the lack of federal cooperation with Metis agricultural endeavours, resulted in the Metis living in landless conditions on the road allowances of prairie communities. Because these “Road Allowance People” were not municipal taxpayers, their children were not welcome in school. The Metis had become a disenfranchised people, looking for opportunity and a place to call home. The Metis diaspora, coupled with the attempts by individual Metis to pass as non-Metis, led to the Metis being referred to as “the invisible people” (Seaborn, 2003). This legacy continues to jeopardize the Metis today, as demonstrated by their high

rates of poverty and ill health. It is for these reasons that the Metis have had difficulty in organizing themselves as a community, as a nation, and as a strong cultural force, until recently. Without land, the Metis have become scattered and separated from each other.

Today in Canada, the Metis are more likely to rent than own a home (Normand, 1996). In relation to their homes, 16.9% said they were in need of major repairs (p. 57). In terms of health, 32% of Metis people reported having disabilities, as compared to 18% of the general population (p. 59). In terms of income, the average Metis income in 2001 was \$16,342 as opposed to approximately \$22,430 for the general population (Siggner, 2001). Generally, these statistics place the Metis between the Euro-Canadian population and the First Nations population in terms of the indicators.

#### *Explanation of Metis Identity Spaces Model*

I designed the diagram below (Fig. 3.1) to deconstruct the “worlds” or cultural spaces in which the Canadian Metis are situated. These three spaces include the first space, occupied by the dominant, Euro-Canadian culture, the second space, occupied by the First Nations people, and the third space, which is the hybrid space occupied by the Metis. The no-man’s-land between the main spaces is symbolically linked to the Road Allowance People and the experience of being on the margins or in between the major cultural spaces.

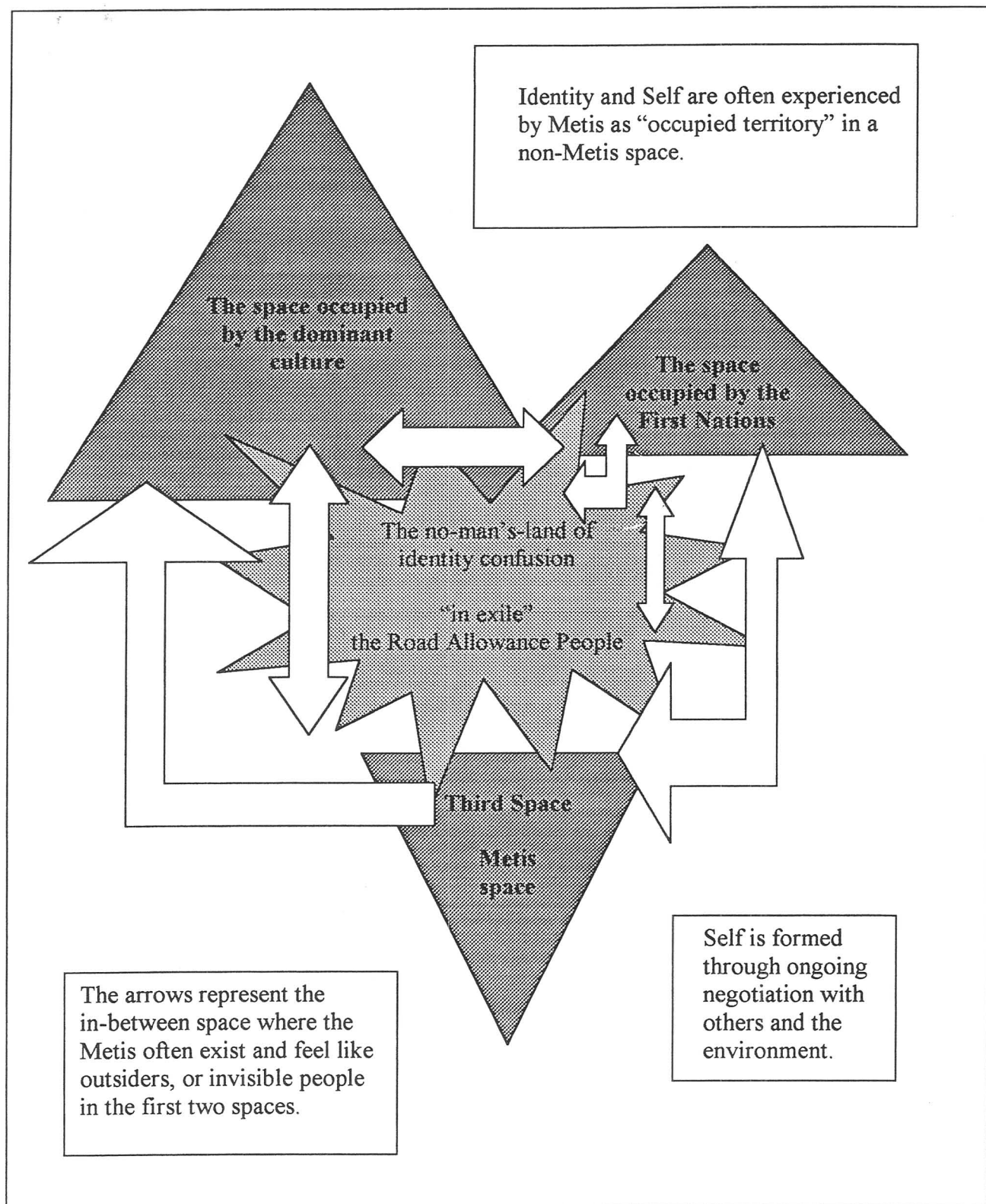
The first space is a site of the dominant cultural stories and Euro-Canadian worldview. In this space Metis people often deny their Metis ancestry or experience challenges in being Metis. The second space is a common visiting place for Metis people and a place where hybridity, or European ancestry, is sometimes denied or de-emphasized. It is a site of First Nations cultural stories and a place guided by Aboriginal

worldview and the story of colonization. Similarly, the third space is governed by an Aboriginal worldview with a Metis perspective. Here, the predominant cultural story is about hybridity and the integration of various ancestries for the purposes of survival and wellness. The concept of the third space will be articulated more fully in the upcoming examination of postcolonialism later in this chapter.

Metis people often feel the greatest sense of safety and belonging when they are in community with other Metis people. Although some Metis have gained acceptance in the mainstream, they often do not feel at home there due to the incongruence with their cultural selves. As postcolonialist writer Edward Said (1993) observes, “emulation and mimicry do not get one very far” (p. 317). Due to the historical and current oppression of Metis people in Canada, Metis individuals commonly hear the inner voice of the internalized other – a voice which is often a spokesperson for one of the non-Metis spaces.

I used the term *space* in this diagram, but the postcolonial term *place* is also relevant. Place, in postcolonial societies, is a complex interaction of language, history, and environment (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1995). Place and displacement are crucial features of postcolonial discourse and important themes for the Metis in Canada because the self of Metis people is largely formed in occupied territory – on non-Metis land.

*Fig. 3.1: Metis Identity Spaces Diagram*



*Symbolic Interactionism on Colonized Ground: Postcolonial Explanations of Self*

The body of post-colonial literature provides additional context for investigating the process of Metis self-creation. Post-colonial theory contains an analysis of the colonial legacy as it affects mixed-race people who live in the world of European colonizers. Post-colonial theory has been defined by Homi Bhabha (1984, in Duran & Duran, 1995) as “a social criticism that bears witness to those unequal processes of representation by which the historical experience of the once colonized comes to be framed in the West” (p. 1). Post-colonial writers (Anderson, 2000; Anthias, 2001; Bhabha, 1998; Said, 1993) explain the notion of hybridity and the relationship between colonized and colonizing populations. Key postcolonial concepts explored here include hybridity as survival, hybridity as miscegenation and treachery, and metissage.

These terms are contextually imperative post-colonial theoretical concepts, and offer explanations of the Metis situation and how self is formed under specific post-colonial conditions. Metis researcher Etien Rivard (personal communication, March 15, 2003) believes that all Canadians are culturally influenced by the ongoing metissage where influences from the Native world are continually woven together with European influences to form a Canadian culture. This fits with Said’s (1993) description of colonial society as the “immigrant settler society superimposed ... on the ruins of considerable native presence” (p. xxv).

The self-formation of both Aboriginal people and hybrid people is inseparable from the history of colonization, inseparable from homeland, and inseparable from the broader sociocultural context. It is important to consider self in relation to social and environmental factors, particularly when addressing Metis people who must form the self

within the bounds of a settler/invader society (Ashcroft et al., 1995). Integrating the theories of symbolic interactionism and post-colonialism involves acknowledging that the external world, from which the self gathers information, stories, and experience, is a colonized, non-Metis space. Therefore, most of the information gathered in that external world belongs to the dominant culture and does not represent a Metis worldview.

### *The Problems of Colonization*

When discussing the effects of colonization on Native Americans, Duran and Duran (1995) conclude that

many of the problems facing Native American people today – such as alcoholism, child abuse, suicide, and domestic violence – have become part of the Native American heritage due to the long decades of forced assimilation and genocidal practices implemented by the [U.S.] federal government (p. 35).

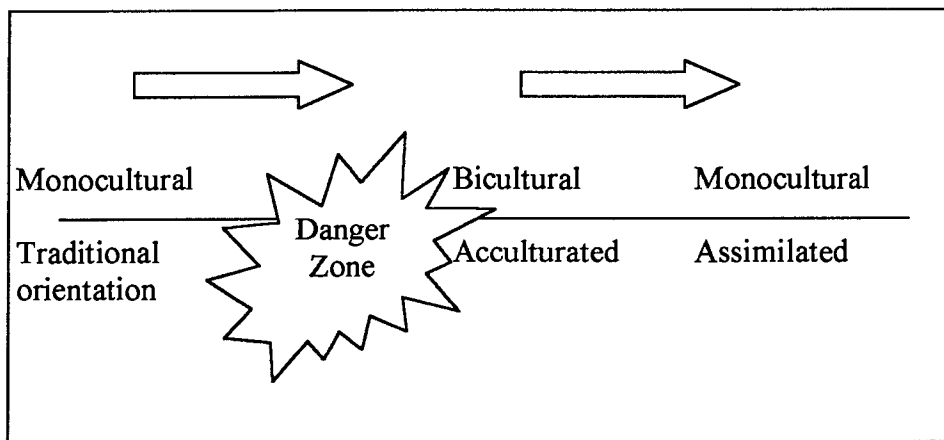
Duran and Duran (1995) also conclude that “once the warrior (the male cultural identity of protector of his community) is destroyed, a deep psychological trauma of identity loss occurs” (p. 36).

The unwellness of Aboriginal communities is viewed, to some degree, as an effect of the colonial process. Each Aboriginal group and individual chooses to respond to this effect in different ways. An important act of resistance for hybrid people is to develop a third space, on their own terms. This is why a Metis cultural space is crucial for Metis people.

In the “Metis Identity Spaces” upcoming diagram (Fig. 3.1), I proposed a model of the three cultural worlds in which the Metis dwell. I suggested that the spaces in between these worlds represent marginality and what I here called a “no-man’s-land of identity confusion.” At this point, I would like to introduce a model (Fig. 3.2) that

notion that places of marginality are vulnerable places for Metis and Aboriginal people. These places are associated with being at risk, and therein the rates of suicide and social despair increase dramatically. As depicted in Fig. 3.2, Little Soldier (1985) identifies a continuum of acculturation.

*Fig. 3.2: A Continuum of Acculturation*

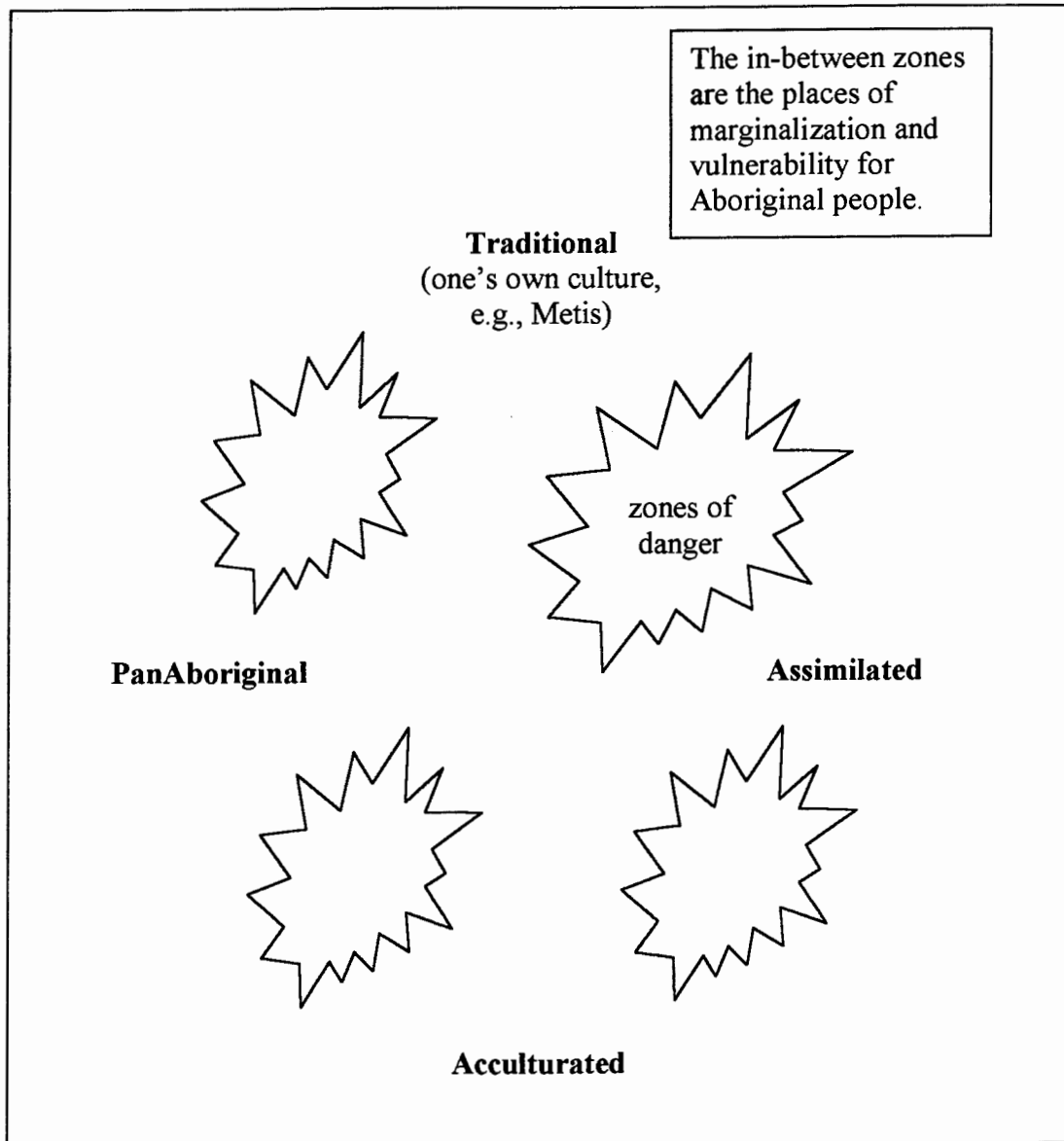


In Little Soldier's model, monocultural/traditional orientation means that the Aboriginal person identifies with the "Indian" world. The acculturated position means that the individual is enculturated in traditional Indian ways but has acquired the behaviours required for functioning in the dominant society's culture (what I call the first space). The monocultural/assimilated position means that the Aboriginal person is assimilated and identifies solely with the non-Indian world. In this American model, Little Soldier (1985) asserts that identity struggles exist when individuals do not identify with their tribal culture nor with the dominant culture – in an in-between no-man's land. At this point, the Aboriginal individual would be "cultureless" and may have no support systems available. It is here where Little Soldier (1985) sees the Aboriginal individual exposed to the greatest risk.

Garrett and Pichette (2000) have created a five-level model placed on a continuum where Native American Indians (U.S.) may be situated. These spaces are described as traditional, marginal, bicultural, assimilated, and pantraditional. The traditional position refers to the Aboriginal person who generally thinks and speaks in their native language, practices traditional values, tribal customs, and Indigenous methods of worship. Marginal refers to the Aboriginal person who, although he or she may speak both the native language and English, may not fully accept the cultural heritage and practices of their tribal group nor fully identify with mainstream cultural values and behaviours.

Bicultural refers to the Aboriginal person who is accepted both by dominant society and by tribal society. The bicultural Aboriginal person practices both mainstream and traditional values and behaviour. The assimilated Aboriginal person is accepted by dominant society and embraces only mainstream cultural values. The pantraditional Aboriginal person is generally accepted by the dominant society but has chosen to embrace previously lost traditional cultural values and practices. Again, for Garrett and Pichette (2000), the position involving the most vulnerability and risk is the position of marginality. Metis researcher Sylvia Cottell (2004), in a study of Metis youth, has adapted Garrett and Pichette's linear model to form a circle. The following model (Fig. 3.3) depicts Cottell's version of the Aboriginal cultural experience.

*Fig. 3.3: Cottell's Diagram of Zones of Marginalization*



In Cottell's model, the Aboriginal person has an anchor, provided through some sort of cultural belonging and support. However, it is in the marginalized, in-between zones between the cultural positions where Aboriginal people are most at risk. Here rates of suicide, drug use, despair and self-harm are elevated. I have found these models of cultural positions to be helpful to inform the danger of the no-man's-land of identity

confusion. However, these models do not specifically address the unique issues facing mixed-race Aboriginal people and Metis people.

As outlined early in Chapter Three, Metis people are more vulnerable in areas which do not support their unique culture, their hybridity, and where they are not given the space to define themselves on their own terms. Therefore, it is crucial to incorporate into the study design a model that depicts the unique situation and challenges of the Metis people. The third space model, with its zones of marginality between each of the three cultural worlds, outlines pictorially and metaphorically the journeys Metis people undertake on a daily basis, and which provide the stories for self-creation. It is due precisely to the extended length of time spent in spaces of marginality that Metis people face higher levels of risk and harm than the mainstream Canadian population. It is crucial to employ a study design that gets to the crux of this matter.

*Geographies of Belonging: Why the Third Space is Important for the Sense of Metis Self*

The harshness of life for the Metis renders the existence of a Metis psychological space critical to satisfying the human needs of acceptance, belonging, and validation. A sense of belonging has been shown to be foundational for happiness and self-actualization (Maslow, 1968). The literature has shown that Aboriginal people tend to associate the self and culture with a particular landscape or geography (Osborne, 2001; Rose, 1995; Basso, 1996). Where one lives is related to one's identity and self-perception. The important link between *self* and *landscape* is articulated theoretically: "The central premise of the geography of identity is human attachment to particular spaces. People live in places and identify with them, or are alienated by them" (Osborne, 2001, p. 42).

While Metis people may spend time visiting or *passing* in the first and second spaces, extended periods without feeling at home may create a sense of alienation. The third, Metis space represents a Metis psychological homeland and cultural space in a country where the geographical homeland has been usurped by the colonizer. The third-space homeland experience is a moveable feast and can be invoked wherever Metis people gather, spend time together, share stories, food, cultural activities and generally celebrate Metis identity together. This cultural opportunity is validating for Metis people and can solidify and strengthen the sense of Metis self. Osborne (2001) argues: “Self-knowledge and personal identity cannot be reconstructed without place – worlds. Not merely neutral containers, geography, locale, setting, place – whatever you wish to call them – are complicit in strategies of cultural survival” (p. 43).

Certainly, the Metis express a strong connection to certain important places such as Red River and Batoche, places where they lived together for extended periods and where their cultural traditions emerged strongly. Geographer Gillian Rose (1995) writes:

One way in which identity is connected to a particular place is by a feeling that you belong to that place. It’s a place in which you feel comfortable, or at home, because part of how you define yourself is symbolized by certain qualities of that place (p. 89).

The third space for Metis people is characterized by these qualities of belonging, identification and feeling that one is “at home.” Basso (1996) also believes in the importance of the link between self and place: “Knowledge of places is therefore closely linked to knowledge of the self, to grasping one’s position in the larger scheme of things, including one’s own community, and securing a confident sense of one as a person” (p. 34).

In the following section, I will describe how four postcolonial concepts (third space; survival: hybridity as strength; hybridity as miscegenation and treachery; and metissage) relate to the Metis.

### *1. The Third Space*

The third space is a site of Metis stories. Bhabha (1998) describes the third space as follows:

Its unity is not found in the sum of its parts, but emerges from the process of opening a third space within which other elements encounter and transform each other. Thus, identity is not the combination, accumulation, fusion or synthesis, but an energy field of different forces (p. 258).

Thomas King (2003) has observed that dichotomy is “the elemental structure of Western society” (p. 25). The third space allows one to move beyond polarized notions, the binary constructions which exclude or render the Metis invisible. In the language of symbolic interactionism the “me” hears, “You are either this or that,” while the “I” knows she or he is “neither this nor that” but rather a whole being. The third space has been described as a unique “cross-fertilization of the constitutive elements of cultures” (Achebe, cited in Ashcroft et al., 1995, p. 184) and the Bhabhian “assimilation of contraries” (1998, p. 209). The third space is a political and cultural strategy of opening a space of possibility and opportunity. In Bhabha’s words, “the application of third space thinking . . . quite properly challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force. . . .” (1998, p. 208).

The sense of self for Metis people is often in flux as individuals struggle to accept the various and sometimes contradictory influences that comprise their being and their ancestry. The meaning ascribed to the mix influences how ancestral influences are

translated and integrated into an evolving sense of Metis self. Post-colonial writers

Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1995) believe:

it is the Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew (p. 184).

This opportunity for rewriting history offers exciting possibilities, psychologically and intellectually, for the Metis. As an intellectual intervention and decolonizing process, the Metis can look at the world through a Metis lens, using Metis language forms in a Metis cultural context. Spending time in the third space may occur when Metis people are together, sharing stories and participating in cultural activities. The third space is a place where belonging can be experienced, and the sense of Metis self is strengthened both individually and collectively.

## *2. Survival: Hybridity as Strength*

Post-colonial theory analyzes the hybridized nature of colonized societies and valorizes hybridity, viewing it as a strength rather than a weakness (Ashcroft et al., 1995). Further, colonized people are not seen to be completely silenced, but rather engaged in an ongoing “dialogic process of recovery and reinscription” (Ashcroft et al., 1995, p. 184). A major theme in the *Post-Colonial Studies Reader* is “survival, even under the most potent oppression.” An example of strength and self-sufficiency in the face of diversity can be found with the Creoles of Louisiana:

This culture (Creole) began as an offspring of the Old World and the New World when this country was still being colonized. Creoles are not one thing or another; and have lived their lives being misunderstood, misrepresented, and misinterpreted. In the past, under White government, Creoles were not allowed to be an equal part of society. Blacks, free and slaves, did not feel Creoles were part of their world either. Because of this rejection, Creoles had a strong bond with

one another and had to create their own world and culture. They were self-sufficient and relied on each other. Creoles were landowners, artists, teachers and business people (Louisiana Creole Heritage Center, n.d., par. 2).

The postcolonial writings venerate the “potent resistance in the counter-discursive practices they celebrate” (Ashcroft et al., 1995, p. 184). Humans are considered not hapless victims but are expected to strategize and resist (Coates, Todd, & Wade, 2003). Here, these three theorists believe that violence against individuals and groups is typically misrepresented in ways that excuse perpetrators, such as the colonizers and the government. Through these deliberate acts of misrepresentation, violence is obfuscated (e. g., Louis Riel is portrayed as a lunatic): the victim’s resistance to violence is concealed, diminishing the perceived level of injustice (e. g., calling the resistance at Red River a “rebellion”). Finally, the victims are blamed and pathologized for their victimhood. The Metis are cast as the poor, unwell, unsophisticated, and undereducated; thus their children are removed by child welfare authorities due to some inherent flaw (Coates et al., 2003). In spite of the state-supported violence against the Metis, they have survived as a people. In many ways, the Metis appear to have integrated various strengths from both parent cultures in order to adapt and survive.

Survival is a major theme in Metis cultural stories, and is the motivating force behind Metis behaviour. The impetus towards survival has preserved the Metis people throughout generations of living “underground,” and has permitted Metis people to resurface generations later to retrieve cultural information and to recreate a cohesive cultural community. For healthy self-formation to occur, the Metis must have a Metis cultural space from which Metis stories and experience can be drawn. Historically, the Metis have survived by preserving just such a space.

In forming a healthy sense of Metis self, it is crucial that the Metis individual has access to Metis experiences and Metis landscape. If not, the individual will struggle to identify with culturally incongruent experiences that never really resonate with the inner knowing and experience of being born a Metis person. Metis stories have illustrated that Metis people do not feel completely at home in the dominant culture, even when they are accepted into it. Metis people become proficient at existing in different societal worlds (C. Bourgeois, personal communication, August, 2002; R. Donahue, personal communication, 2004; White, 2000), but generally acknowledge that the mainstream world and the First Nations world are not their worlds. Despite this, the Metis have acted as teachers, as translators and as mediators between European and First Nations. The Metis have survived.

### *3. Hybridity as Miscegenation and Treachery*

Another perspective states that creating a mixed race through procreation with Indigenous women was seen both as the imperial nation's master plan and an individual choice during the early contact era. Some post-colonial theorists see it primarily as a calculated and deliberate colonizing process (Loomba, 1998). Hybridity in post-colonial societies can be a deliberate strategy of the colonizer to dilute race and eventually eliminate Aboriginal people. This strategy was articulated clearly in the Australian film *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (Noyce & Olson, 2002). Here, a colonial representative of the British government explains that liaisons between European men and Aboriginal women will, after four generations, create children with no visible trace of Aboriginal ancestry. After a few generations, the strategy is not seen as so deliberate, when mixing occurs by choice

rather than by design. Forcing Indigenous people to assimilate new social patterns is one of the ways to force the assimilation of Aboriginal people (Ashcroft et al., 1995).

Jorge Klor de Alva (in Loomba, 1998) asserts that one's experience of colonial exploitation depends upon one's position within the racialized hierarchy. He views the hybrid population negatively as collaborators with the dominant European colonizing population. Aboriginal people were attacked physically by disease and abuse, genetically and socially by miscegenation, and culturally by the religious and political practices of the Europeans and their mixed progeny (Loomba, 1998). Some First Nations theorists (Alfred, 1999) believe that Aboriginal people should identify with their Aboriginal forebears and not those of the colonizer. The implication here is that the Metis are traitors because they mixed with the enemy. Clearly this is not a celebratory view of Metis and European ancestry. Denying any aspect of one's ancestry does not appear to be a healthy, integrated strategy for emotional wellness.

Viewing hybridity as a tool used to conquer the Native world is not a perspective that would enhance the Metis sense of self. Metis people experience varying degrees of alignment with the colonizers and the dominant culture. I have tried to address this tension in an article entitled "Embodying Both Oppressor and Oppressed: My View as a Mixed-Race Woman" (Richardson, 2001). The Metis are characterized as a people who celebrate both of their cultural ancestries. However, the fact that one of the parent cultures was colonized by the other parent culture creates contradictions and challenges.

#### *4. Metissage*

Postcolonial societies such as Canada are "inevitably hybridized, involving a dialectical relationship between European ontology and epistemology and the impulse to

create or recreate independent local identity” (Tiffin, in Ashcroft et al., 1995, p. 95). Aboriginal people have tried over time, with varying degrees of success, to assert their personal and cultural values against a colonial discourse that “construe(s) the colonized as a racially degenerate population in order to justify conquest and rule” (Tiffin, in Ashcroft et al., 1995, p. 41). The overt denigration of the Metis has prompted Metis people to resort to mimicry of the dominant (Euro-Canadian) culture population. This is a theme discussed at length by Bhabha (1984). Sylvia Van Kirk (1982) describes an account of the daughters of Sir James Douglas wearing Victorian ball gowns to a social event. These women were scrutinized and ridiculed by a newly arrived English gentleman for being halfbreed women, with unattractive body shapes, trying to dress like English ladies. This anecdote provides an example of how the Metis were adopting the habits they admired from the colonizers and reconstructing an identity for themselves as being *of both worlds*.

These Victorian Metis women were demonstrating a dance of “resistance and reconstruction” (Ashcroft et al., 1995, p. 2). They refused to allow their European preferences to be denied, and demonstrated new possibilities for mixed-race people of “good” families. For decades, Metis people have been attempting to “pass” in the dominant culture as a way of resisting oppression, and are now starting to reconstruct a public cultural identity, asserting their right to be acknowledged as the mixed-race founding people of Canada.

Metis and other hybrid cultures can be viewed as what Guyanese novelist Wilson Harris calls *architectonic*, meaning a “complex creativity involved in the *digestion* and *liberation* of contrasting spaces” (1976, in Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 1995, p. 189).

One could describe the symbolic interactionist process of self-creation as architectonic, as the “I” both digests and liberates the information and the experiences collected by the “me.” Fanon (1995) states that “people are now the very principle of dialectical reorganization” (p. 209). Bhabha (1984) sees the self as formed through a “dialectical power struggle between self and other” (p. 34).

Symbolic interactionists may not necessarily identify the self-formation process as a power struggle, but this term may accurately reflect the precise nature of the self-formation process revealed in participants’ stories. The post-colonialists point out that various forces and influences of both the colonizers and the colonized may compete for dominance in the self-concept of the individual. For the Metis, the internal power struggle is often a result of the inauthenticity experienced when Metis people pass for non-Metis, or think of themselves as White. When “passing,” the colonized person may reject or deprioritize his or her own cultural stories for those of the dominant culture.

When authenticity and the strengthening of the cultural self is the goal, one’s own cultural stories are sought out and digested. This goal may be organized around one’s need for safety and survival, around the need for belonging and acceptance, or around the need to experience the truth and an authentic self.

### *Symbolic Interactionism as a Narrative Process*

It is important to address symbolic interactionism in narrative terms because of the relationship that Metis people have with the narrative process. Whether in forming a sense of self, learning new information, or understanding one’s place in the world, the Metis rely upon stories. Narrative theory has provided an applicable explanation about

how self-concept is held together through stories. As well, the Metis may experience a sense of belonging in their heritage when they connect to the stories of their people.

*Narrative knowing* refers to a type of organizational scheme, expressed in story form, resulting from our involvement with the world. Through a narrative form of knowing, we encounter reality and produce a meaningful flow of experience (Polkinghorne, 1988). It is this meaningful flow of experience that is integrated into the self. Narrative is a fundamental tool for transforming disparate human actions and events into a composite of interrelated aspects (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 13). When we gather the raw data of life experience, analyze, edit, and integrate that which has value, we are employing the symbolic interactionist process and recreating ourselves moment by moment.

Theodore Sarbin (1986) brings James' concept of the self into the realm of narrative by presenting the "I" as the author of the story while the "me" is one of the characters, presumably the main one. This explanation is particularly appropriate for describing the Metis self-construction process, because as Metis individuals move between worlds, they are engaged in ongoing inner conversations about how to be and how to find acceptance and belonging. This conversation constitutes a dance between conformity and resistance, because Metis identity is most often formed on non-Metis ground. As Robert Kroetsch (1995) points out, "Now we're on my home ground, foreign territory" (p. 395).

#### *Embedded in a Narrative*

The process of self-creation has been articulated in narrative theories that describe a "storied" self (McAdams, 1993; Polkinghorne, 1988; Sarbin, 1986). In this view, life

events are not random and disjointed, but rather form a coherent, ongoing storyline of connection and relationship. While the individual may experience an almost infinite number of separate life moments, she or he has authored a single, cohesive, self-story dictated of the interpreted experience. In narrative terms, the “I” is the writer/editor/reader while the “me” is the protagonist of the life story. The life experience of the protagonist forms the narrative of self, which is guided by the parameters of meaning. Narrative therapist McAdams (1993) writes: “we create a self that is whole and purposeful because it is embedded in a coherent and meaningful life story” (p. 92). The meaning humans assign to life events is a result of their beliefs, values, and ethics (Artz, 1990, p. 10).

### *Metis Storytelling*

Storytelling has always been an important form of transmitting information in the Metis community. Cultural stories can capture a whole range of experience. The Metis, who face high levels of illiteracy, have traditionally shared an oral culture. Many Metis feel at a disadvantage in a European-based written culture where Metis traditional skills such as reading geographical signs, interpreting weather patterns, and understanding animal behaviour are largely obsolete (LaRocque, 2001).

For the Metis, this renders the transmission of cultural stories and the “moccasin telegraph” (transmitting information across families and distances) even more crucial to the creation of a Metis self. Stories provide a tool for remembering the traditions of one’s people and a way to experience a sense of belonging. It is important to retain access to Metis information and experience, that which is culturally meaningful, in order to sustain a sense of Metis self. Without access to their cultural stories, Metis people become

psychologically *deterritorialized* (Rivard, 2003) and deprived of their intrapsychic Metis space. It is crucial for the Metis to hear Metis stories.

### *Stories Create Culture and Culture Creates Stories*

Narrative psychologist George Howard (1991) says that members of a particular cultural group share the same stories. Theorists from a variety of disciplines believe that self is constructed through the process of hearing, retelling, and living one's stories (Baumrind, 1998; Bruner, 1987; Howard, 1991; Madigan & Law, 1998; Polkinghorne, 1988; Reissman, 1993; Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992; White, 1997, 2000). Narrative theorists see the disparate aspects of the self, such as events occurring at different times in one's life, as joined together by stories (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Polkinghorne, 1988; White, 2000). Like individuals, cultures also experience coherence through the shared stories of the cultural community.

Cultural stories transmit important information about the cultural 'worldview' and the types of activities that are life-promoting according to cultural beliefs (Bopp, Bopp, Brown & Lane, 1984; Deloria, 1992; McGoldrick, 1998; Nsamenang, 1992). These stories continue to reinforce one's sense of cultural self and hold cultures together over time. Psychological researcher Michael Chandler (in Chandler & Lalonde, 1998) suggests that a narrative understanding is that which turns the mere chronology of a life into a coherent and diachronically unified self (p. 194). In studying whether Canadian youth use an essentialist or narrative "self-continuity warranting strategy," Chandler (in Chandler & Lalonde, 1998) found that culturally mainstream youth proved to be "committed essentialists" (p. 198). First Nations youth proved to be committed to the view that "there is always some story (often multiply authored) that succeeds in gluing together the

distinctive time-slices of their lives” (p. 198). To what extent Chandler’s narrative tendencies of First Nations people apply to the Metis is unclear, primarily due to the absence of similar research conducted in the Metis community.

### *Stories From Between Worlds*

European cultural stories have successfully dominated most of the identity spaces available to the Metis. We are taught the history of the colonizer, while Metis contributions to Canada are erased. Metis writer Joanne Arnott (1995) identifies this cultural erasure:

I am a person of mixed Native and European heritages. Fundamentally what I have inherited is a good deal of information about the various European traditions from which I come, and racist denial of the existence of my Native ancestry (p. 1).

One of the explanations for the lack of cultural information is that Metis people often chose to pass as members of the dominant culture as a strategy of self-protection and survival “in a virulently racist society” (Arnott, 1995, p. 59). Not all Metis people look distinctly different from Europeans. In a climate of racial intolerance and a Euro-centric worldview, passing is one of the strategies for surviving, or even thriving, in the mainstream. Passing – taking on an identity congruent with that of the dominant culture – is attributed to the hegemonic power of the dominant culture which contributes to the self-fragmentation process that results in the creation of multiple identities (White, 2000, p. 8).

The dominant culture stories received by Metis people are not the cultural stories that the Metis people tell about themselves. For example, Metis perspectives shared in a Metis space tend to do what Coates, Todd and Wade (2003) articulate as ways to promote change. They use their perspective and their language (discourse) to expose violence, to

clarify perpetrators' responsibility, to elucidate and honour victims' resistance, and to contest the blaming and pathologizing of victims (p. 4). These processes of change are ultimately important and require the sanctuary of the third space in order to take shape. It is here that some strategies are developed, shared, and enacted for survival in the other worlds.

Metis people strategically adopt multiple selves that assist them in performing in the various cultural worlds. Narrative therapist Michael White (2000) recognizes that people experience a phenomenon of multiple authenticities as an outcome of the fact that people live out their lives in various contexts or zones, and that problems are "embedded in the person's cultural context," and are thus related to issues of power imbalance. White proposes that persons become linguistically radicalized against the culture's dominant knowledge and power practices (in Madigan & Law, 1998, p. 28).

In this case, the *presenting identity* would be dependent upon the degree of personal power/empowerment and psychological safety the Metis individual felt in each cultural space. The same symbolic process occurs where stories are taken in, assessed, and integrated based on their value in a number of contexts. The "I" digests those experiences that resonate in a way that says, "Yes, this is who I am."

### *Metis Stories*

As the Metis were directly impacted by the encroachment on their land by newcomers, the theme of *how to act honourably during times of severe cultural and geographical disruption* emerged as an important theme that runs through many Metis narratives. Subsequently, sub-themes of *heroism, service to community, generosity, piety,*

and *living in right relationship to the natural world* are also important themes in Metis cultural stories.

Metis people exposed to cultural stories in their youth often heard tales of *Wasagichak*, the creator/trickster spirit man who teaches us how not to be, through humorous tales of misguided encounters with the environment. These and other cultural stories play a significant role in helping Metis people understand who they are collectively and individually.

Metis cultural stories give coherence to one's sense of Metis self and serve to connect people to their community. These stories offer a sense of belonging through a shared experience and history. Chandler and Lalonde (1998) have strongly suggested that individual youth experience a stronger self-persistence when they are experiencing the cultural continuity of their communities (p. 198). Our stories are inseparably linked to our survival. Culture is the blanket that protects us, and stories are the threads of that blanket.

The Metis self-formation process can be explained using symbolic interactionism in a post-colonial and narrative context. It would be inappropriate to apply theories that address self-formation in a European cultural context in a context of social equality. The intricacies of the colonial dynamics, and the need for the Metis to access their stories in Metis cultural spaces, creates a unique process where self is formed.

Place and displacement are important themes for Metis people and are important features of post-colonial discourse. The Metis were displaced from their traditional homeland, and continue to be wanderers in non-Metis spaces. Displacement is thus the concomitant of difference, the continual reminder of the separation, and yet of the hybrid interpenetration of the colonizer and colonized.

When Metis people participate in third-space cultural experiences, they experience respite from this separation, and proceed toward the creation of a self that is more complete.

#### CHAPTER FOUR: A NARRATIVE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

In this chapter, I discuss the narrative approach to research that I employ in this study. I explain the evolution of research methodology and the place of narrative inquiry in this evolution. I discuss my reasons for selecting this approach. I describe my role as researcher and I present the steps in this method that provide the structure for the analysis and the writing of the research. To create ground for discussing Metis people and their experience of hybridity, I have documented some key aspects of European and Indigenous thought, borrowing from places of complement and relevance to establish an appropriate methodological landscape. As such, I construct a strategy for operating in two cultural worlds, creating the possibility for operation in a third cultural world.

The strategy for operating in a number of different worlds involves using a qualitative, narrative process that is congruent with some forms of European and Aboriginal understanding. Before elaborating on this narrative approach, I will explain some of the methodological developments in research that have created space for the narrative approach in social sciences research. Social sciences research practice was influenced directly by the scientific method and the greater European philosophical arena.

European thought, including the development of the scientific method, has had a cultural impact on Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Through colonization and the arrival of European values in the new world, Aboriginal people have become largely bi-cultural, and have experienced pressure to assimilate into the Euro-Canadian dominant culture. Native peoples have not always benefited from the research that has been conducted on them (Smith, 1999). It is my hope to conduct research in the Metis community in a way that is respectful and collaborative. A narrative approach to inquiry makes room for more

equitable relationships in the research process. It allows for the creation of a research space that reunites life experience and the analysis of that experience in ways that promote rich interpretation.

### *Social Thought and the Evolution of Research Methodologies*

The Renaissance saw philosophy emerge as a discipline separate from religion. The sciences were developed as a secular form of study, whereas earlier scholarship was primarily an enterprise of the church. In 1644, René Descartes introduced the idea that doubt was the critical tool of disciplined, intellectual inquiry (Purkey, 1988). Questioning the universe formed the basis for scientific research, and the scientist was believed to be outside, or separate from, the subject(s) of study. Scientific research was quantitative, focused on fact-finding, and referred to as positivist. Positivism refers to “the assumption that human experience can only be understood via research methods modeled after those employed in the natural sciences” (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995).

At the turn of the century, the field of psychology was growing and most psychological theories were related to behaviour. Freud (1900) was beginning to discuss notions of a psychological self. This reconceptualization influenced how the self was perceived by researchers. In keeping with the reconceptualist movement, the self moved from being considered in more behavioural and detached ways to being considered in more humanist, psychodynamic, and interconnected ways (Purkey, 1988).

The notion of self-concept has been defined as the totality of a complex, organized, system of learned beliefs, attitudes, and opinions that each person holds to be true about his or her personal existence (Purkey, 1988, p. 1).

Academia has provided an extensive literature on the topic of self: selfhood (Thelen, 1958); sense of self/fragmented selves (Miller, 1991); self-concept (Fromm, 1956; Lecky, 1945; Raimy, 1948); self-production (Wexler, 1974); the narrative self (Gergen, 1992; Hopcke, 1998; Lesko, 1988; Olney, 1988); the postcolonial self (Bhabha, 1983; Fanon, 1967; Tiffin, 1987, 1988); and the saturated self (Gergen, 1991). There are also large surrounding areas of research regarding cultural identities (Freire, 1985; Ng, 1993; Omi & Winant, 1983, 1986), autobiography (Edgerton 1991; Grumet, 1981; Krall, 1988), cultural self (Cole, 1996; Geertz, 1965; Ogbu, 1992) human development (Erickson, 1982; Fowler, 1981; Kaufman & Kaufman, 1980), moral development (Dewey, 1939; Dixon, 1980; Gilligan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1964, 1976, 1981; Oh, 1986), intelligence (Dewey, 1968; Ennis, 1962; Piaget, 1975; 1977), self-esteem (Rogers, 1969; Smelsner, Vasconcellos & Mecca, 1989), and individuation (Jung, 1963).

The writing of Sigmund Freud (1900) represented a major milestone in the description and analysis of the self. Freud conceptualized the self as a tripartite system of ego, id, and superego. He saw the individual as caught in a balancing act between the forces of drives, desire, and social responsibility and illuminated other complex mental processes. His daughter Anna Freud (1946) shed light on the importance of ego development and self-interpretation. Psychologist Eric Fromm (1956) described self-concept as “life being aware of itself” (p. 1).

Other psychologists (Lecky, 1945; Raimy, 1948) continued to work with self-concept theories in counselling. In 1947, humanist psychologist Carl Rogers advanced the notion of self-concept in counselling and introduced a system known as person-

centered counselling. Rogers (1947, in Purkey, 1988) described the self as “a social product, developing out of interpersonal relationships and striving for consistency” (p. 1).

Some of these changes in self-concept marked a movement away from more scientific and behaviourist views of the self, verging into areas of humanistic thought. This created a multiplicity of psychological views about the self and how the self could be studied.

In the 1960s, the well-entrenched positivist and structuralist views, influenced by behavioural psychology, were met with a movement of new thought pertaining to the world and its resident humans (Cherryholmes, 1988). William Pinar, William Reynolds, Patrick Slattery, and Peter Taubman (1995) document the challenges to the predominance of positivism, empiricism, and the scientific method as an overarching explanatory tool influencing research. They document a diverse community of “progressive voices” (p. 217) calling for a reconceptualization of social thought. These voices were articulated from the realms of early humanism, 19th century romanticism, child-centered thought, literary criticism, Marxism, neo-Marxism, social reconstructionism, deconstruction, postmodernism, and poststructuralism. Curriculum researcher Arthur Foshay (in Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995) traces “the 1970s situation to the 1950s” (p. 187). Pinar et al. (1995) suggest that history supported the reconceptualization of the field through the worldwide student revolution, particularly the anti-war and civil rights movements.

Accompanying the demands for social change in the 1960s, the demands for intellectual change created a paradigm shift referred to as *the crisis of representation*. Gouldner (1970) states that “nearly every discipline associated with the social sciences

underwent self-critique” (in Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman, 1995, p. 52).

Qualitative research increased and entered the social sciences alongside quantitative methods. “Qualitative” became an umbrella term which included all non-quantitative work (Ibid., p. 52).

A number of theorists have documented this paradigmatic shift in social thought and research methodology (Benham, 1981; Feinberg, 1985; Huber, 1981; Jackson, 1992; Lincoln, 1992; Mazza, 1982; Miller, 1979; Schubert, 1986; Schubert & Lopez-Schubert, 1980; Pinar, 1988). This reconceptualization was characterized by the new-found aim of seeking understanding and meaning, as opposed to an objective truth. There was a new focus on ethics, politics, and a challenge to include culture. Ecological models were sometimes employed to shed light on cultural and social forces surrounding the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1980; Helm, 1962).

Three streams emerged from the reconceptualization movement. MacDonald (1975) describes them in the following way:

1. The first used theory as a guiding framework for applied research and as a tool for evaluation.
2. The second involved a more conventional concept of scientific theory, where theory was “tested” and used as a tool for empirical validation.
3. Theorizing was seen as “a creative and intellectual task, not to be used prescriptively or as an empirical testable, but as a set of principles and relationships for the purpose of conceptualizing and talking” (p. 216).

This third group emerged as the largest group of these three streams, and came to dominate the research enterprise. This third stream relates to narrative theory, with its focus on relationships between various storied forms of information.

These important relationships include the ones between different stories, between researcher and participant, between participant and environment, and between personal stories and social stories. This recent phase in social sciences research has been designated as “an experimental moment in the life of human science inquiry” (Marcus & Fisher, in Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 11). This sentiment was paralleled by Denzin and Lincoln (1994) who have named the present moment in inquiry as “the fifth moment” (p. 11).

### *Narrative Inquiry*

Many North American scholars from across the humanities, social sciences, and educational research have turned to narrative as “the organizing principle for human action” (Cronon, Miles, Gitlin, & Miles, 1992; Czarniawska, 1997; Fonow & Cook, 1991; Richardson, 1995; Rosaldo, Gelipi, & Keohane, 1982; Schafer, 1980, 1992; Scott, 1998). Narrative researcher Reissman (1993) explains that “the methodological approach examines the informant’s story and analyzes how it is put together, the linguistic and cultural resources it draws on, and how it persuades a listener of authenticity” (p. 2).

Reissman (1993) describes the purpose of narrative as a representation of how respondents in interviews impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives. Bruner (1990) writes that “narrative analysis – and there is no *one* method here – has to do with how protagonists interpret things, and how we can go about interpreting their interpretations” (p. 51).

Riessman (1993) and other theorists (Bruner, 1990; Geertz, 1973; Sarbin, 1986) believe that the study of narrative “does not fit neatly within the boundaries of any single scholarly field” (in Riessman, 1993, p. 1). Social sciences researchers from various disciplines have employed a narrative approach to research. Anthropologists (Bateson, 1994; Denzin, 1997; Geertz, 1973; Ginsberg, 1989a, 1989b) work with narrative approaches, characterizing narrative as “inherently interdisciplinary, [extending] the ‘interpretive turn’ in the social sciences” (Geertz, 1973).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) document the narrative method across a number of disciplines. Narrative thinking “comes into the intellectual territory of other ways of thinking” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 46). For example, narrative research can be found in the disciplines of psychology, anthropology, sociology, education, public administration, the humanities, and literature. In 1969, Todorov coined the term *narratology* “in an effort to elevate the form to the status of an object of knowledge for a new science” (Godzich, 1989, p. ix). Dan Scott (1998) articulates a methodology of narraturgy in his dissertation “Spirituality, Education, Narraturgy.” In 1987, Gerald Prince compiled *A Dictionary of Narratology* to explain the expansive area of narrative. Psychological researchers (Bruner, 1987, 1990; Coles, 1989; Polkinghorne, 1988; Sarbin, 1986) understand narrative to be the organizing principle for human interaction and stories as fundamentally linked to self-formation and identity.

### *Why a Narrative Approach Fits*

I elected to employ a narrative approach to this research because of the possibilities of including culture and environment as factors influencing lives, including historical and social factors as influencing field texts (i.e., research notes, data, and

research text), and creating more holistic representations of personal experience. Dinesen (in Arendt, 1958) remarks that “all sorrows can be borne if we can put them into a story” (p. 175).

Narrative researchers provide numerous reasons for working with narrative inquiry. Bruner (1990) writes: “Because the [narrative] approach gives prominence to human agency and imagination, it is well suited to studies of subjectivity and identity” (p. 51).

Metis experience has involved fundamental challenges regarding identity, belonging, and culture invisibility. The subjective experience of Metis people has not been elicited on a scale equal to that of European people and, more recently, First Nations people. Things that are Metis have been rendered invisible through a general lack of public acknowledgement (Storey, 2004). Metis writers have identified the problems of being “neither this nor that,” culturally speaking, and the ensuing invisibility (Adams, 1995; Arnott, 1995; Campbell, 1973; Dumont, 1996; Scofield, 1999). The Metis have been limited by the notion that “duality is destiny,” and that one must fit into one category. Hence, the Metis have been limited in their possible self-view and expressions of their subjective experience. Thus, it was important for me as social sciences researcher, to develop an appropriate philosophical, linguistic, and methodological landscape for conceptualizing and theorizing Metis people in this study.

#### *A Narrative Approach: Working with Stories*

Stories contain aspects of the larger culture, including beliefs, experience, values, aspirations and mores. I have written at some length, in the introduction to this document, about the significance of cultural stories in relation to the sense of self. In the literature

review, I have explored theoretical ideas about stories and the relevance of the colonial historical experience; I will not delve into that again here, except to reassert the notion that stories are embedded in every culture and are inextricably linked to the sense of self. I have philosophical and epistemological reasons for choosing to work with stories. Stories can be a bridge across the cultures with which I am working.

Stories are an important aspect of Indigenous research. Aboriginal people are now invited to tell their stories more than in the past, and their perspectives are sometimes considered in the delivery of human services, education, and health care. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) observes, “these new stories contribute to a collective story in which every indigenous person has a place” (p. 144). Australian Aboriginal researcher Stuart Rintoul describes the oral histories gathered in a research project with Indigenous Australians as “memories of injustice . . . an avalanche of voices crying out in hundreds of countries across innumerable Dreamings” (Rintoul, in Smith, 1999, p. 144). Many stories carry an element regarding the important process of remembering culturally significant experiences.

Aboriginal people who give testimonials may feel disrespected if questioned about details – “What was the date of that event?” “Is that documented somewhere in print?” “How old were you?” (Duran & Duran, 1995, p. 98). Detail-specific questions tend to diminish the message for the speaker and they may feel challenged or disbelieved. As a researcher, I am most concerned with how research participants interpret their cultural self-formation process and the importance of their cultural stories. Stivers (1993, in Pinar, et al., 1995) states: “There is no hard distinction in postpositivist research between fact and interpretation” (p. 217). The meaning that participants ascribe to their

story will shape their perception of their sense of Metis self, and it is that individual meaning which is sought. Some theorists, such as Gergen (1991), believe there is no difference between private and public stories. In an Aboriginal context, each story told is personal, has social themes, transcending threads, and narrative overlappings (Huber, 1999). Each individual within a culture internalizes these stories in a unique and personal way. This process was addressed at length in Chapter Three in the discussion of symbolic interactionism and narrative theory.

### *Metis Subjectivity and Experience*

Metis people, from their cultural position as Metis, employ their own vocabulary and structures in their stories that may be characteristically Metis. Narrative permits the methodological space for the Metis experience to be told and woven together structurally, thematically, and chronologically in ways that make sense for Metis people. These ways risk being overlooked by methods that do not allow room for complexity, hybridity, and the ever-changing nature of reality through storytelling.

Narrative inquiry provides room for the Metis interpretation of events affecting their lives. The interpretation of the Metis participant is considered and, together with the researcher, “a second level of representation” occurs in the way that participant and researcher co-construct a text (Riessman, p. 31). In the process of telling, Riessman (1993) believes the story is created by both the storyteller and the researcher: “by talking and listening, we produce a narrative together” (p. 10). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) share this belief, and write: “In the construction of narratives of experience, there is a reflexive relationship between living a life story, telling a life story, retelling a life story, and reliving a life story” (p. 71).

These overlapping Metis themes include the search for belonging; exclusion; being in between or in the middle; looking for respect as an antidote to racism; resistance; and ways of escaping or transcending reality (Adams, 1989; Arnott, 1995; Campbell, 1973; Cariou, 2002; Dumont, 1996; Scofield, 1999; Welsh, 1991). These themes explicate the reality of being caught in polarized situations and the possibility of the third space as an opportunity to transcend dualistic structures. In working with a strategy that transcends dichotomy, I am able to combine a number of complementary intellectual traditions. I understand that the topics of self, stories, and research can be approached from very many different angles through many different systems of belief.

Mechanical metaphors, adopted from the natural sciences, imply that the researcher may provide objective descriptions of forces and that the researcher is positioned outside of these forces. Through a narrative approach, I address layers of meaning and my role in the co-creation of meaning. These layers can include the narrative intersection between the personal and the social, including relationship to environment, culture and historical factors. I will address these layers of meaning in the section about the steps in the research process.

### *My Position as Researcher*

Many Aboriginal people believe that research is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism (Smith, 1999, p. 1). Some Aboriginal people may remember the scientific research of the past, such as the removal of ceremonial objects from communities for placement in metropolitan museums, or current psychological assessments which discredit their capacity to function, to parent, or to access certain employment (Smith, 1999, p. 1). The authorial voice of the researcher cannot remain

objective in the face of human misery and yet, in mainstream research, may be seen as biased if overtly compassionate. Educational researcher MacDonald (1975) shares a similar belief, writing:

Personally, my own work in the field in retrospect is best explained to myself as an attempt to combine my own personal growth with a meaningful social concern that has some grounding in the real world of broader human concerns. Thus, education has served as a societal pivotal point to explore myself and the broader human condition in a meaningful context (p. 3).

Balancing these influences provides the researcher with a challenge, as emotional involvement is not always considered a research attribute, similar to the way “going Native” is seen as a failing of the ethnographer.

I am also placed in a sensitive position as a Metis researcher because I am both an insider and an outsider in the context of the Metis community, and I bring some influence in my position as researcher. The insider/outsider dynamic has been discussed in ethnographic research (Ogbu, 1992) and, after the reconceptualization, was recognized for its potential advantage in creating a researcher with adept cultural understanding. This influence may be managed by using the researcher’s authorial voice to present the interview participants’ voices and stories sensitively, with what Clandinin and Connelly call “wakefulness” (2000, p. 184).

As a Metis researcher, I have strived to be wakeful, and I aim to consciously activate a Metis intellectual tradition, as described earlier in this chapter. I am guided to work with stories. I am inclined to view the self in relationship to others in the context of the cultural world. I aim to avoid reproducing colonizing practices that have been harmful. Importantly, I have also decided to approach my research with an active stance

to decolonize, rather than inadvertently continue some kind of disrespectful practice that may have no later relevance or role in making things better for the people being studied.

It is my goal to create research that is collaborative and meaningful for both the academic and the Metis communities. I aim to participate in the improvement of the Metis situation, via research, rather than helping to maintain an unsatisfactory status quo. Other researchers are also aiming, increasingly, to produce research that can offer something back to the community being studied. For example, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (2002) has revised its guidelines to request that research have some practical benefit to the communities involved and to the larger society. I outline these steps in this research on page 84.

As a Metis researcher, I personally am situated within the study as I am embedded with the hybridity, the flow, and the cultural experience of the Metis. In working with narrative, I understand that I am personally implicated in the storytelling process. Narrative inquiry requires that one “think beyond the black box” (Dewey, 1968, in Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). The metaphor of the black box comes from Dewey’s theory of experience, and relates to the notion that experience is irreducible and cannot be peered into (Ibid., p. 50). To extend this metaphor, I could describe my situation as being simultaneously inside the black box with the participant and outside of the box. I am steeped in Metis experience and my own Metis stories, yet my purpose is to assist participants in creating a narrative of the experience of their self-formation. I am “in the midst” of the study, and my own understandings evolve throughout the process. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) define “in the midst” as “located somewhere along the

dimensions of time, place, the personal, and the social, and in the middle of a nested set of stories – ours and theirs” (p. 63).

I am not a completely distanced and separate observer of the participants’ experience because I have become part of their experience:

In narrative inquiry, it is impossible (or if not impossible, then deliberately self-deceptive) as researcher to stay silent or to present a kind of perfect, idealized, inquiring, or moralized self (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 62).

When I ask questions, I am helping to develop and co-create the story. When the story has been told, the storyteller has articulated his or her personal reality. Through the telling and listening process, the participant realizes that the story, and his or her life, has been changed. In a sense, the participant has narrated his or her self into a slightly different position, and the story has changed. Manning, Van Maanen, and Miller (1993) observe that:

the narrative approach is embraced by researchers who have found that once standard interview practices are followed, and data is compared and coded into a common set of thematic categories, the individuals recapitulate and reinterpret their lives through storytelling, and their spoken truth is no longer the same as when first spoken.

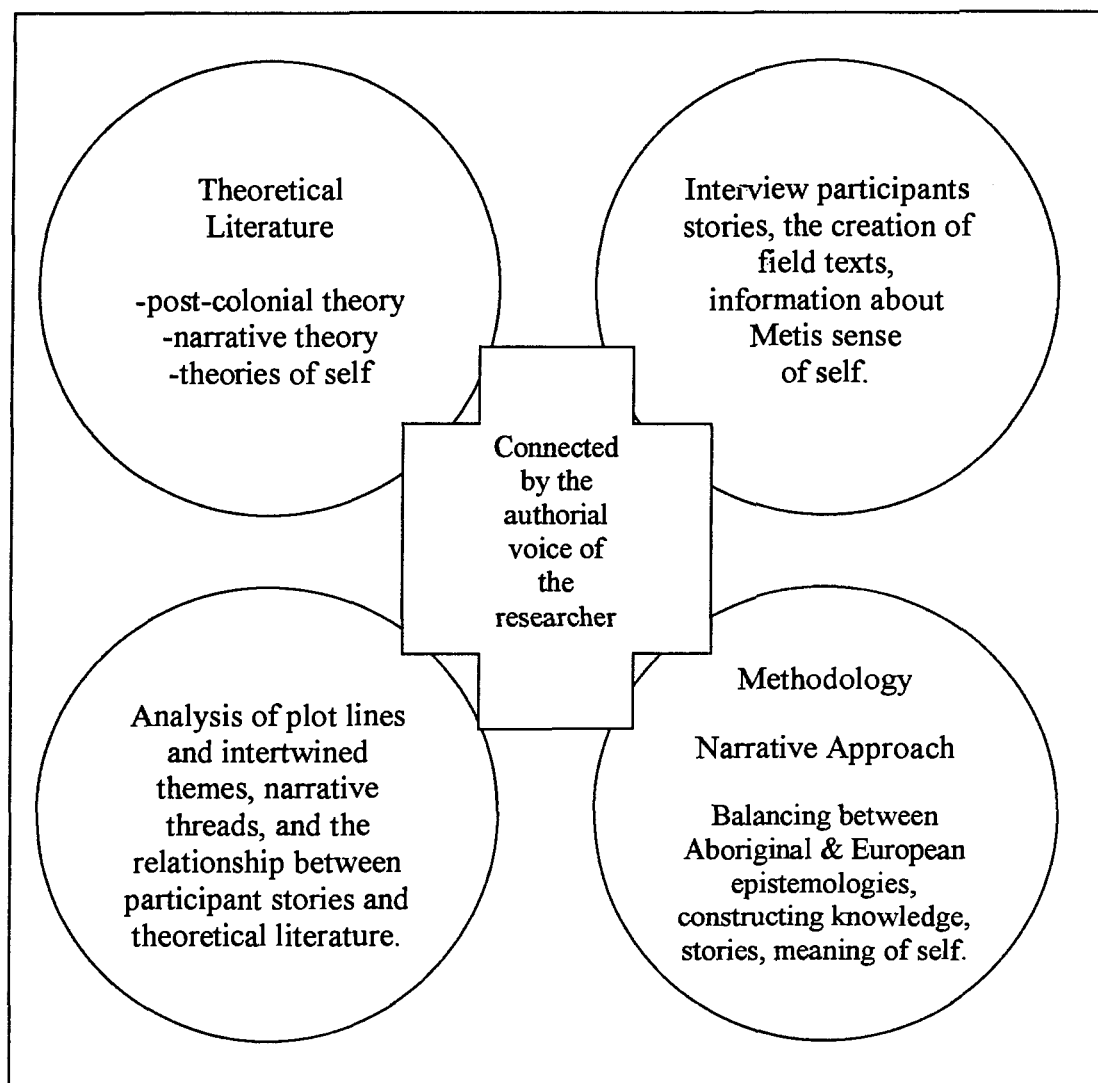
For example, many Metis tell stories about how they do not have stories and, at the end, realize that they do have a story – a story about not having stories. Suddenly they may see themselves transformed into a person with a story. There are various implications for research in the transformation through storytelling. This relates to what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) refer to as the inward/outward flow of the narrative self-creation process (p. 54).

*A Narrative Approach to Social Sciences Research: What Am I Doing?*

Narrative inquiry provides a way of conceptualizing, and talking about, the experience of the Metis people. As a researcher, I am not testing or prescribing. Narrative provides the opportunity for operating in what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) call “three-dimensional narrative inquiry space,” which they describe as a landscape involving temporality, inward and outward movement, and place. Inside this three-dimensional inquiry space, there are tools that I use for my analytical framework. This space provides a rich backdrop to the information provided by participants.

The following diagram (Fig. 4.1) illustrates the layout of this study, which balances participant stories, theoretical literature, and researcher analysis of intertwined themes, using a narrative methodology. These complementary aspects work together to create a research story, narrated through the authorial voice of the researcher.

*Fig. 4.1: Layout of the Study*



These components were assembled to include a wide range of knowledge about the subject of Metis self-creation and Metis stories. These five elements (theoretical literature; participants' stories/field texts and experience; analysis; and methodological explanation) contribute to a research process and product which is well-grounded and

which generates well-grounded conclusions (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 175). Like the narrative process itself, these five aspects of the study serve to connect the aspects of the study in a way that increases our knowledge about the topic. The following steps compose the method that guides this research study.

### *Outline of the Steps*

#### *A. Interviews, Field Notes and Field Texts*

As part of this process I conducted interviews, which were recorded by audiotape with the participant's consent. I asked questions, listened, and elicited stories. I assisted the participants in telling their stories, using prompting tools such as summarizing and asking "Can you say more about that?" My involvement as an interviewer renders me implicit in the creation of these research notes; at the same time, I have tried to minimize my influence over the answers and stories so that the participants' experiences could come through clearly.

Kvale's (1996) approach of the *interview as a conversation* is the kind of process I am seeking to engage in with participants. This process involves asking guiding questions and balancing processes of questioning, listening and prompting. Much of the acquisition of knowledge in Aboriginal societies takes place through a process of listening to stories and integrating the information in a way that is feasible for the individual at that moment in time. The same stories are often perceived in a different way each time they are heard. Deloria (1992) observes that many Native stories begin with the words "The way I heard it . . ." (p. 98). King (2003) writes: "*You'll never believe what happened* is always a great way to start" (p. 1). Traditionally, the asking of questions was

not condoned as a respectful process. Little Soldier (1985) points out that “at home, many Indian children are not rewarded for curiosity and for asking questions: parents may even use legends and fables to discourage curiosity. Children are expected to learn by observation and to be patient” (p. 188).

Listening is considered important and listeners take away whatever part of the story that contributes to their current learning needs. Children are not encouraged to ask questions of elders, but rather to listen and wait for the answers to emerge. Today, certain protocols remain around approaching an elder or teacher in search of some particular knowledge. This can involve offering a gift, sometimes tobacco, or, in formal situations, a blanket.

Interviewing as part of a European research tradition may involve asking a series of predetermined questions to get at a particular area of knowledge or experience. Steinar Kvale’s 1996 book *InterViews* contains at least forty pages of references dedicated to the subject of questioning. Questioning forms a large part of qualitative research, even when involving Native peoples, in spite of the fact that questioning can be alienating for Aboriginal people. Duran and Duran (1995) observe that “a high level of distrust exists among Native American people to anyone asking questions, regardless of the good promised by the results of the research and often regardless of the tribal affiliations of the researcher” (p. 25).

In the information-gathering process, I have aimed to elicit topic-related information in a way that is respectful and appropriate. This has meant that the way the information was gathered was not identical for each participant, although the same questions were asked and answered. I did not always move through the list of questions

sequentially, and sometimes waited for the questions to be addressed spontaneously before asking them directly. Sometimes the questions were posed as an elaboration of something the participant mentioned. I used the skill of listening as a research approach, eliciting information throughout the course of the story. In four cases, the interviews were conducted in two separate sessions.

During the audiotaped interviews, I created field notes by jotting down observations that might help me later in the analysis. These were pencil-written short notes, consisting of a few words or a sentence, which I wrote on my copy of the interview questions. After completing the audiotaped interview, which was typically conducted in one session and in four cases broken into two sessions, I listened to the tapes a number of times. I took notes from these listening sessions which were later helpful for the analysis. I then created a written document, which I call a field text – a word for word transcription of the audiotaped interview. Typically, these documents provided answers to the interview questions with answers that often included stories. I kept these typed interviews together in a binder, and stored the computer discs and audiotapes safely in an office drawer designated specifically for this research project.

### *B. The Study and Analysis*

Analyzing field texts involved looking for plot lines and intertwined themes. These structures were left in the context and embedded in the interpretation of the participant. The purpose of this approach is to promote holistic understandings and to avoid fragmenting or decontextualizing the data. I examined the passages, the participants' explanations, and the meaning they assign to the information. As I will explain in the section below on inward/outward flow, meaning is connected to the inner

state (emotions, values, hopes) and external states (environment, history, cultural community).

I then provide my analysis, balancing the plot lines/intertwined themes and the participant analysis with the theoretical literature. As a researcher, I narrate the research document, through the lens of my own understanding and experience, with the practice of identifying what is mine and what comes from other sources. My process follows these steps, not always necessarily in this sequence, as processes of analysis and interpretation take place all along. I have identified the intersections between stories and Metis experiences of self-formation. Stories have personal and social aspects that are unique and, at the same time, intersect with the experience of others.

#### Narrative threads

Narrative threads are similar to plot lines and intertwined themes. They are the threads that run through many Metis stories and create part of a bigger picture of Metis experience. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state: “Narrative researchers imagine narrative intersections, and imagine possible narrative threads emerging” (p. 70). These threads are part of what join individual Metis people together, composing a larger social story.

#### Describing the inward/outward flow

The inward/outward flow is a structure for drawing in complexity. ‘Inward’ refers to the participants’ feelings, internal conditions, hopes, aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions. ‘Outward’ refers to existential, environmental, and historical conditions (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). This structure allows the researcher to deal with

cultural and social factors which shape the Metis people, and helps to provide a framework to attend to both personal and social issues. This process fits with what Thomas King (2003) believes about the connection between stories, culture, and cosmology: “Meaning is refracted by cosmology, the way understanding is shaped by cultural paradigms” (p. 72).

The inward/outward motion is depicted in the symbolic interactionist conceptualization of Metis self-creation, described in Chapter Three. Outer experience and stories are internalized and edited and authored into a self-story. This movement is an illustration of the ongoing self-creative process. The inward/outward flow also represents movement from the personal story to the social story and back again. In this way, one may visualize the Aboriginal sense of relationship. In the cosmology of connection, the individual, and individual experience, is seen as inseparable from the collective and collective experience. From this perspective, the personal is social.

#### Temporality and place

Temporality involves consideration of how a story or event is related to past, present, and future events and conditions. Attention to place can highlight special connections between Metis people, home, homeland, and the natural world. I have addressed the importance of place in Chapter Three of this dissertation. Attention to temporality also permits the analysis of historical conditions and the effect of events upon personal and social stories. Reinterpretation of past stories and experience is facilitated by hearing new stories and new interpretations of the past. At times, therapeutic processes help to reintegrate past negative experiences through exploring new

interpretations, a process narrative therapists call re-storying or re-authoring lives (White, 1997).

Metis people tell stories that took place in the past, that are drawn into the present, and that influence the Metis future. The future is being created in the past and the present. The degree to which the condition of Metis people in Canada will improve is dependent upon what is happening now: "Everything that ever happened is happening now" (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995, p. 469). Stories have the power to transform. Thomas King (2003) authors an echo throughout *A Native Narrative*, which reminds the reader of this transformative tonic:

Take [this] story, for instance. It's yours. Do with it what you will. Tell it to friends. Turn it into a television movie. Forget it. But don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You've heard it now (p. 29).

Thus, storytelling is often followed by transformation, for those who tell and receive stories.

### *C. Checking for Accuracy With the Participants*

This process has allowed for the participants to make revisions, to check the accuracy of my presentation of their information, and to share their experience of the interview. Participants have had the opportunity to make any changes and to document any shifts in their perspective that happened after the interview. After the transcription process was completed, a copy of the interview was sent to each participant. Participants were reminded that they have been given a pseudonym in the study and that their information is unrecognizable. I explained that the final research document will be stored in the University of Victoria library upon completion. When communicating with the

participants about checking the documents, I posed a three-part final question: “Has telling your story about being Metis changed you in any way? Is anything different for you now in the way you think about being Metis? What thoughts have you had about being Metis since doing the interview?”

#### *D. Writing the Analysis*

This process involved deriving interpretations, balancing personal and social stories with theoretical explanations, and writing up the research. A research narrative was created and incorporated into a dissertation. This analysis was compiled through a review of field notes, the study of the field texts, and the ongoing review of the literature cited in this study. Links were made and the analysis was developed throughout the research process. The final analysis was completed after all the research texts were completed and studied, with time allowed to let the information “percolate.”

#### *E. Writing Stories*

In this step, I have provided a representation of sample Metis stories generated in the research process. I have aimed to provide whole accounts of Metis narratives so the reader may have a personal experience of these stories. Each reader may experience the meaning uniquely and personally, based on their own history and experience.

It is constructed at this second level of representation in a process of interaction. The story is being told to particular people; it might have taken a different form if someone else were the listener (Riessman, 1993, p. 11).

Unlike traditional ethnographical methods, I am not aiming to provide descriptions of the lives of Metis people. I understand that language is not neutral or unproblematic, and thus I aim to use the participants’ language because “language is

understood as deeply constitutive of reality, not simply a technical device for establishing meaning” (Riessman, 1993, p. 4). The participants’ language constructs their reality, is “creatively authored, rhetorical, and replete with assumptions, and interpretive” (Riessman, 1993, p. 4). It is also steeped in culture, particularly Metis cultural experience. According to editors Manning, Van Maanen, and Miller, Riessman’s (1993) book has made the method of narrative analysis more systematic and useful for fieldworkers.

The narrative approach is embraced by researchers who have found that once standard interview procedures are followed and data is compared and coded into a common set of thematic categories, the individuals recapitulate and reinterpret their lives through storytelling. Their spoken truth is no longer the same as when first spoken. Narrative inquiry is about close textual analysis and “seeing how a narrative is constructed and how a teller rhetorically creates it to make particular points. Narrative analysis typically involves looking for levels of representation. Narrative research involves locating oneself in terms of personal view, network of relationships, and cultural position (Riessman, 1993, vii).

What makes narrative different from other forms of qualitative research is the difficulty in finding themes in narrative interview texts which knit “together several themes into long accounts that ha[ve] coherence and sequence, defying easy categorization” (Riessman, 1993, p. 4). Riessman (1993) states: “I found myself not wanting to fragment the long accounts into distinct thematic categories” (p. vi).

Because narratives are meaning-making structures, narratives must be preserved, not fractured, by investigators who must respect respondents’ ways of constructing

meaning and analyze how it is accomplished (Riessman, 1993, p. 4). I have not included analyses of entire narratives, but rather have focused on the intertwined plot lines. I have presented examples of Metis stories (in Chapter Seven). I have aimed to preserve the integrity through close adherence to context, to participant interpretation, and to the actual words of the participant.

### *What Makes Narrative Research Credible?*

As an Aboriginal person and academic researcher, there have been a number of tensions at work in assuring this study is relevant, congruent, and rigorous by the standards of academic social sciences. This process has involved balancing the major influencing traditions, creating a space for them to meet in a meaningful way, and then identifying which aspects can transcend the parameters of their tradition and entering a philosophical third space.

I have aimed to preserve the Aboriginal values inherent in the Metis community while working within the realm of Western social sciences. I have strived to maintain this balance through the inclusion of Metis stories and both Aboriginal and European theoretical literature that informs the topic of study. I have positioned myself consciously as a creator of knowledge in collaboration with participants, as both an insider and an outsider in the Metis community as a result of my contrasting positions of community member and university researcher. I have been able to view my data through a Metis lens, while sensitively challenging and problematizing certain aspects in order to lead to greater understanding. My commitment as a Metis researcher can be expressed with the words of James MacDonald (1975, in Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995): "The conscious attitude of integration is not to do violence to one's own nature by repressing

or overdeveloping any part of it” (p. 217). Balancing a number of considerations, I have strived to create a good, solid research analysis.

When using narrative, there are a few important steps that the researcher can take to promote credibility of the research process and product. Riessman (1993) poses the question “How can one tell a better narrative analysis from a worse one” (p. 64)? The answer is determined through the product’s persuasiveness, and through processes such as correspondence, through considering alternative and counter-intuitive explanations, through strong explanations of the relationship to field texts, participants’ experience and the theoretical literature. Narrative theorists talk about the value and trustworthiness of research. I will now explain what this means.

Research must stand up to certain tests of quality in rendering it valuable or worthy, both in the Aboriginal and the social sciences communities. Kiwi Tamasese (2002) is a Samoan family therapist and educator. She demonstrates this point in telling the story about Margaret Mead coming to Samoa and collecting stories about the sexual behaviour of youth. She believes that the accounts of open and free sexuality were a result of the interview participants “pulling Mead’s leg” and inventing stories in response to interview questions (Tamasese, 2002). Riessman (1993) articulates the belief that “the stories we tell, like the questions we ask, are finally about value” (p. 69). Prevailing realist notions articulated this value as “validity,” a concept attached to the scientific method. In her narrative work, Riessman (1993) defines this validation process as “claims of trustworthiness” rather than truth, stating:

The latter assumes an objective reality, whereas the former is about trustworthiness. We have all had the experience of reading a piece of research and thinking “but of course,” even when the explanation is counterintuitive. Persuasiveness is greatest when theoretical claims are supported with evidence

from informants' accounts and when alternative interpretations of the data are considered (p. 65).

In this study, I have aimed for persuasiveness through balancing the participants' stories with the theoretical literature. This balance has helped to create a broader picture of the topic at hand. This literature body has been described at length throughout the dissertation, including post-colonial literature, Metis and Aboriginal literature, social sciences literature about self, and literature about narrative inquiry. The process of corroborating the experiences of interview participants with theoretical claims, and developing alternative interpretations will strengthen the credibility of this study.

*Correspondence* is a process that can also strengthen credibility.

Correspondence refers to the process of taking results back to those studied, from whom the data were originally collected.

It is important that we find out what participants think of our work, and their responses can often be a source of theoretical insight. Returning our interpretations to their home communities is also politically important (Riessman, 1993, p. 66).

However there are limits to this process as a measure of trustworthiness.

Participants' stories represent perspective rather than claiming to represent an objective truth. It is unclear whether the credibility of a researcher's interpretations can be totally affirmed by the interview participant. Some feedback comes in the afterlife of a study. Adjustments can be made to the research and knowledge after the initial dissertation has been produced. As well, "human stories are not static, meanings of experience shift as consciousness changes" (Riessman, 1993, p. 66). I have done my best to document these shifts in the post-interview contact. Theorizing across a number of literature bodies can

enhance the credibility to show that the analysis is not ad hoc. The fact that many themes overlap lends credibility to the relevancy of those themes.

It has been my aim to conduct a study that possesses, in the words of Australian researcher Andrew Turnell (2003), both *grace* and *rigor* – grace through a sensitivity and listening while eliciting information, and rigor through analytical thought, reflexivity, and making relevant connections.

### *The Research Process*

My interest in the study of Metis psychology began when I was a Master's student in Counselling Psychology at the University of Victoria. As part of my training I was engaged in a peer counselling process where I was encouraged to explore my own Aboriginal ancestry. One colleague in particular had an interest in Canadian history, in the fur trade, and in Aboriginal cultures. He encouraged me to write a story about my grandmothers. Later, I took part in a kind of "playback" theatre session where actors played family members. I was becoming very intrigued about what had happened to my family in terms of their Metisness, at a time when being Aboriginal meant social ostracism, prejudice and decreased opportunity. I was curious about why my grandmother didn't want to talk about being Metis. The possibility for this study crystallized when I was admitted as a doctoral student to the School of Child and Youth Care with the supervision of Dr. Alan Pence.

With the guidance of my committee, I was trying to initiate a study of Metis childhood. This topic often appeared vast and unwieldy due to its multiple possibilities. I later narrowed things down to address the stories that are received within the culture, thinking that these stories help shape cultural identity and the sense of self. I believed this

topic to have implications for child development, Aboriginal research, and Aboriginal social service delivery.

I received committee approval for the proposal and then ethical approval from the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Committee, both in 2003. When these were granted I began recruiting interview participants. I recruited 12 participants through a local Metis agency and interviewed these people in the community. The interviews were transcribed and research texts were created and analyzed. One interview was not audiotaped due to the particular process with that participant. She preferred to answer the questions by email, and then to meet in person to talk about the answers. The information was then written into the dissertation during the spring of 2004.

Throughout the process of this study, I prepared a number of papers for conference presentations and journal articles. One of these articles, "Stories That Map the Way Home: A Metis Process of Self Creation" was published in a journal entitled *Cultural Reflections*. Chapter Three of this dissertation was accepted for presentation at a conference of critical ethnographers in Vancouver on the subject of the self and symbolic interactionism. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend the conference. A third paper, entitled "Externalizing Conversations about the Right to Belong" was written for presentation at a Narrative Therapy and Community Work Conference in Oaxaca, Mexico.

### *Recruiting Interview Participants*

In this study I recruited 12 interview participants who were interested in sharing information about the formation of their sense of Metis self. Potential participants were

screened in an initial interview for suitability. Participants were required to meet the following criteria:

- They declared that they possess a sense of their Metis self and defined that in an appropriate way for this study (e. g., self-identification, a primary identification, mixed-race European and Aboriginal ancestors, live in Canada)
- They were willing and able to speak about their personal experience with some depth.
- They understood the nature of the research project and were willing to provide signed consent and to be audiotaped (one exception was made regarding audiotaping).
- They were available for follow-up interviews if necessary.
- They helped contribute to a diversity of participants in the overall constellation (gender, age, geographical location, background, spoken language, sexual orientation, social class).
- They acknowledged that sharing personal stories can sometimes be difficult, are were aware both of the possibility of experiencing emotional distress and the availability of backup supports. They agreed to proceed in spite of the possibility of some emotional disturbance.

### *Data Collection*

I conducted private interviews with 12 Metis participants, who were recruited through an advertisement in a Victoria Metis newspaper *The Metis Messenger*, a publication of Metis Community Services. Interested parties contacted me at Metis Community Services regarding participation. Through these responses, 14 people

expressed an interest in being interviewed; three interested respondents did not participate due to health issues and my inability to reach them after the initial call. A few people contacted me after the data collection process was over.

Six of the interviews took place in the participant's home, three were held at Metis Community Services, two were held in a café, and one was held in my home. The participants appeared to feel comfortable, and we often shared a cup of tea and some food. The participants were informed of the parameters of this study – its purpose, the potential for difficult emotions to surface during or after the interview, confidentiality, and anonymity. The participants signed a letter of consent that was drafted in accordance with an outline provided by the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Committee. Participants were told that they could stop the interview, the audiotaping, or their involvement in the study at any time. I did stop the tape recorder on a few occasions, if the participant had an emotional reaction or needed a break.

### *Questions*

To begin, I asked each participant to provide some general information about their background, primarily their community of origin, age, nature of employment, and family size. During the interview, participants were asked to answer 20 questions. As my skill as an interviewer improved, I was able to draw these answers from the conversation in a more natural and flowing way, although the same questions were asked of every participant. The interviews lasted approximately one and a half hours. The interview questions were designed to elicit reflection and process information about the self-formation process. The questions were as follows:

Q1 (a) What does it mean to be Metis?

Q1 (b) When did you first know you were Metis?

Q2 (a) How did this knowing evolve?

Q2 (b) How would you explain the formation of your sense of Metis self?

Q3 (a) Were there times when you felt more Metis than other times?

Q3 (b) Are there places where you feel more Metis?

Q4 (a) What kinds of experiences helped your sense of being Metis?

Q4 (b) What kinds of experiences hurt your sense of being Metis?

Q5 How do you most clearly show the world that you are Metis?

Q6 (a) What are you like when you are in the White world?

Q6 (b) What are you like in the First Nations world?

Q6 (c) What are you like in the Metis world?

Q6 (d) How do you travel between these three worlds?

#### *Questions about Stories*

Q7 (a) What stories were you told about what life is about? Please tell one.

Q7 (b) Is this a Metis story? If no, what kind of story is it?

Q8 Were you ever told stories that showed “right” and “wrong,” and how to behave?

Q9 In your family, were stories told to you through books, orally, or both? Can you remember a Metis story you learned from your family?

Q10 Did you hear any Metis stories in the form of songs? Can you recall hearing songs that made you feel Metis?

Q11 (a) Did you hear any stories about being Metis, or about the Metis people in the form of political talks, speeches, or public forums?

- Q11 (b) How did these change your sense of being Metis?
- Q12 (a) Do you know stories of Metis history?
- Q12 (b) Who told you these stories?
- Q13 Were you ever moved by any Metis stories in the press?
- Q14 How have television stories moved you?
- Q15 Have you heard folk tales or folk wisdom about the Metis?
- Q16 (a) Are there stories that you tell about being Metis?
- Q16 (b) To whom do you tell these stories?
- Q16 (c) Do you have stories you tell to someone who asks you what it means to be Metis?
- Q17 What would you say to a Metis person who is seeking Metis culture?
- Q18 Where does one go to find Metis stories?
- Q19 What happens to you when you tell Metis stories?
- Q20 What happens to you when you talk about being Metis?

These interview questions were designed to elicit responses about and from the location of the three cultural worlds laid out in the study: the space occupied by the European Canadians (first space); the space occupied by the First Nations people (second space); and the Metis space (third space). These spaces represent three different positions of knowledge and discourse. The questions were designed to elicit information in regards to these three spaces where Metis people dwell.

### *Interview Participants*

The participants came from a number of geographical locations in Canada, some Metis communities and some Euro-Canadian. These communities included Fort St. John,

B.C., Quesnel, B.C., Lac Ste. Anne, AB, Edmonton, AB, Fort William, ON, Williams Lake, B.C., Duck Lake, SK, Vancouver, B.C., Yellowknife, N.W.T. Most of the participants have lived in a few different communities. Often they were raised in a place they consider to be “home,” or their place of origin, along with the places where they moved in order to find work or be with a partner.

The participants ranged in age from 24 to the mid 80s, the mean age being approximately 40. I will now describe some of the lives of the participants in non-exclusive, overlapping categories. Participants were involved in a number of different types of relationships and life situations: five participants were involved long-term heterosexual relationships and one participant was involved in a long-term homosexual relationship. Two of the participants were widowed and three participants were single. Seven participants had been to university and four are currently enrolled in postsecondary education. Four of the participants are retired and one works out of her own home. All of the participants have worked in a number of occupations throughout their lives, spanning the service industry, manual labour, and professional occupations. Linguistically, four participants speak French as a first language, eight speak English as a first language, and three participants speak a small amount of Cree as a secondary language. Two of the participants were male and 10 were female. Attempts were made to recruit other male participants, but in the end the sample was predominantly represented by women.

#### *How Participants Responded to Being Interviewed*

Generally, participants demonstrated being positive about being interviewed. No participants asked for the interview to be terminated or expressed discomfort about the process. An array of emotions were demonstrated, including excitement, delight about the

increased insight they were experiencing, grief, sadness, longing, anger, curiosity, nostalgia, pride, and despair about the past. Some participants were very close to their emotions linked to receiving racist or brutal treatment by peers and community members in the past.

Many participants shared sidebar comments about having experienced a lot of negativity in the educational system. Many had bad memories of the education system and experienced great relief when they left it. In spite of that experience, most participants went on to receive higher education as adults. All of the participants solidly shared that they felt marginalized due to their Metisness when they were growing up. Most expressed a current pride in being Metis.

#### *Narrative Connection*

Like narrative, the five aspects of the study (methodology, analysis, theoretical literature, participant interviews, and researcher's voice) help link disparate events into one single story. Events that are linked can appear to be random and disparate. For example: *the Metis lost the Battle of Batoche in 1885; a Metis man lives in a shelter in a west coast city because he has lost his home, his hope and has minimal prospects of employment in the city. He left his home in Alberta because of family violence; he is rated "4" on a Ministry risk assessment and subsequently presented as a danger to his children because of his historical abuse, regardless if he himself is an abuser. The Metis were subjected to a lot of racism and cruelty; there are a lot of Metis people in jail.* Without the appropriate context, the possibility of appropriate understanding is minimized. Because of the strategic use of these five aspects in the study, meaning can be made which is well supported. Polkinghorne (1988) reminds us that "an argument is valid when

it is strong and has the capacity to resist challenge or attack” (p. 175). Narrative explanations are based on past facts. In this instance, these facts relate to historical processes such as colonization and racism.

### *After the Interviews*

After the interviews, I transcribed the information on audiotape into field texts. These were sent to the interview participants for feedback. Participants had the opportunity to make amendments. A few participants took the opportunity to make small changes, usually involving slight changes in wording. At this point, I asked a three-part follow-up question: “Has telling your story about being Metis changed you in any way? Is anything different for you now in the way you think about being Metis? What thoughts have you had since doing the interview?” The answers to these questions will be treated in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE: WHAT PEOPLE SAID

Metis interview participants shared information about themselves and their Metis self-formation process. A wide range of experience was presented, with some similar themes and common threads running through unique and personal stories. In Chapter Six, I place these stories in the context of the literature and theoretical ideas. In this chapter, the experiences and stories of Metis participants are presented, largely in their own words. Interview participants were given the following pseudonyms to preserve their anonymity: Patty, Roland, Peter, Julie, Madeleine, Rose, Helene, Marie, Aline, Susan, Sarah and Lucy. Participants have had varying degrees of exposure to Metis culture and lifestyle during their lives. I have designed the following categories to represent these different types of cultural experience. These categories are as follows and are explained further on page 105:

Category 1: Raised White with no knowledge of Metis background

Category 2: Raised White with a little knowledge of Metis background

Category 3: Raised White with a lot of knowledge about Metis background

Category 4: Raised Metis in a White environment outside of family

Category 5: Raised Metis in a Metis environment

Category 6: Raised Metis in a First Nations environment

Category 7: Raised as a First Nations person in a First Nations environment

These designations exemplify the way various families responded to the sociohistorical conditions that lead to Metis families concealing their cultural background. Interview participants ranged from Categories 1 to 5, mostly possessing a

little to a lot of knowledge of their Metis ancestry and culture. All participants continue to explore what being Metis means to them.

Peter and Marie were raised Metis in a Metis environment (Category 5); Madeleine and Susan were raised Metis in both a White and Metis environment at different times (Categories 4-5); Patty and Helene were raised White with a little knowledge of their Metis background (Category 2); Roland, Julie, Sarah, and Rose were raised White with no knowledge (initially), and a little knowledge (gained later) of their Metis background (Categories 1-2); while Aline and Lucy were raised White with no knowledge of their Metis background (Category 1). In this last instance, knowledge of their Metis background was gained much later in life, in their adulthood. None of the participants were raised in a First Nations environment, either as Metis or as First Nations. It is important to note that the participants placed in Category 1 had no initial spoken or documented information about being Metis, but often had an intuitive knowledge that they were either part Native or that the identity that was presented to them was not correct. I will now present the participants' experience about the meaning of being Metis.

#### *Metis Self-Identification: What Does Being Metis Mean?*

Many of the interview participants stated that, although they knew they were Metis, they did not know what that meant until they were adults. For most, that understanding is still evolving. Even the participants who were raised Metis in a Metis community are constantly exploring what it means to be Metis. For example, Peter began by explaining his process of knowing that he is Metis:

It [the knowing] was really at a time beyond remembrance, somewhere in the midst of time. And then it came as time's memories, which is like your past life, things that you learn along the way, and then it's suppressed. And so, I realize I'm Metis throughout time (Interview, p. 1).

Later, the knowing evolved as such:

It evolved over time. There was an awareness that I think you are given at the instant of birth, about many things. I think I was drawing upon that wellspring of information (Interview, p.1).

Finally, Peter experienced an epiphany that helped clarify what it means to be

Metis:

I should also tell you that I had an epiphany about Metis identity in about 1982. All of a sudden I began to ask myself some questions about "who are you?" And the question that resolved itself for me was one that I posed to my brother. My brother had lived his life not particularly as an ordinary person in all the things that he did. And I called him up and asked him, "Thomas, are you more an Indian with White man's blood or are you a White man with Indian blood?" He thought about it for a long while, and then he said, "I think that I'm more an Indian with White blood than otherwise." Then I said, "Well, you know, for me, sometimes I feel the opposite – that the answer to the question is, I'm Metis – a mixed-blood person." And the revelation came to him at the same time (Interview, p. 2).

Peter sums up this experience by saying that "the hour struck," and from then on he knew what it meant to be Metis. The confusion that Peter experienced around being Metis had occurred despite the fact that he had spent his childhood living in a Metis community surrounded by Metis family.

Julie shares that for her, being Metis "has to do with being a person caught in the middle – a person in the unsafe position of straddling the road between two very different cultures" (Interview, p. 1).

For Patty, being Metis means "being part of a cultural community where I can celebrate my identity and have some connections with others. I think that's the best way I can put it" (Interview, p. 2).

Aline outlined what being Metis means for her in the following way:

I think for me, just coming to the recognition that I'm part of a larger history of colonization and I think because it's pretty new for me, sort of making me think of the historical impression of my grandmothers and where I fit in that process. Also, just the fact that I do have white skin. I have passed as White for my whole life and I've grown up White so. . . I don't really know where I fit. For me it's just this recognition that it's a bigger process (Interview, p. 1).

Marie grew up in a prairie town where at least half the population was Metis and were considered to be a major cultural group. Among the Metis, that community is considered to be "a Metis community." Thus, Marie experienced a sense of normalcy, self-respect, and belonging in her Metisness.

Many of the participants experienced the revelation that they were "different." Marie reported always knowing she was Metis and remembered, at one point, realizing "Oh, we are Metis and those people are a different nationality" (Interview, p. 5). She refers to her identity as "Michif." Patty reported also noticing that Metis people appeared to be different than others: "I knew we were different, so to speak, but I didn't know what that meant" (Interview, p. 2). Julie also reported feeling different from others: "I always knew I was different, even when I was small, I just didn't have a name for it" (Interview, p. 1).

As young children, both Roland and Susan grew up with the knowledge that they were "part Native" or "part Indian." Susan did not live in a Metis community and had only her family with which to share the Metis experience. She stated:

There was an awareness of being 'part Indian' kind of thing. And when people would ask, because people did ask, a lot of the time when I was growing up, what my background was, they would say to me, 'You're not completely White' and I would say I was part Indian. And I stopped saying it. And I said it to one of my friend's mom, who was English and she kind of looked a bit shocked and went like 'Oh!' And then I thought, 'Oh, it makes her uncomfortable. Maybe I shouldn't say that' (p.4).

Madeleine and Peter will now call themselves Metis if pressed, but remind that they predate the word Metis, and never called themselves that when they were young. Peter's family always referred to the Metis (themselves ) as "the people." Madeleine says "I was a Scotch half-breed." Julie reported, "Where I grew up the word 'Breed' was used more often than Metis" (Interview, p. 1). She added, "We never used that term (Metis) at home" (Interview, p. 10).

Sarah reconnected to her Metis ancestry and community about one year ago. Until then, she had identified more with her father's Italian culture. She states that she was waiting "for something to come into my life, and I think that's why I reconnected with my Metis roots (Interview, p.5). For Sarah, being Metis means "some painful identity struggles. . . . You know, I have always known but, for whatever reasons, I still haven't figured it out." Sarah reported that she does not look Native and that can be difficult: "I was talking about having a difficult time with the identity issues because, you know, people don't think I look Native."

Lucy reports that:

To be Metis means that I am waking up to my mother's Native roots. Because we were brought up French Canadian and that was it. Nothing else! So I felt that grounded me when I found out I was Metis.

Patty and her family referred to themselves as Michif, which is the Michif (the Metis language) word for Metis. Peter said his family referred to themselves and the Metis as "the people." An experience of "hiddenness" and "invisibility" was reported by all of the participants.

*“Being Metis Means Keeping Your Mouth Shut”: The “Invisibilization” of Metisness*

There is a certain invisibility, or “invisibilization” of Metisness that accompanies being Metis. I use this invented word *invisibilization* to illuminate the external pressure to hide one’s identity. “Passing” as White and hiding one’s Metis ancestry is not a natural process but a strategy made in response to a climate of racial prejudice. This pressure to hide identity, out of a fear of recrimination or racist treatment, leads to a sense of exclusion for Metis people. A number of participants said that being Metis means being told not to talk about being Metis.

Madeleine declared adamantly in the interview that “being Metis means keeping your mouth shut.” She recollected that she was regularly reminded by her mother to “keep quiet until you get home” and “keep your mouth shut!” Madeleine’s mother was afraid that the child would say something that would result in the family’s ostracism in the community. This ostracism could have severe economic consequences for the family. Madeleine explained that this reproach occurred in a context where being Metis meant you would not get a job. If you could not work, it was difficult to survive. Employers did not hire Metis people. Madeleine shared that Metis people often used more than one last name. Certain last names increased the likelihood of gaining employment.

Marie said, in relation to a recently published book about the history of Duck Lake, “Oh, my dad would not have anything in that book about our family. Anything that was put in there was by someone else” (Interview, p. 16). Sarah reported that the pressure to deny Metis ancestry still exists today, saying, “Oh yeah, it’s been happening everywhere.” She said:

I mean Metis history is amazing. And painful! I mean with all the pressure that Metis people have gone through. For example, one of our members, he’s trying to

find a job. He's in one field but he wants to move into another field of work. You know, he puts on his resumé that he is Metis. His friends have told him, you know, not meaning to be mean or anything, you should drop the Metis from [your] resumé. Still stuff like that is happening (Interview, p. 35).

### *Being In-Between/No-man's-land/Not-belonging*

Julie shared the following experience about being Metis:

Being neither one thing nor the other I would like to explore more of how to take these two traditions and bring them together in a new way of being. But for me it is still a discovering process (Interview, p. 3).

Julie also states: "Prejudice is such an evil thing, and as Metis we often get it from both sides of the blanket. A feeling of never quite belonging anywhere haunts me" (Interview, p. 5).

With the exception of Madeleine, Marie and Peter, the other participants did not identify as part of a larger Metis community to which they would later return. They are still searching for community elsewhere, sometimes in urban centres. The younger participants all expressed a period of alienation from "their people," and spend a lot of their lives trying to find out who they are, as part of something larger. Through the course of this journey, the Metis participants found some assistance along the way.

### *Signs, Guides, and Maps on the Road Home*

Many Metis have intuitively felt that there must be a place where they could feel at home, and have spent much time searching for that place. For example, after hearing a Metis song that stirred her sense of pride, Julie wondered, "Was there a place where I could finally fit in and be comfortable?" (Interview, p. 12).

Many Metis participants report that they receive various forms of guidance that helps them learn about their Metis ancestry and guides them to a Metis community. In

this study, participants identified a number of forms of guidance. Patty spoke about an inner knowing about her ancestry, although no one explained to her what Metis means.

I always knew, right, but I didn't. There wasn't really a voice given. I just knew that my dad's side of the family was Metis and my mother's was not Metis, and I moved away from my dad when I was about two years old (Interview, p. 2).

Rose spoke about receiving assistance from a man who worked at a Metis office. He showed her books about her ancestors and welcomed her into the community. Rose remembers:

He was the guy who answered the phone when I phoned the Metis Association. And so it was through him that I got my first introduction and he introduced me to people and explained a lot about the culture and stuff, and talked to me about all the issues that came up around that time (Interview, p.15).

Sarah, Roland, Aline, Susan, Patty and Peter also report finding guidance and belonging through a Metis community association. Marie, Madeleine, and Lucy have also had some contact with various Metis and Aboriginal agencies which has lead to some community involvement.

### *Inner Knowing as a Guide*

Lucy has never received any genealogical proof that she is Metis, but she believes strongly that she is. She reported that she knew it profoundly the first time she was in a healing circle and heard the Native drum.

I was at a Native, an all-Native treatment centre during my practicum, and a Native fellow started playing the drums and, up to that point I had no idea I was Native. So I started sobbing and crying and then I heard my inner voice, by that time I had quite a large journal of when my voice was talking to me. And at that point it said, this is about your mother! And then I saw an image of my mother, her dark, dark eyes, dark skin and I saw her, some of the things she said, I connected it. And that's when I felt the grounding. I felt like I was stuck to the ground, stuck, parked. . . . I had a spiritual experience, where I felt my spirit was just engulfed, you know, all these people were with me and I was with them, and it was a really good feeling. That's where I got the first feeling of being Metis.

And then after that, I started to know why, oh that's why you felt so comfortable with Native people (Interview pp. 1-2).

Similarly, Sarah reports a strong visceral experience that often brought chills and tears when hearing the drum, and sometimes the fiddle:

If I go to powwows, just the big drum. I find it a visceral experience, sometimes I find myself in tears. All of a sudden I am choking: I just find it a very visceral experience hearing drums. It's getting to be that way with the fiddle music, too (Interview, p. 23).

Peter shared having an inner knowing about being Metis, which he gained at the moment of birth. He also believes that Metis people have the ability to recognize each other: "I have the profound sense of the ability or capacity of Metis people to recognize each other. It must be in the blood or something" (Interview, p. 7).

Marie told a story which demonstrates this kind of inner knowing or recognition. She shared that she used to have a restaurant together with her husband, in a non-Metis urban centre. She made friends with a local Metis woman who frequented the restaurant. They did not know that the other was Metis. For years they enjoyed chatting and visiting at the restaurant. Much later, they were amused to find out that they were both Metis:

I was so surprised to find out she was Metis, and where she came from. 'Cause *that* I am sure, you don't go around and tell people you are Metis. . . . I was just amazed and I felt a connection which I hadn't before, and I was very surprised (Interview, p. 20).

A young man once came into Marie's restaurant in search of employment. Marie could not hire the young man, but spent time talking with him. He continued to come back to the restaurant, mostly to visit. He would say to Marie "this place is different, what is it about this place?" People sometimes recognize something of comfort in each other, without knowing what that is. It is possible, in this case, that it was a "Metis

place,” where Metis people felt comfortable, although it was never articulated as such. These Metis participants experienced these signs as indicative of their Metis ancestry.

### *Stories as Guides*

Stories have played multiple roles in the lives of Metis people. The stories help to soothe, to teach, and to put things into perspective. A number of participants never had books read to them as children (Susan, Marie, Julie, Madeleine, Patty) and received stories orally. Peter said that “stories were not told directly; you had to overhear them” (Interview, p.7). This situation was similar for Marie and Madeleine. They report overhearing adults in the next room, or at the kitchen table. Susan remembers that her dad’s stories “teach us to be respectful of other people’s things and to be very thankful for what we had” (Interview, p. 46). She shares a story her dad told when her brother was having trouble at school:

Like if my brother was having trouble at school, he [my dad] told a story about when he went to an English school for the first time. He didn’t know how to speak English; he only knew how to speak French. And so everybody would come up to him and say things like ‘Hey, do you want to fight?’ And he’d be like, ‘Yah, yah, sure.’ And we thought that was just hilarious, like the idea of our dad not knowing how to speak English, or he used to say he was kicked out of Catholic school because he was too smart for the nuns. And just the idea, like, it made it good for my brother because he really struggled with school. I think it made it good for my brother because he’d think to himself, ‘Well, I’m too smart for my teacher, anyway’ (Interview, p. 47).

Susan perceived these stories as gifts she received from her dad:

I think that the stories themselves were oftentimes gifts, too. I guess just the strong effect they had on me and my brother, that we would be so interested in them and like how they never really went away. Like we’d ask to hear them again and again, or we’d ask about things, or we’d ask for more details and things like this (Interview, p. 49).

Julie also points out that stories maintain their medicine power only under certain conditions. She believes that the storyteller needs to understand the essence and the meaning behind stories, and not merely repeat them by rote. She also believes that the focused intent and prayer behind any action creates the meaning (Interview, p. 14) and that stories relate to a particular place in time and geography that may not be transferable, although the Metis are a nomadic, landless people now. Julie shares the following information:

What many people today don't understand is that a lot of the old tales are associated with places and don't translate well out of context. They are stories that belong to the land itself though they may be about human heroes or animals. We called them 'dishenhach.' For example, behind the waterfall at the end of the lake there's a cave. An old woman lives in that cave and if you take her an offering and are brave enough to spend the night there she will heal a sick relative. This didn't mean you could go to any lake and find that old woman, only that particular lake had a spirit that honoured bravery with healing (Interview, p. 9).

### *Stories Through Books*

While a number of participants did not have much exposure to books during their early lives, a few participants (Sarah, Peter, and Marie) reported enjoying books as a child. Peter explained that his dad was the town schoolteacher who believed in the importance of reading. Some participants report being guided to their Metis culture by books, particularly later in their lives. Sarah believes that sharing knowledge through stories is very important: "Sharing! Because there's so much institutional and academic ignorance about Metis or anything" (Interview, p. 34).

Sarah reports being guided by writers such as Greg Scofield, Richard Van Camp, Basil Johnson, and that she is exasperated by Native writer Sherman Alexie's deprecating views about mixed-race peoples. Julie said that the book *Halfbreed* by Marie Campbell

was “a very enlightening experience” (Interview, p. 1). Julie also comments on the role of stories in the development of her cultural pride:

The times when I have been the most proud of being Metis have been when I’ve read or heard stories about famous or not so famous Metis people. At other times it has been when I have acted as a cross-cultural workshop facilitator helping different groups to understand one another (Interview, p. 5).

Julie is now writing books to share her perspective of “seeing the world through tribal eyes” (Interview, p. 5). Lucy has written a book about the spiritual knowing that has guided her on her healing path. Sarah, Rose, Aline, Patty and Peter have done a lot of historical reading, trying to place the experience of their family into the larger Metis history. Peter spoke about being moved, later in life, by Duke Redbird’s book *I Am Metis*. Patty reports being influenced by Lee Maracle’s *I Am Woman*.

#### *Stories that Guide, Soothe, and Teach*

Susan remembers that her dad used to tell stories that were both soothing in times of difficulty and educational, with the aim of keeping the children safe and out of trouble (Interview, p. 55). She remembers her dad telling her brother that:

If you wear your shoes on the wrong feet you will meet a bear. Her brother didn’t listen and wore his shoes on the wrong feet. That morning, Susan’s brother did indeed meet a bear in the woods. After that, he always put his shoes on properly (Interview, p. 55).

Patty recalls stories that made fun of people who were acting inappropriately, such as bragging, or fighting (Interview, p. 12).

There was this young guy who was bragging about how well he could ride a motorcycle. He told everybody but he really didn’t understand anything, and then there was this spar that caught him in the bum. Everybody just thought this was hilarious, ’cause it showed how he was talking too much (Interview, p. 2).

Patty shared another family story that taught children how to behave:

My Auntie D. and Uncle M. went up into the mountains when they were kids. They were hiking around and M. pushed D. down the hill and she lost an eye. This story was always told to me when I was fighting with my cousins. It would often begin ‘remember what happened to your Auntie D.!’ (Interview, p. 2).

Julie was told stories about witches and scary creatures one might meet in the bush, like the bush babies or the Sasquatch. She remembers: “Old people would tell stories to kids to keep them from wandering away and getting lost” (Interview, p. 9).

Marie has a story that serves as a humorous guide for how to behave:

It was the Christmas holidays. Cousins, friends, uncles and aunts were over, the women sitting around the table talking, the men playing good old Majeur and sampling Dad’s wine. The kids were playing upstairs. It was getting pretty hot downstairs and the wine was flowing fairly good at that point. We were getting out of hand upstairs, jumping on the bed and dancing around. Little to our knowledge, the hook holding the oil lamp above Dad’s head was working itself loose with all the jumping. The card game was pretty exciting. Dad was holding a hand with Louis \_\_\_\_\_ at his right side. At that moment, the lights went out for Dad as the lamp had fallen from the ceiling, hitting him on the head and knocking him out cold. We all ran down the stairs. There lay Dad out flat. We thought we had killed him. In a few minutes he had recovered, but only to think that Louis had hit him because he was holding the royal Majeur. It took a couple of minutes to get it through Dad’s head that Louis was not to blame. And he did not deserve the abuse he was about to receive (Interview, p. 22, originally told by Lorraine Dumont).

Julie believes that some higher knowledge may be transmitted through the storyteller. For her, telling stories feels like a way of letting someone talk through her:

Sometimes it is almost like the spirits are talking through me. A part of me goes away and I let them speak. This doesn’t happen so much anymore because not so many are interested in hearing about such things (Interview, p. 14).

Many participants report being guided by the example of Metis people who have devoted themselves to serving the Metis people.

*Metis Leaders and Historical Figures as Guides*

Many Metis relate to the examples of historical Metis figures and those in positions of leadership as models of serving one's community. All of the Metis participants report having been moved by the story of Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumont and their contribution to the Metis people. Many participants found that they did not relate to the version of Riel's story they received in school, where Riel was portrayed as a crazy man. In some cases, hearing family members talk about Riel provided a sense of connection and cultural pride. Roland remembers his grandmother in an old age home in Saskatchewan talking about Riel. Julie shared that she has been guided spiritually by the teachings of Riel:

But what is Metis spirituality? Is it a separate thing from Native or European religions? And what of Metis culture, for that matter? Is it only that of the roadsides and Red River people? Certainly the visions of Riel and others would lead me to believe it is more, but I question how their descendants are applying it today (Interview, p. 4).

Sarah shared that her great-great grandfather was a spy for Gabriel Dumont and that his father was killed at the battle of Frog Lake. Marie reports that a number of Gabriel Dumont's possessions are held by various family members, who are among Dumont's many descendants. Marie has an ancestor who was killed at the Battle of Duck Lake (Interview, p. 15). She also had an ancestor that was killed in the Battle of Batoche. She reports that out of all her relatives, "probably everyone," would have been involved at Batoche. She spoke about the Metis resistance as an integral part of her family's history. Madeleine reports having an ancestor that was seen as "stupid enough to get himself killed at Batoche" (Interview, p. 13).

It is an interesting historical fact that some Metis soldiers fought on the side of the government, largely because this was their job. For example, I have a Metis ancestor who was killed at Batoche, fighting on behalf of the government. Marie reports having an ancestor who fought for the government troops, but had a “day off” on the day of the battle at Batoche in 1885 (Interview, p. 14). Luckily, he was saved the torment of fighting against his own people.

*Humour, Teasing, and Jokes as Guides to Metis Ancestry*

A number of participants identified humour, jokes, and teasing as clues to their Metis ancestry. There were the kinds of jokes that families told amongst themselves, as well as the more offensive kinds of teasing inflicted by others. Throughout a period of denied ancestry, Patty remembers family members saying to her, “Oh, you look like the most Indian one out of us all.”

Roland remembered he and his dad being questioned by neighbours:

When we lived out on the farm, my dad was standing out on the deck, and a neighbour came out and asked him, ‘What kind of race are you guys and what heritage are you guys?’ And he said, ‘Heinz 57’ (Interview, p. 6).

Although self-deprecating in nature, humour about ancestry is used to relieve tension in potentially uncomfortable situations. For Patty, the sharing of jokes about the Aboriginal ancestry in her family meant “some kind of stuff came out there.” Rose recalls family jokes about Native ancestry:

It’s very strange because when I was a kid people would ask about Indian ancestry and my grandmother denied it so heatedly and so frequently that it became a family joke. People would say ‘Oh, it must be that Indian ancestry’ to get my grandmother to react, and then we’d all laugh. And so, in some ways, did I know then? And I didn’t consciously know because I asked my grandmother, ‘Well, do we?’ and she said, ‘No, no!’ And I asked my mother and she said, ‘No, no!’ And yet I was asking the question because it was sort of like the elephant in

the room that nobody will talk about. . . . One day I came home, or went back to the home town for a visit, and was late and knocked on my aunt's door. She opened the door and I said, 'Sorry I'm late – it must be that Indian blood!', which was the family joke. And she said, 'Well, we've got it!' (Interview, pp. 4-5).

Metis songwriter Dana Lynn Seaborn (2004) uses humour and self-irony to portray the mixed quality of being Metis. Her tune "I'm Metis" contains the following verse:

My bison horns are hanging on the gate  
 My pemmican is used on a china plate  
 And my canot du nord's on top of my RV  
 Because I'm free to be me, I'm Metis  
 Well, my skin is pretty pale beneath my tan  
 I drive a two-tone red and white sedan  
 And I've got real rabbit ears on my TV  
 Because I'm free to be me, I'm Metis.

Humour is an important element of many stories. Humour can also serve as an act of resistance against despair and racism.

### *Racism and Despair*

Despair is a response to the racism and exclusion that the Metis participants report having to deal with in their lives. The participants share a number of stories that caused them despair. For example, Julie recalls "being called 'four-eyed squaw' throughout my school years" (Interview, p. 1). She shares an example of the exclusion she has experienced in her life: "I'm either too White for Native tastes and so mistrusted, or too Native and alien for White tastes when I let it out that I'm not just like them" (Interview, p. 4).

Both Peter and Helene comment about the difficulties for a "halfbreed" moving from a small town to a big city. Peter refers to it as "the urban thing" (Interview, p. 4).

It was a hard thing to be halfbreeds living in north Edmonton in 1950. We were the odd family on the block, so that the whole urban experience flowed out of the kind of idyllic Lac Ste. Ann village atmosphere into a hard urban place where you are brown, and most of the people are White (Peter, Interview, p. 4).

Helene shares a similar experience:

Someone called my sister a halfbreed in a negative way. Parents of my sister's boyfriend told her son our mother was part Indian and told him to break up with her. He later felt bad about it and apologized, but it was too late (Interview, p. 2).

She feels strongly about the importance of telling Metis children about their heritage before they get married: "Tell your future spouse about your Metis heritage. You don't want it to come back at you later. The men in our family were racist and used our heritage to insult us."

Helen later shares a painful story, among many:

When I was married my husband would refer to me as a 'squaw' when he wanted to be cruel. He would make me walk behind him and when I asked why he wouldn't wait for me he said, 'That's where the squaws walk.' I wouldn't want my kids to know that (Interview, p. 2)

Madeleine is a Metis elder and offers council to other Metis people. She states: "I am an elder for all the dislocated, disenfranchised Metis. It is this common yet unshared experience that holds us together as a people" (Interview, p. 12).

Some Metis participants, who have been recent university students, also share some painful experiences. Patty recalls a university professor telling her that she is White because she has white skin. Patty tried to assert her Metisness:

And then going to a conference two summers ago, with an instructor talking about how we were all White, and then 'No, I'm Metis,' and them saying 'Well, you look White, so you are White!' I constantly need to fight to prove who I am. And [I'm] not liking that at all (Interview, p. 8).

Patty also shares the following story regarding her postsecondary education:

I remember I wrote a paper in one of my Aboriginal classes about myself as a non-Aboriginal person and talking about Aboriginal issues, because I just thought it would be easier than having to explain who I was and deal with other people's reactions to that. . . . I felt, in terms of my paper, that it would be easier for the teacher to mark if I identified this way (Interview, p. 6).

Julie reports some of the difficulties she faced as a result of racism:

I was teased about being a four-eyed squaw, and later in my teens treated worse. My mother was dying of cancer by that time so I had little time away to worry about prejudice. Where I lived discrimination was more subtly veiled rather than thrust in your face. If I had a choice I think I'd prefer to have it out in the open. At least then you know where you stand. Subtle prejudice is even more hard to deal with than the shotgun on the rack of the pickup variety, because no one comes out and says anything direct so you never know if you are just imagining things or just being over-sensitive. With overt racism one can put up a defence, but with this other a person is left unsure, and somehow feeling that everything is your fault (Interview. p. 2).

These stories demonstrate some of the experiences that have caused despair for the Metis participants. Although the Metis participants have shared situations that have caused despair, they have also shared strategies for coping and surviving in various non-Metis worlds.

### *Coping in Non-Metis Worlds*

#### *In the White World*

Metis participants were asked to comment on their process of moving in between Metis and non-Metis worlds. Participants described various strategies for travelling through various non-Metis worlds – from a Metis world, through a no-man's-land, and into the White world or the First Nations world. For example, Roland said he spent most of his life living as a White person, so "it's not hard for me to blend in" (Interview, p. 10). Helene relies on a religious belief to cope in all worlds. "Knowing we are all human and equal in God's eyes" helps her to travel in non-Metis worlds (Interview, p.2). She

adds, "I think I am the same everywhere. My Metisness is invisible" (Interview, p. 2).

Lucy believes she is the same person wherever she goes: "'Cause as I said, I look White, don't I? I mean maybe some people know that I'm not really, but you're the same person wherever you go, basically" (Interview, p. 7).

Lucy does not believe that she makes any kind of identity shifts in order to move between worlds. Patty finds that operating in the different worlds is like "putting on your different hats, and still being the same person in all of them" (Interview, p. 9). Rose believes, "I'm like a White person in the White world" (Interview, p. 20). Aline states that she is able to function well in the White world but senses that it isn't really her:

I feel like I function fine. Like, I don't know, like I feel like I've grown up in the White world. I guess I've just always assumed I was White, like that's who I was, even though I had people like ask me, since I was maybe a teenager, or yeah, ask me where I am from. . . . I think I've grown up a certain way and was, sort of taught to be a certain way. And I kind of feel like that wasn't really me (Interview, p. 8).

Others speak about "passing" in the White world where their Metisness may be invisible if they have light skin. Julie says that "sometimes, because I am so light-skinned, I just pass, and the subject of ethnicity doesn't arise (Interview, p. 6). For Julie, being herself and moving successfully through the different worlds is a matter of psychological integration and drawing from Aboriginal traditions: "I learned early how to integrate different parts of myself better than many others. Knowing a lot about the old traditions gave me a base on which to build" (Interview, p. 8).

Thus, Julie has found a strategy to draw strength from her Metis teachings that helps her in all worlds. For health reasons, Julie also employed a strategy of retreat as a means of psychological survival, attributing "the bush life" as a form of resistance to poverty and alienation. When her health continued to decline, she was forced to move to

an urban centre to access health care services. She shares the following view of urban life:

Urban life isolates us and makes us vulnerable. Family members move away from each other and we get separated. It's all part of a bigger plan to stamp out tribalism and make the next generation all good consumers in the market place (Interview, p. 8).

Thus, even though she has tools for survival, Julie views the White world as a distinct threat to Aboriginal living for Metis people. She does not perceive White ways as advantageous for Metis people.

Sarah discusses the ideas of Metis writer Warren Cariou (2002) who talks about gaining advantage from looking White:

You know, basically I've always been in the White world. So, you know, I have gotten the advantages of, you know, being White. Going to university, getting my PhD, you know, if I was darker, or looked more Native, it could have been a lot more different (Interview, p. 11).

Peter tells about his reaction to being in the White world:

When I was in the White world and trying to be White I was reacting to everything around me that was successful: working hard at working hard, working hard at having common values with common men around me that were not Metis; they were all White. And adapting to that culture and taking its values. . . . I tried very hard to do it, but I never quite made it (Interview, pp. 6-7).

Peter's strategy for moving between worlds is to play various roles. He says that after spending a few days working in the White world, he needs to spend time recovering at his cabin by a quiet lake (Interview, p. 9). He shares: "Because I think that it's difficult always. You're playing a role that's difficult, so you need your perks and your rest from it" (Interview, p. 9).

Susan tells a story about her family's "difference" from others in the White world:

First of all, when I was a child growing up, for example, every summer we were away for long periods of time, camping out in the bush and just spending a few

weeks to a couple of months out camping and not doing anything else. And the kids at that time were me and my brother and whichever other cousin or kid we'd have with us at the time. We really had tons of freedom. And this is really normal. But then we'd go back to school and it wouldn't be normal. . . . And then I got to be a teenager and noticed that 'Oh, not all families do that and it's kind of different and why does your family do it and not every other family do it.' So as a teenager, I just wondered why we did it and also like we had tons of family coming to visit us all the time. And family that wasn't anything like any of my friends' family. I had uncles with no teeth and [who] dressed really funny and kind of like hillbillies and things like this. And it was a joke amongst my friends, like "Oh, Susan's uncles are in town," you know, and it was really laughable (Interview, p. 10).

In summary, most participants found operating in the White world to be trying. They feel they don't quite fit and they employ strategies for coping and survival. These strategies include returning home, or to Metis spaces, to rest and recover. They need to find a place where they can be themselves, and feel accepted without needing to explain themselves. In addition to moving through various worlds, and spending time in the White world, being in the First Nations world is also reportedly difficult for most Metis participants.

### *In the First Nations World*

Patty reports, "Sometimes I'm nervous round being a Metis person [in a First Nations context] 'cause I feel like that's frowned upon" (Interview, p. 8). Susan reports:

Like in B.C., I kind of felt like the First Nations communities are very strong. And I felt when I was working here sometimes that I somehow had to prove myself as being Aboriginal enough, or Native enough (Interview, p. 38).

Aline reports feeling insecure at a First Nations powwow, thinking that others are saying "why is [that White woman] here?" (Interview, p. 8). Susan says laughingly that she is "defensively hostile" in the First Nations world (Interview, p. 22):

That might be a little bit of an overstatement, well I don't know about hostile but I am defensive. Well I feel like I'm going to be looked at as a White person unless I

self-identify, at which point I assume I'm going to be looked at as a 'wanna-be Indian,' and I am aware that a lot of First Nations people don't know much if anything about the Metis, especially on the west coast, and that a lot of the First Nations people who don't know about the Metis don't care because they see them as being newcomers or a result of Europeans coming to this continent to begin with, so they're not okay, or there may be an embarrassment because of all the First Nations women who went with White men for whatever reasons. They don't want to acknowledge that. So all those things are in my mind when I'm in a First Nations context . . . So I don't relax (Interview, p. 23).

Rose says she puts on her armour when she is travelling through the different worlds (Interview., p. 27).

Peter recalls humorously that his Metis ancestors had the view that Indians were horse thieves. Today he is spending more time working in the First Nations world, as compared to before when the worlds were more separate (Interview, p. 8). Sarah believes that her confidence is increasing in the First Nations world:

But I am finding that I am getting better at being in the First Nations world. I am still kind of shy and cautious. . . . I get more confident, and I think, 'Yes, okay, I don't look Native, but I am, right.' And I travel between the three worlds (Interview, p. 11).

Julie shares the following about her experience in the First Nations world:

I'd like to say I feel more at home, but that isn't always the case. Now that I am older and am seen as an elder it is better, but when I was younger I faced a lot of prejudice from Natives because I am very light skinned. I still feel a bit nervous when I am around full-bloods that I don't know well. They don't always treat me like a Native, figure I'm just another 'wanna-be.' That used to hurt most of all (Interview, p. 7).

Lucy says that she has always felt comfortable in the First Nations world and that her first husband was a Native man (Interview, p. 7). She enjoyed her experience at a pan-Aboriginal treatment centre. However, the majority of Metis participants expressed some personal discomfort and experienced some challenges of not belonging in the First Nations world. Due to the struggles for the Metis in the White and First Nations worlds, it

seems important to Metis participants to have a place of respite where they can go to rejuvenate and be with other Metis.

*The Importance of a Third Space: A Metis Psychological Homeland*

All but one participant talked about the importance of having a Metis world where they can be with other Metis. Participants described Metis worlds as: at home; with a grandmother; with Metis family; in a Metis organization; with a group of Metis people; at a Metis gathering; at Metis conferences; in the bush; camping; sitting with a group of people singing and fiddling; and in a place of the spirit. They talked about the importance of coming together with other Metis to be themselves, to share stories, to not have to explain themselves, to rest, to laugh, and to experience culture.

Marie experiences a sense of acceptance and normalcy when she is with other Metis people:

When you are together with other Metis people, it's a pleasure. But otherwise you're always ashamed. It's really true. Always have that feeling you're inferior and you don't believe it, but it's true (p. 29).

Susan tells that she is most comfortable around other Metis people: "So like within my own community, I feel the most comfortable [with] other Metis people that I know and hang around with, and being friends with them I really try to nurture those relationships" (Interview, p. 42).

Susan shares a story of acceptance she experienced at a Metis conference:

There was a room full of Metis people and people who really – it was strange – it was like almost sometimes like the same sense of humour as my own family, and sometimes really a lot of reinforcing for the way I was brought up, and for my background and things that happened. I can remember, it was like this guy was flirting with me while I was there and I said something about – they were talking about hunting – and I said, 'Oh yeah, I grew up eating moose meat' or something like this. . . . And he said, 'Wow, and you eat moose meat as well, gosh, will you

marry me now?’ And it was so, like it was kind of funny, like it was so reinforcing. Suddenly it was like it wasn’t weird, and it wasn’t strange and it wasn’t like . . . you didn’t have to explain it (Interview, p. 17).

Patty shares her feelings of confidence when she is in the Metis world:

I think I’m more confident in the Metis world, like I feel better that I am able to articulate who I am and what the issues are for Metis people as well as myself, as a Metis person, better than in any other setting (Interview, p. 9).

Most participants stated that being in a place that was primarily Metis, such as in a family member’s home, a Metis gathering, or a Metis organization, helped them to experience a sense of comfort, belonging, and of feeling at home. Julie states: “I have always been a bit of a rebel and outcast. Perhaps that is why I have wandered so far from home looking for people who shared my dreams” (Interview, p. 2).

Rose shared that being in a Metis space was like finding “a place to land.” She says that “people looked like my family.” Peter shared, “I feel like this is where I’m supposed to be.” Being Metis is “like living and breathing.” Aline talks about a sense of trust when she is in a Metis place: “I think for me there’s definitely a trust to hear people’s stories and to me like how we’re connected or whatever, or just kind of hearing stuff like that or other people’s dreams” (Interview, p. 8).

However, Julie did not share the sense of belonging in the Metis community.

I suppose it would be nice to say I feel more Metis at Metis gatherings or other places where a strong Metis and Native presence is apparent, but that wouldn’t be completely true. The sad fact is that even among the Metis there is prejudice, and it is often related to family or skin colour, especially in the prairie provinces (Interview, p. 4).

Here, Julie is commenting upon the existence of the “need to prove oneself” that accompanies being Metis and exists in all cultural worlds.

Susan says that when she is in the White world she wants to “defend, protect, or hide, not share things . . . not make myself vulnerable” (Interview, p. 33). She says that university is “so outside Metisness,” and shares, “I believe it’s not really real and a lot of the things that go on there don’t really matter because I don’t feel a big connection to it, at all” (Interview, p. 36).

Patty recalled that the Metis setting where she worked was “a place of warmth and solace.” Peter states that he feels “a bond” when he is with other Metis in a Metis setting (Interview, p. 8). He recalls having that experience as a child when he would sit on the porch with his grandmother:

But I guess also my very early experiences with my granny \_\_\_\_\_. Just the example that I saw about how she lived and what was important to her and who came around to visit and what they talked about when they came around. And just the sense of belonging that I felt in her company was profound. She gave me pemmican from a leather bag off her back porch, that’s where it’s kept. And it was like a prize: I could have one finger full (Interview, p. 4).

Julie feels no particular sense of belonging “at Metis gatherings or other places where a strong Metis and Native presence is apparent,” and believes that politics have overtaken cultural and spiritual activity:

In other, more urban places I have lived, the Metis organizations are often set up to deal with very practical issues like social work and court cases, as well as promoting small businesses whenever possible. All these things are very good, and definitely needed, but without some sense of culture and spirituality I am left feeling empty in my soul (Interview, p. 4).

Lucy shares that she feels “not quite as comfortable” in the Metis world as in the First Nations world. This may be due to the increasingly stringent definitions of who is Metis.

In this chapter I have presented an overview of what the interview participants shared about their experience of being Metis, and about their Metis self-formation

process. I have shared some of their stories, in their words, to demonstrate how they use stories in various ways to bring themselves into being. In the next chapter, "Stories Meet Stories," I talk about the participants' stories and stories from the literature, and analyze the places where they meet.

## CHAPTER SIX: STORIES MEET STORIES

In this chapter, Metis personal stories meet stories found in theoretical and published literature about the Metis, about the narrative self-formation process, and about post-colonial experience. In this study a number of plot lines and intertwined themes have emerged. Some of these plot lines and narrative threads are shared between different stories and tie them together in some way (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The plot lines experienced by participants include the following, in no particular order: invisibility; exclusion; being in between; identity confusion; racism; despair; resistance; survival; belonging. There are many ways to say the same thing, and I have chosen these particular words to portray the panorama of Metis experience as shared by research participants. After some deliberation, I chose these words to represent the overlapping themes that encapsulate Metis participant experience and to link this experience to the literature.

Although stories are personal and unique they can also have narrative intersections that create relationship between different stories (Riessman, 1993, p.2).

Feminist writer Susan Griffin (1992, in Riessman, 1993) reminds us:

We forget that we are history. . . We are not used to associating our private lives with public events. Yet the histories of families cannot be separated from the histories of nations. To divide them is part of our denial (pp. 4, 11).

Each Metis person is shaped by their history and is continuously responding to the context that was constructed generations back. The participants' stories portray Metis experience and offer Metis-centered explanations of this experience. Presenting their Metis-centered interpretation is crucial in the analysis of this study.

It is important that the Metis are not cast as deficient or stereotypical in their stories, as they often are when analyzed through Euro-centric lenses. Metis participants

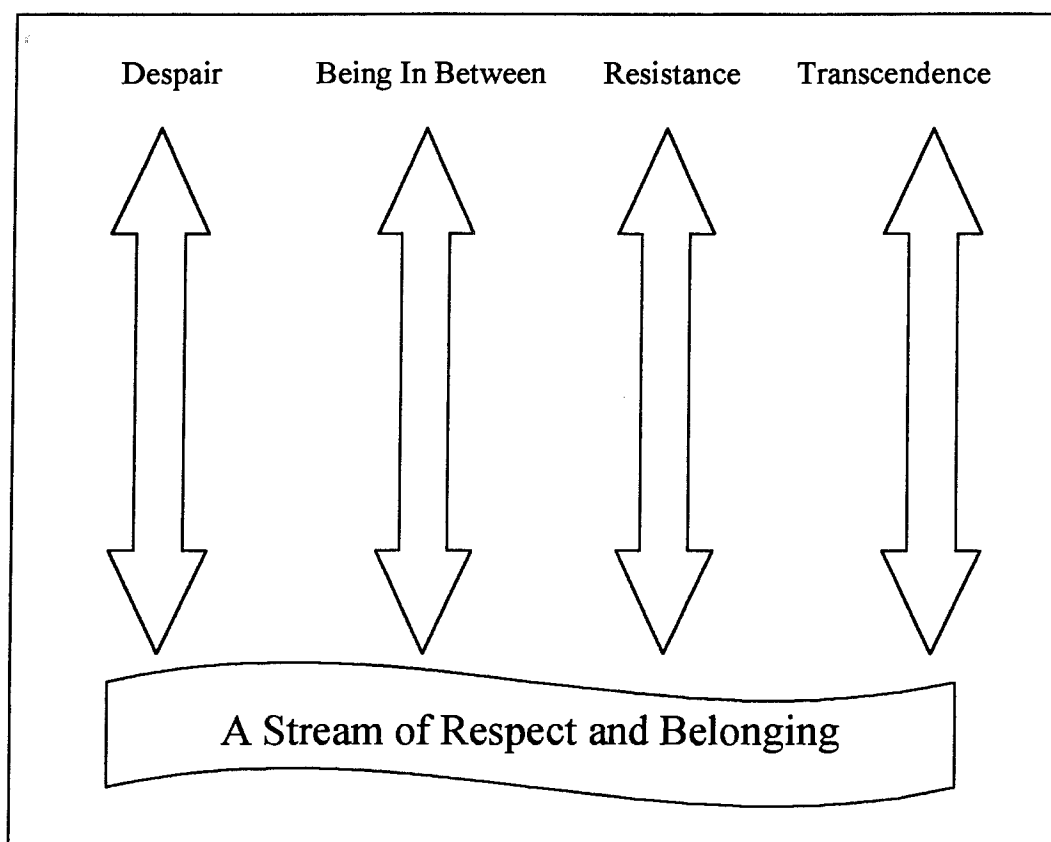
cast themselves as proficient, humorous, misunderstood, compassionate, frustrated, sad, reflective, challenging authority, and resisting imposed interpretations of their experience. Their stories represent a broad spectrum of experience and emotion. Metis people “have” a story and they “are” a story (Randall, 1997), and they do not pathologize themselves in their stories. The participants’ stories counter despair and promote their survival and belonging. In these stories, the Metis protagonists offer counter-explanations to many of the determinist theories that have been applied to them by social scientists and social engineers.

Emergent from participants’ stories are strategies for “managing” (Goffman, 1963) and “resisting” (Reissman, 2000) the challenges of being mixed-race, colonized people in Euro-Canadian society. These strategies are depicted in the following model, “Four Ways of Living the Situation.”

#### *Four Ways of Living the Situation*

I have encapsulated the plot lines into four major categories: despair; being in between; resistance; transcendence. In the face of these challenges, Metis participants find sources of belonging and respect to counter the challenges of being Metis. The following diagram (Fig. 6.1) illustrates some of the themes and how they interact to form a Metis strategy for survival.

*Fig. 6.1 Diagram of a Metis Survival Strategy*



Foundational in the lives of Metis participants is the need for respect and for belonging. This is their ethos and their praxis (marriage of theory and practice). In other words, Metis participants have repeatedly articulated a theory that involves respect and dignity being allotted to all humans generally and to Metis people specifically. They seek this for themselves and their families. They use stories to teach the importance of respect. I present and analyze these stories throughout the course of this chapter.

#### *A Foundation of Belonging*

The participants talk about the need to experience belonging in order to feel rooted, culturally and psychologically, in their lives. Julie sums up this quest for belonging by saying, "I have always been a bit of a rebel and outcast. Perhaps that is why

I have wandered so far from home looking for people who share my dreams” (Interview, p.2).

Julie may be seeking the kind of place that Goffman (1963) talks about – a place where people of shared suffering can come together for support. Historically, some Canadians have found safety and a good life at the expense of other Canadians, mostly without knowing it. Cultural psychologist Monica McGoldrick (1998) articulates the importance of safety and belonging for all individuals within a society – a belonging that has largely eluded the Metis and left them to experience despair and disrespect: “We must not seek safety that jeopardizes others or denies them their own sense of belonging and spiritual connection” (p. 210).

Social oppression, and the resulting diaspora, have jeopardized the Metis’ survival as a people. Metis activist Dana Lynn Seaborn states: “The Metis are more likely to go to jail than to attend postsecondary education” (personal communication, October 2003).

In many traditional Aboriginal belief systems, the notion of interconnectedness keeps people accountable for how they treat others. A slogan for the First Nations Education Division in Victoria reads:

The honour of one is the honour of all.  
The suffering of one is the suffering of all.

The Metis participants share stories about their suffering due to racism and exclusion in Canada. The participants believe they deserve respect, and deserve to have a place to belong, as do all other human beings. Helene believes: “we are all equal in God’s eyes,” regardless of race or ethnicity. She does not believe that some people are superior to others based on race or skin colour.

### *Despair*

Despair emerged for participants in response to the racism and injustice they experience in their lives. Despair is an evoked emotional response to a state of injustice. Despair serves a number of functions and is seen theoretically in different ways. It is linked to a process of decolonization identified as mourning (Laernui, 2000). Laernui (2000) identifies mourning as the first phase of the decolonization process wherein “people are able to lament their victimization” (p. 154). Despair is a form of resistance and demonstrates that the individual refuses to be contented with oppression and mistreatment (Coates & Wade, 2004). Despair is linked to grief and mourning.

Native American theorists Duran and Duran (1995) believe that grieving is a process that was denied colonized people in the traumatic disruption caused while receiving Europeans and their cultural ways in North America. Although the initial colonization took place generations back, Metis people are coming to terms with what was lost as a result of European colonization. Sarah states that, after a day of witnessing racism and injustice, “sometimes it’s too much and I just go to bed and cry” (Interview, p. 16).

Julie, Aline, Marie, Roland, and Madeleine say that they experience sadness when they think about the cultural loss of the Metis, and when they remember departed loved ones who were important links to the cultural past. Marie feels sadness when she misses her departed mother and came to tears when thinking about her during the interview. When asked what happens when she tells Metis stories, Aline responds, “Right now, I feel a sense of sadness and grief” (p. 3). Aline links this sadness to the loss of her grandmother and the loss of access to cultural information.

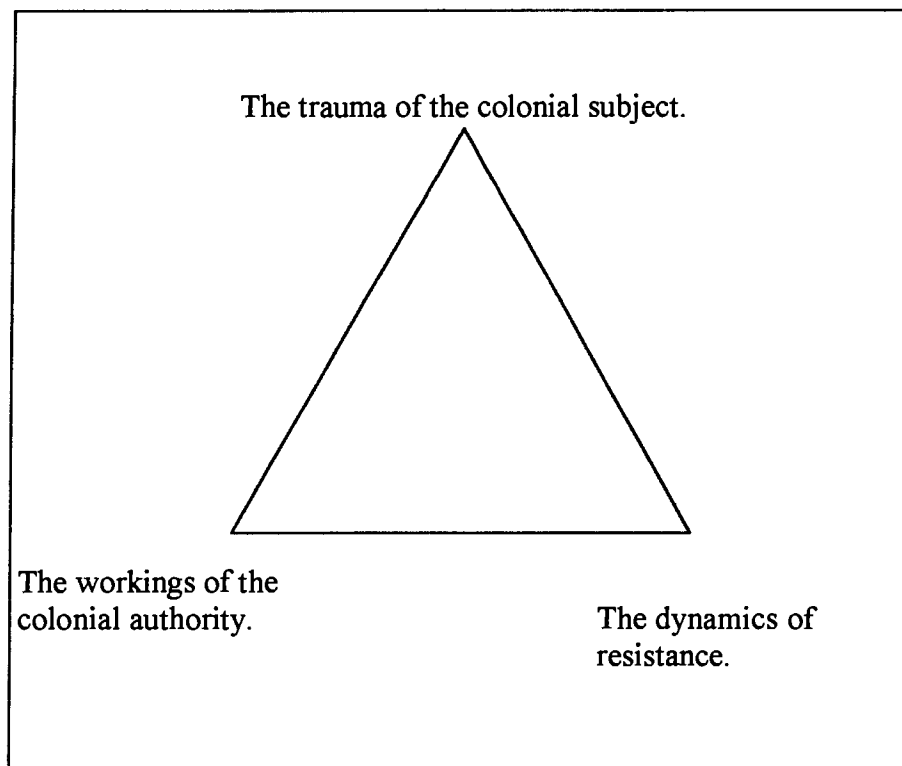
Metis participants often identified a key person who served as a link to the Metis family history and stories. Peter told of the immense belonging he experienced with his grandmother, and the joy in being offered some pemmican out of her leather pouch as a special treat. Some participants (Roland, Peter, Aline, and Rose) identify grandmothers as being important transmitters of culture, and find their passing to be very difficult. Lucy believes that “the ancestors are calling you back to your people” (Interview, p. 12).

*Being In-Between: Different Views of Hybridity*

Julie finds herself as caught between cultures, and sees herself as a bridge between these cultures (Interview, p. 2). Postcolonial writers have a lot to say about being a colonized, hybrid person. Theorist Shohat (1993) insists that we discriminate between the diverse modalities of hybridity. She lists these as forced assimilation, internalized self-rejection, political co-optation, forced conformism, cultural mimicry, and creative transcendence (p. 110). Postcolonial writer Parry (1994, in Loomba, 1998) describes the way that most Metis feel or act in an opposition to the forces of their colonization. He believes that current invocations of hybridity, within post-colonial theory downplay the bitter tension and the clash between the colonizers and the colonized, and therefore misrepresent the dynamics of anti-colonial struggle (p. 180). While Metis participants did not speak of bitterness, they did speak about the endless need to explain themselves to other people. Their strategies for living help them to avoid living in bitterness. They aspire to live according to their own values and not merely in response to others. They talked about the importance of coming together with other Metis people, which I address in the upcoming section on a Metis third space.

Bhabha (1983) has developed his own tripartite model for the consideration of the hybrid experience, illustrated below in Fig. 6.2.

*Fig. 6.2 Bhabha's Tripartite Model*



I have touched on the trauma of colonization at various points in this dissertation. While colonized people experience trauma, it is problematic to attribute their suffering to 'post-traumatic stress' because it shifts the emphasis from colonization and violence to a psychological disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, p. 218). Violence and oppression are located in social interaction, not within the mind of the oppressed. The problem of colonized people is not their internal psychology but the oppression and power abuses that exist, both historically and currently, in their lives.

As explained earlier in this dissertation, I have outlined a conceptual model of three worlds with a cultural no-man's-land in the middle. The 'third space' Metis world

offers an alternative to being caught between the White world (first space) and the First Nations world (second space), and experiencing belonging in neither. Metis participants demonstrate numerous survival strategies for working and living in the White world, while resisting the inculcation of the dominant cultural values. Resistance theorist Collins (1990) states: “Although avoidance strategies run the danger of self-imposed exile, the everyday resistance (of women) allows a measure of control – safe spaces where they can resist objectification” (1990, in Riessman, 2000, p. 124).

Although some resistance theorists (Collins, 1990, 1997; Goffman, 1963; Riessman, 2000) talk about strategic avoidance as a resistance strategy, the Metis do not have the option of completely removing themselves from the White world. However, emotional distancing and retaining private thoughts help them to cope. Therefore, some of the feelings of “not-fitting in” are self-generated, as participants share a sense of “not wanting to belong to that club.” Participants employ strategies for existing outside the Metis world.

One participant prepares herself for moving between White and Metis spaces:

No, you know, I do ‘prep’ in my head. And again it’s like, to me, I never think of them as separate worlds because I recognize that all the worlds are connected. It’s like putting on your different hat and still being the same person in all of them (Patty, Interview, p. 9).

Again, we see the acknowledgement that all things are interconnected, along with the acknowledgement that the Metis need to adapt to the different spaces. Postcolonial theorist Arif Duvlik (1994, in Loomba, 1998) reminds us that “conditions of ‘in-betweenness’ must be considered and hybridity cannot be understood without reference to the ideological, institutional structures in which they are housed” (p. 180). For the Metis, this means acknowledging the system of imperial practices that exist in the White

world today – including colonial discourse which is used to objectify the ‘other’ as deficient, and a medical/psychological system that pathologizes difference and where difference is seen as a failing rather than as a cultural difference (Gussow & Tracy, 1968, in Riessman, 2000). One of the things to note about being objectified is that the practice of European psychology sees people being affected by events, and through this lens, ignores their attempts to resist their subjugation, or sees them as pathological signs of weakness (Wade, 1997, 2000, 2002, in Riessman, 2000). However, as Riessman (2000) points out, “in the empirical world there are countless instances in which individuals disavow the dominant perspective” (p. 114).

Through this lens, the Metis, and particularly Louis Riel, have been cast as violent, deficient, mentally ill, desperate and savage. The country (and soldiers) that attacked the Metis, in 1869 and 1885, are cast as heroes, nation builders, good citizens, and just. This is depicted nationally in the public school curriculum. Most participants report being cast as deficient by members of the White world, and numerous examples of this were reported in Chapter Six, “What People Said.”

Writer Parry (1994, in Loomba, 1998) believes that current invocations of hybridity within post-colonial theory suggest they downplay the bitter tension and the clash between the colonizers and the colonized and therefore misrepresent the dynamics of anti-colonial struggle (p. 180). Duran and Duran (1995) write that: “European colonial logic universalizes the Western liberal discourse of civility to justify its authority while simultaneously denying the applicability of civility to native people” (p. 120).

The particular use of language in each space, is known as a ‘discursive strategy,’ to propagate a particular point of view (Coates & Wade, 2004). I will later demonstrate

for the need of a Metis third space, in which a Metis point of view can be developed and shared.

A number of methods are employed by interview participants to deal with being in-between. Some Metis employ self-care strategies to gather strength for moving between worlds and doing the work they do. Metis Elder Robert Donahue (personal communication, 2003) states: “Doing this work is really hard, and that is why we need a lot of time for rest, for contemplation, and for perks. Otherwise we probably couldn’t keep it up.” He refers to the work of being a Metis person trying to serve his or her Metis community, and all the challenges that accompany that task. Metis participants spoke about the responsibility they feel towards their community that leads them to service (Susan, Peter, Roland, Patty, Sarah, and Rose). In the above diagram of strategies for survival (Fig. 6.1), I have depicted a metaphorical stream which contains an elixir for some of the things to which Donahue was referring. In order to help others, participants talk about the need for ongoing self-strengthening and healing.

The image of the stream (of respect and belonging) contains a number of metaphors relevant to the Metis experience. These metaphors include the healing that can be experienced in the natural world, in being together with other Metis people where belonging and understanding are experienced, and a place where respect, kindness, and some emotional respite from the challenges of the Euro-Canadian world can be found. These metaphors tie into the themes of transcendence from suffering and the third space as a Metis refuge. The interview participants in this study were not people who had resorted to violence, suicide, or socially destructive behaviour in response to life’s challenges. One participant had engaged in self-medication in the form of alcohol, but

none of the participants expressed any current struggles with addiction, involvement in criminal activity, or overt forms of self-harm. Perhaps reflective of the kind of people who might be attracted to a research study, the participants are well-functioning individuals who live by the values of their Metis culture and participate in some kind of contemplative practice. Taking care of the inner self helps to deal with the outer world.

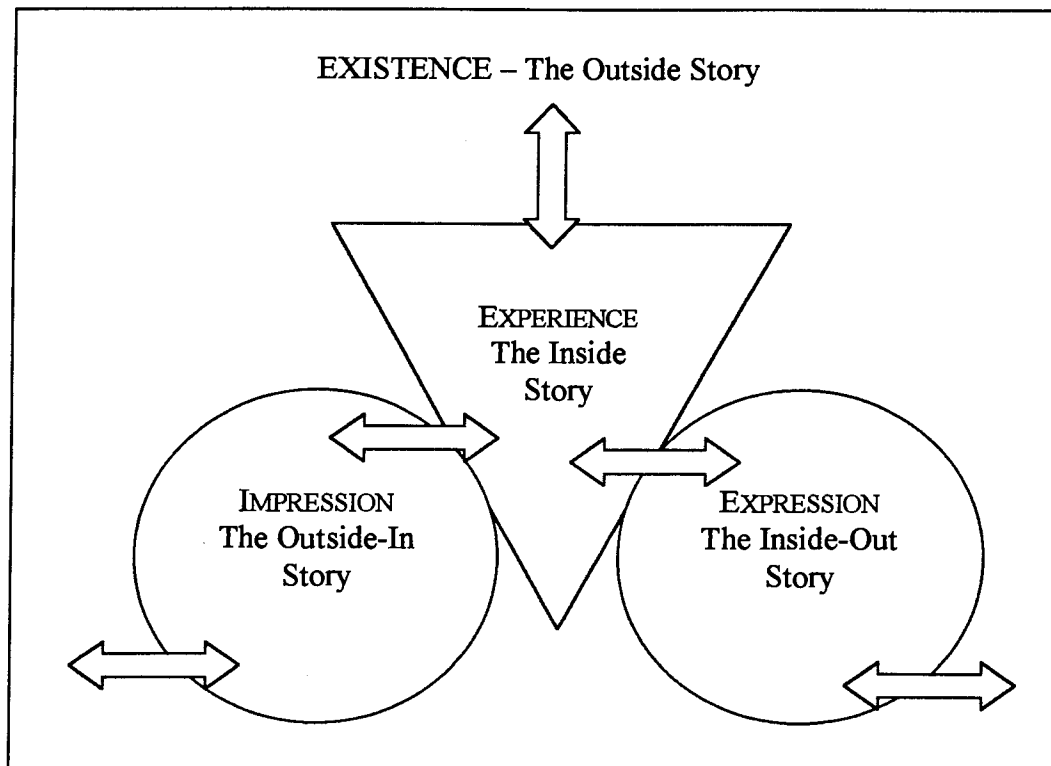
#### Inward/Outward Flow – Racism (Outer) and Resistance (Inner)

The dance of racism and resistance demonstrates the inward/outward flow described in narrative theory (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Randall, 1997) and in symbolic interactionism (Sarbin, 1986). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) refer to the flow between the participants' inner world – feelings, internal conditions, hopes, aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions – and their outer world – existential, environmental and historical conditions (p. 50). Throughout this process, the individual draws from the inner world and determines the course of action by asking a form of the question “Does this reflect the kind of person I want to be?” The belief in respect and dignity helps to produce respectful and dignified responses which help to create a respectful and dignified self.

Narrative theorist Randall (1997) describes a self-creation process, depicted below in Fig. 6.3, based on the integration of certain external information and experience. Randall (1997) illustrates a flow between outer events and inner experience. He describes a dialectical exchange between the inner and outer worlds taking place within the larger scheme of existence (the outside story). Within existence, experience (the inside story) is influenced by impression (the outside-in story) and expression (the inside-out story). In the illustration of this process, Randall (1997) writes:

I hope to show repeatedly, though, it is the continual interplay of these various levels – distinct yet related yet distinct – that constitutes so much of the mystery of my being and the complexity of even the simplest of my involvements with others. Somehow, woven together in one web, swirling about me as one world, all of them *are* ‘my life,’ all of them *are* ‘my self,’ and all of them *are* ‘my story’ (p. 61).

*Fig. 6.3 Randall's Narrative Self-Creation Process*



One of the interesting things that Randall notes is “just how little of our outside story actually makes it into our inside story, and why” (p. 61). Perception psychologist Berger (1963) observes that “of the near-infinite number of things that could be noticed in any given situation, such a tiny fraction are” (p. 56). This means that only a tiny segment of our total existence becomes our experience. Erving Goffman (1963) believes that the self is a “stance-taking entity,” and he attributes the selective integration of

information to the strategies people use to “manage” information about themselves.

Sarbin (1986) attributes this to the editorial process of the “I.”

The internal response to the external plays a large role in determining how the story will be authored, and how the sense of self is authored. Peter demonstrates this by practicing “aplomb,” which he was taught through stories. He reports that “aplomb” is the practice of “keeping a cool head in dangerous situations.” It offers a model of behaviour for times when you or your people are being threatened. This response can help minimize violence and promote safety in dangerous times.

According to Goffman (1963), the self participates in primary and secondary adjustments to deal with the outside world. Primary adjustments involve forms of resistance that take place within the thoughts of the individual and within existing structures, while secondary adjustments involve challenging the system and breaking rules. He believes that a strong form of resistance involves asking the system to provide what it promises to provide and to extend its promises to all members of society.

Violence theorist Nick Todd (in Coates et al., 2003) believes that victims of violence and abuse scour their consciousness and reflect on their own actions to make sure they are not acting in ways similar to those of their oppressor. As well, a form of “inverse moral response” takes place, where victims of abuse tend to take responsibility in inverse proportion to the perpetrator. Many forms of resistance are employed to mitigate negative experience and events that Metis people know are “not really about them,” often after extensively analyzing their part in the interaction.

### *Resistance*

Resistance refers to an internal move to counter difficulty and mistreatment. For example, interview participant Helene describes a process of observing her mother's attempts to hide her Metis identity, which resulted in the formation of a judgement that "it is/was awful" to be treated as "less than" and knowing that "that is unjust."

I figured [my Metis ancestry] out seeing my mother's attempts to hide it. I learned I was different, and Metis, because of other people's insults and reaction to us. It was awful to be seen as 'less than' (Interview, p. 1).

Generally, resistance is recognized as an action that is overt and physical, such as taking arms to resist an attack of government troops at Batoche. However, research has shown that resistance is ubiquitous, and whenever individuals are treated badly, they resist (Brown, 1991; Burstow, 1992; Kelly, 1988; Wade, 1995, 1997, 2000; Zemsky, 1991). Theorist Homi Bhabha (1985, in Loomba, 1998) believes:

Resistance is not necessarily an oppositional act of political intention, nor is it the simple negation or the exclusion of the 'content' of another culture, as difference once perceived [but] the effect of an ambivalence produced within the rules of recognition of dominating discourses as they articulate the signs of cultural difference (p. 177).

Metis participant Aline says the following about resistance:

When I talk to my Nuu-cha-nulth friends, they are very much linked to their language and culture and traditional food. My friend gets 50 salmon each year from her band. I think of the buffalo slaughter and how this impacted indigenous people on the prairies, it makes my heart ache. When I read about the Resistance (Northwest, 1885) I have mixed feelings – proud and also sad at the defeat. I also see resistance as a continual process. Metis people are not defeated, we are here and alive and are reclaiming who we are along with other Native peoples (p. 3).

Bhabha (1995, in Loomba, 1998) describes this process of existing between worlds as:

a doubling, dissembling image of being in at least two places at once which makes it impossible for the devalued, insatiable *évolué* (an abandoned neurotic, Fanon claims) to accept the colonizer's invitation to identity: you're a doctor, a writer, a student, you're different, you're 'one of us.' It is precisely in that ambivalent use of 'different' – to be different from those that are different makes you the same (p. 176).

Franz Fanon (1995) says that the colonial authorities invite mimicry, believing their ways to be superior and worthy of emulation. I find the term 'mimicry' to be degrading towards the colonized and obfuscates the coercive nature of imperialist practices. Many Metis were forced to conform and assimilate. There was an overt or implied threat of punishment and social ostracism for non-conformity. For example, the Metis children who were forcibly removed from their family and placed in residential schools were subjected to the same modes of terrorization as First Nations children (Logan, 2001), including physical, sexual, and verbal abuse as well as forced labour. The children were also prohibited from using their own language or practicing their culture while they were socialized into European Christian practices. They were often removed from their community forcibly without parental consent and separated from siblings as well as parents (Logan, 2001).

Homi Bhabha (1985, in Loomba, 1998) also writes about mimicry, and believes that mimicry can undermine authority. The story that was documented earlier in this dissertation about the Metis daughters of British Columbia's first governor, Sir James Douglas, wearing ball gowns, demonstrates an example of the employment of a strategy of mimicking the dominant culture for personal advantage. Surely these young women would not have been accepted into colonial society had they worn moccasins or buckskin dresses. The elite cannot remain elite if the society becomes so democratized that class distinctions are no longer notable. A member of a local minority group shared a story

about how young moms dress their toddlers in expensive designer clothes to help ward off “race-based” reports to child welfare authorities. At the same time, these Aboriginal families received criticism for “wasting” their limited welfare money on expensive baby clothes (personal communication with a Victoria social worker, 2002). This is an example of what James Scott (1990) calls “everyday resistance,” which he describes as “informal, often covert, and concerned with immediate de facto gains” (p. 33).

Interview participant Susan spoke of the need to participate in “White ways” in the Euro-Canadian world in order to work and participate in postsecondary education. She identifies the White world practices she was required to reproduce: the Protestant work ethic; working hard; saving money; getting up on time; getting to work on time or people will call you lazy; pressure to go to university, to become educated, to better yourself but not by becoming a better person; making money (Interview, p. 37). Peter practiced “White world behaviour” in order to succeed in that world, and found those clearly delineated codes of behaviour temporarily helpful for creating order in his life (Interview, p. 6). Julie finds life in the White world to be quite hard:

I find it hard, though. I still don't own a TV. It's so noisy, and bright at night, and so many people are angry and mean. At times people's talk seems so shallow. Everything [is] for appearance, no deep emotion, except anger, and no talk of spirituality. I am usually quiet and listen more than talk when I am out. I also hate dealing with welfare. I hate that I am so vulnerable, and that every time the political winds change the poor are always attacked (Interview, p. 7).

There is not a lot about the White world that Julie chooses to emulate, but she believes that one needs a balance between the Native and White worlds in order to survive today. Julie relied on her memories of living in the bush to counter the stress of living in the city.

### Passing as a Form of Resistance

“Passing” involves a form of living the ways of dominant culture on the outside, and is a strategy of resistance employed by many Metis and their families over the past several generations. It is important to note that while Metis people practice White ways, they think “Metis thoughts” in the privacy of the mind. Collins (1990, in Riessman, 2000) documents the resistance of the mind as “the private, hidden space of consciousness, the ‘inside ideas’ that allow (women) to transcend the confines of oppression (p. 124).

Passing is what all people do to accommodate, to fit into images, to keep invisible the parts of themselves that do not conform to the dominant culture’s values. The ability of the Metis to pass is dependent upon the tone of their skin, as well as any noticeable family connection to others who have dark skin.

### Skin

Franz Fanon (1994, in Loomba, 1998) reminds us that skin “is not just assumed like a mask: it is God-given even if its meanings are social, discursive. What skin and masks have in common is that they mark the interface between the self and the world: they are the border” (p. 177). Riessman (2000) reminds Erving Goffman that not all people can “pass” (p. 1). Patty reminds us that others called her White even though she asserted that she is Metis. She was told by her instructor that “Patty is White because she looks White.” Patty experienced frustration and anger, because she herself does not identify with the colonizer and does not want to be told she is the colonizer. Patty was relating to a sentiment articulated by postcolonial writer JanMohamed (1983, in Loomba, 1998) that it is the Manichean dichotomy (binary opposition) between colonizer and colonized that really structures colonial relations (p. 105). In the mind of Patty’s

instructor, she was limited to being either White or First Nations; since she didn't look "Native," she was told she was White.

In colonial society, dark skin colour has led to various forms of discrimination and positioning of the 'other.' Skin has been problematic for many Metis people because it has confounded people's attempts to protect themselves from racism and hide their Aboriginal origins. Metis poet Marilyn Dumont (1996) writes: "All the bleach and soap bones in the Red & White couldn't keep our halfbreed hides from showing through" (p. 17).

One of my own family members told me a story of trying to cover the skin with white make up, and trying to stay out of the sun to avoid looking "Native." Peter spoke of trying to scrub the darkness out of his skin. He shared a story of a White person once asking him and his brother, as little kids, if they had just gotten back from Mexico. Rose reported a lot of difficulty in her family due to the variance in skin tones that Metis families often experience. This caused divisions between family members, stemming out of the fear of persecution by others due to perceived "Nativity." A number of participants share stories of the painful racism that existed within their own family (Rose, Roland, Peter, Susan, Lucy, Helene, and Julie). Roland shares his conviction that the worst kind of racism is that which occurs in one's own family. He states:

When it comes entirely from my family – that is kind of the worst form of discrimination, you know. That's funny because I had an aunt who was very racist, and didn't want anything to do with it, and I guess I just have to accept that (p. 7).

However, it is clear that Roland does not accept it and, in fact, is quite opposed to it. He spends much of his daily life fighting racism and advocating for Metis rights.

What is at stake in these stories is their interpretation. Deterministic views from the White world, such as psychological or sociopolitical theories, can pathologize what others might call healthy acts of resistance. Freire (1970) would see the Metis as internally oppressed; Marxists would attribute much of Metis behaviour to a state of “false consciousness”; Freudians might say that parental values were internalized uncritically in the Oedipal stage of development. When seen through the lens of colonial discourse, these actions reflect psychological flaws, whereas in the language of responses, the actions are strategic methods of self-preservation within a limited range of choice. They are responses that reflect the quest for dignity, even if it entails cosmetic changes to skin tone.

It is interesting to note that colonial discrimination was most often based on colour, but not always. The following account demonstrates how the colonized Irish were viewed by a prominent English imperialist. In this case, the lack of colour difference (of the colonized) intensified the horror of the colonial vis-à-vis the Irish. Thus Charles Kingsley (cited by Gibbons, 1991, in Loomba, 1998) observed after his first trip to Ireland:

I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country . . . But to see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black, one would not feel it so much, but their skins, except where tanned by exposure, are as white as ours' (p. 109).

Metis experience has shown that discrimination is not merely based on skin colour. Overtly identifying with Metis culture and non-European practices has resulted in persecution for the Metis. The most blatant example of this is the execution of Louis Riel for treason for posing a challenge to the Canadian establishment. The Metis have been cast as ‘other’ for their existence as mixed-race, Aboriginal people.

### The Construction of the Metis as 'Other'

Colonial discourse has contributed to the Metis as being 'other.' Abdul JanMohamed (1985, in Loomba, 1998) calls: "the othering of vast numbers of people, and their construction as backward and inferior depending upon what he calls the Manichean allegory, in which a binary and implacable discursive opposition between races is produced" (p. 104).

Such oppositions are crucial for creating both the insider and the outsider. The Metis have found a sense of self-respect in their ongoing quest for freedom and self-governance. Loomba (1998) stresses that "we cannot appreciate the specific nature of diverse hybridities if we do not attend to the nuances of each of the cultures that come together or clash during the colonial encounter" (p. 180). Similarly, Arif Duvlik (1994, in Loomba, 1998) reminds us that "conditions of 'in-betweenness and hybridity' cannot be understood without reference to the ideological, institutional structures in which they are housed" (p. 180). For example, these conditions of in-betweenness and hybridity have harmed people, and specifically the Metis, in various ways. Aline states that when she talks to other Indigenous peoples, she feels that "they are more connected to their culture, and [that] they are more 'authentic.'" Duran and Duran (1995) discuss Native stereotyping in terms of hegemony:

This is about the power to define, produce and disseminate meaning. In this power of the colonizing culture to define, there is a struggle of related terms and their binary opposites: tradition/assimilation – savagery/civilization. It is about the nature of alterity and a culturally and historically specific form of (European) reason that constructs identity on the boundaries of what it is not, therefore constructing what it is (p. 119).

As 'the other,' the Metis have been accused of being *sauvage*. Marie remembers being called *sauvagesse* (the young female savage) by her school teachers. Due to being

cast as savage, the Metis were seen as corruptible and unethical by the federal government in 1869. Howard Adams (1989) reports that emissaries from Ottawa, including Donald A. Smith (one of my ancestors), were sent to talk to the Metis provisional government leaders at Fort Garry and to try to bribe them into submission:

So Donald Smith intrigued, spent 500.00 pounds bribing whom he could, and on January 18-19 spoke, together with Riel, to a two-day mass meeting of the settlers. After being in the colony for only a short time, Smith apparently decided against attempting to buy off halfbreed leaders once he realized that the Northwest people were deeply committed to their resistance (p. 56).

Although not treated like a savage, Susan experienced the discomfort of external definitions. She reports the following:

People just don't get it and it's so hard to explain yourself as being Metis, because – I had one guy say that I had special powers because I was Indian. And other people say, like 'Oh, I was an Indian in a former life,' and things like that. There's such a 'new age-y' kind of thing going on over there that it's just viewed as . . . I felt it couldn't be appreciated for what it is . . . and it was just skewed (Interview, p. 22).

Roland recalls being told that he was a "Heinz 57":

Well, your grandmother was Metis, your grandparents are Metis, but you're Heinz 57 because both your parents are Metis. And that really kind of hurt my sense of being connected to Metis identity (Interview, p. 6).

In the opinion of another, being too much of a hybrid meant that Roland had no legitimate identity. Other participants were assigned names they did not choose for themselves. For example, Marie and Julie were called a "breed"; Peter, Helene, and Marie reported being called a "halfbreed"; Roland remembers being chased and attacked by kids who called him names that referred to being Native (Blackie, Beaver). Madeleine was told not to tell anyone about the family's Metis ancestry in order to escape prejudice and labelling. She recalls receiving a lot of negative treatment as a Metis child in Ontario.

Metis participants describe having to explain their newly evolving Metis identity to their friends. Susan shares:

It was just kind of like a weird thing and so I remember also another person saying to me, 'But you grew up in the same place as we did and I mean, you had the same experiences. We went to the same school; how can you be that different?'

Patty and Julie also describe difficulties in shifting identities in relation to others who want them to continue "being White." Being trapped in an assigned identity is insufferable for many Metis people. Susan remembers that her Metis sense of self was something that evolved in her life: "I came into it as opposed to just always being there" (p. 28). Participants shared ways in which they transcended a limiting experience into a position where they could develop into a whole human being.

### *Transcendence*

Transcendence refers to a way of enlarging your beliefs and moving on with your lives in a new way – a way that works. Transcendence refers to integrating that which has value into a new self that is larger than the former self. Writer Neale Donald Walsh (2002) defines transcendence as follows:

Your new larger belief system will no doubt retain some of the old – that part of the old belief system that you experience as still serving you – and so it will be a combination of the old, the new and the old, not a rejection of the old from top to bottom (p. 11).

In keeping with the practice of selecting aspects of various cultural traditions, Metis participants mixed various strategies for coping and wellness into their everyday lives. For example, Peter said that as a mixed-blood person he has a "revolving door identity" and that he feels "more Metis in the place of the heart . . . just a completely spiritual place" (Interview, p. 3). He referred to his stories as being *archetypal*, a term

which derives from the works of Carl Jung and refers to the universality of experience. He talked of studying about Christian pilgrimages and performing a pilgrimage to Batoche, Saskatchewan, but also spoke of developing a “Zen” attitude to things (Interview, p. 3).

Stories have a transcendental quality that can help the individual shift from one state to another. For example, educational stories may help the listener to shift from one place of knowing to a place of greater knowing. Stories with a spiritual message may provoke an experience of epiphany where the listener shifts to a place of greater understanding. For example, in asking Metis participants if telling their stories to me has changed them in any way, one participant said that she will now pay a lot more attention to stories, because she now knows there is a lot more going on there than she suspected (Rose, Interview). Paying attention helps recognize the signs that direct the way to the Metis psychological homeland.

As I mentioned in the preliminary chapter of this document, the word Metis has etymological roots that refer to the metissage, or the weaving together of different kinds of threads to form a cloth or blanket. Implicit in being Metis is the act of drawing in aspects of value, beauty, and ancestral culture that help make life into an aesthetic product. Metis self-creation is a process of discernment and integration of what has meaning for Metis people and reflects the question “Is this the kind of person I want to be?”

### *Finding a Place to Belong: The Importance of a Third Space*

There are so many reasons that a third space is important for Metis people. Homi Bhabha (1984, in Duran & Duran, 1995) defines the hybrid experience, or what I define

as moving between the first and second space, through the no-man's-land. Third-space activity provides an opportunity for resistance and "constructing counterhegemonic meaning. It is about a struggle to be subjects rather than objects of history. It is about the location, mode, and idiom of cultural articulation" (Bhabha, 1984, in Duran & Duran, 1995, p. 119).

These activities may take place, and evolve ideologically and intellectually, when Metis people come together on their own terms to discuss who they are in relation to the dominant culture. Here, Metis people may construct a more holistic identity, rather than the "oppositional identity" described by Duran and Duran (1995, p. 118).

Collins (1990) writes that "resistance thinking and avoidance strategies do not attack stigma and discrimination directly, but they may be tactically necessary. Open challenge of a dominant ideology is not always possible" (1990, in Riessman 2000, p. 124).

In sequestered settings where meanings can be reformed, overt critiques of domination may develop (Scott, 1990). Challenges to structural and ideological power develop from hidden spaces of consciousness (Collins, 1990). The third space serves as a "sequestered" space where Metis interpretations can be developed and shared.

The interview participants demonstrate that Metis stories can be told from various positions, from Metis-centered perspectives and from perspectives more palatable for others. Amongst Metis people, Metis stories are often shared from a strong third-space position. The third-space story is often grounded in Metis pride. Storytelling is an act of resistance because it generally serves as a healing and strengthening process for the

storyteller. This strengthening can be both psychological and cultural. This is transformational, both for storyteller and listener.

Julie shares that she feels “very proud and good inside when I speak of the old ways and what I know. Sometimes it feels like the spirits are talking through me” (Interview, p. 14). She later adds that she feels sad, as well as proud, because she feels that the old traditions are totally gone. She believes (third space) traditions cannot compete with (first space) dominant culture such as TV, fast food, alcohol, and the mall culture that is sweeping the world (Interview, p. 15). However, she felt comfortable enough to share these views with me because, as two Metis people together (researcher and participant), we have created a (third space) ground for our conversation.

Roland finds hope in sharing stories:

By telling the story, I hope that it inspires people and that there’s not going to be any feelings of shame for anyone about being open about their heritage. . . . It does create hope. It also creates a sense of ownership. These are my stories; these stories affect me, type of thing. It brings me closer to feeling pride in my Metis community – the feeling that I *am* Metis. It’s not just a label, type thing. This is what I am. It’s more of a validation that I am a part of a race of people (Interview, p. 30).

Roland finds third-space Metis storytelling to be validating for his racial identification and for his sense of Metis self. Peter experiences a sense of excitement when telling Metis stories:

Ahh, I get excited. I get excited about – if you’re sharing Metis stories, it’s just big fun. And if you’re at a spot where you think, by telling the story that you can bring somebody out [of the closet], or give them a new perspective about all mixed-blood people, that’s kind of exciting. I think it’s an intimate subject that let’s you get involved with people in a very safe way (Interview, p. 27).

For Lucy, telling Metis stories is an emotional experience: “I get emotional until my eyes get teary” (Interview, p. 14). For Susan, telling Metis stories makes her laugh a lot.

I don't know, you laugh a lot. Because it's always funny, oh I don't know. Yeah, it's very much my dad and it's very much the whole thing. I guess a big part of it is like there's just sort of a happiness in it. It doesn't really matter what you have or something like this. Like it doesn't really matter. Like the story is told to kind of make you feel good. Or even if it's told to make you learn something or to show you something, it's told in a way that's gentle and it's told to make you laugh, to make you realize why you're laughing – because you have it so good, or because you're so thankful, or something. For me, I remember my dad a lot. It makes me think of my dad, for sure. It makes me think of my younger brother, all the stories I tell about him. It just makes me realize how great life is (Interview, p. 69).

Susan's view corresponds with that of Thomas King (2003), who believes that stories can help us to live differently. Stories help remind Susan to appreciate her family and her life, and provide perspective. In fact, telling stories in response to challenges is one way of acting with aplomb.

Rose uses Metis stories as a tool for teaching people about the Metis experience:

I like Metis stories because I've spent a certain amount of time dealing with politicians and fighting with people over funding, and it's very superficial, and there is no way to connect on an interpersonal level – it's all theoretical, and stories make things real. That's why I tell them when I am making presentations, because then people feel a connection and they are more open to getting or hearing the facts (Interview, p. 44).

Some participants tell about storytelling outside of a Metis space, where they feel more guarded and less safe about how they will be received. It is more difficult to remain in a Metis-centered position in a White-world situation. Rose shares that she has to employ protective strategies when she does not feel safe, or when she suspects that she will be challenged.

If I'm in what I feel to be a hostile context, if I'm with people that aren't Metis, and I feel like they are looking at me askance or suspiciously, I'm more guarded and succinct. If I'm in front of an audience where I feel more accepted, then I'm more comfortable telling my stories (Interview, p. 45).

The place where the storyteller stands when telling the story and the place where the audience is situated influence the delivery of the story and the experience of the storyteller. For Helene, storytelling reminds her of the difficulties of being Metis and she de-racializes her stories to protect her children from experiencing shame:

I've got a lot of stories but I don't racialize my stories. I think that I'd like my kids not to feel ashamed about being Metis. I'm okay with [storytelling] but I realize it was hard for my mother, and for us growing up (Interview, p. 5).

As a strategy, Helen tells her stories from a Metis de-centered position in order to protect her family from racist remarks. It seems that the experience of storytelling may change depending upon the audience and the level of safety of the storyteller.

Due to increased safety, and a Metis-centered experience, the third space offers Metis people a way of being and thinking that is distinctly Metis. This space reflects a Metis cosmology, and the way of thinking reflects a Metis schema. In psychology, the 'schema' refers to knowledge structures in which the parts relate to one another and the whole in a patterned fashion (Mandler, 1985). Thomas King (2003) says: "Meaning is refracted by cosmology, the way understanding is shaped by cultural paradigms" (p. 72). This means that after spending more time together, the way that Metis people see the world tends to become more and more similar.

Cultural psychologist Howard (1991) believes that a cultural group is a group of people who share the same stories. For example, this may mean seeing humans in direct relationship to nature and spirit (Julie, Interview, p 9) and sharing this view with other Metis at her workplace. It may mean associating 'the hunt' with the prayers, rituals and

preparation that precede it (Sarah, Interview, p. 6). It may mean teaching other Metis people to hunt in this way. For Susan, it may mean normalizing activities like spending summers camping in the bush, eating moose meat, and living with extended family.

In Canada, as in other colonized societies, Christianity became was “the prism through which all knowledge of the world was refracted” (Miles, 1989, p. 16). Telling stories in a Metis third space provides Metis people the opportunity to go beyond imposed limitations and experience the healing power of stories away from the gaze, the interpretation, and the judgement of the dominant culture.

### *Stories Are Medicine*

Thomas King (2003) says that stories are a form of medicine (p. 92). In this statement he refers to the power that stories possess to heal, to comfort, and to make people feel well, like many good medicines do. He says “stories fight illness and death” (p. 92). For Metis people, stories promote survival. They do this literally by delivering messages that teach children to stay safe, and to teach people how do behave in times of difficulty or challenge – to behave with aplomb, to practice humour, to be respectful to all forms of life. All these stories act as medicine. Metis people sometimes need various forms of medicine to help them. The historical disruption from homeland, from community, and often from family has created imbalance, which has resulted in a state of social vulnerability for Metis people. The participants’ stories have shown that storytelling is an important part of their Metis self-formation process, and that having a Metis space for sharing stories from a Metis perspective is crucial for Metis self and community development. Lucy reminds us that the ancestors are calling us back to our people, but we sometimes need the help of other Metis people, to remember to recognize

their call and to find our people. The stories in Chapter Eight share some of stories passed down through Metis families, welcoming people back to their culture. I would now like to introduce you to some of these stories.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: A METIS STORY

*“You’ll Never Believe What Happened!”*

The following stories were shared through the process of conducting this research. Most come from interview participants and some come from my own family as well as others I have talked to over the past few years. They provide a composite of Metis life experience. The first story begins in a Metis boarding house on a busy fur trade route. The narrator, a Metis woman, tells about her grandmother and the storytelling that took place in her grandmother’s home.

\* \* \* \* \*

My grandmother, Justine, ran a boarding house on a very busy trade route. Travellers of various occupations would spend the night. A variety of wares often covered the front porch – piles of valuable furs, trade goods, saddles, food and provisions. Although payment was expected for room and board, it was also expected that the guests would share a song or a story after dinner. This merriment provided the evening’s entertainment. On the particular night in question, a group of people sat contently, with full stomachs, sharing their tales. Since Lent had just passed, Philippe thought he would begin by sharing a story about the night there was dancing during Lent.

Philippe told the group that he was from a Metis settlement in Alberta, and that this story had been passed down through his family, who were Catholic and had a strong religious streak. They were told that demons were abroad in the land. These demons had a habit of turning up in various places wherever temptation could be found. The priest had warned the townspeople about the dangers of dancing during Lent, but it was a warning that they did not heed. Here’s how it went.

Spring was in the air while the winter snow lingered on. It was a cold April on the prairies. The holy time of Lent had arrived and the local priest had assigned numerous restrictions on behaviour. He preached about the importance of purification before spiritual rebirth. The people had been instructed to give up some of their favourite distractions during this time of restraint. This meant no card games, drinking, music, overeating, fighting or dancing. Despite a surface of conformity, and the priest's best attempt to spring-clean the town souls, trickster medicine was in the air that Saturday night. There was a beautiful new building that sat empty because dancing was forbidden until that night.

The young people of the town spent the day at their usual activities – cooking, cleaning, mending, walking, tending horses, helping with chores. As evening approached, and meals were eaten and cleared away, the young people of the town quietly excused themselves from their families. Without appearing too noticeably eager, they left the warmth of their homes and went out into the night chill. They all arrived at the same place. A secret dance was scheduled for that night.

The guests arrived, one by one and in small groups. The excitement was building as the band tuned up. Guitars were strumming, fiddles were humming, the fire was crackling, and furniture was being moved aside. The room was cleared for party-goers, for the musicians, for the food, and drink, leaving only a few benches against the wall.

A buzz of excitement filled the air, and the girls removed outer layers of sweaters, coats, and boots to display party frocks and beaded moccasins, or even leather dancing shoes. The band was warmed up and couples were beginning to fill the floor. As the

evening rolled on, the house heated up and the air whirled with movement, breath, and intoxication.

At a particular moment, attention was drawn to a handsome stranger who had entered the room, seemingly unnoticed. He was a beautifully dressed, handsome, dashing man. As he handled each partner with skill and style, the young women became enchanted by his presence and eagerly lined up for a dance. The girls swooned as he came in and danced furiously with them. The stranger possessed a kind of magnetism, and everyone watched him transfixedly. One of the young women, a Mlle D. (the daughter of quite an important man whose name won't be mentioned), had the inclination to approach the handsome stranger and ask for a dance. I'm not sure of the exact moment it happened, but I believe it was when Mlle D. happened to catch sight of the stranger's unusual hands.

Suddenly, Mlle D. saw the stranger's hands, and a blood-curdling scream left her mouth. They were not human hands, but rather hooves. They were covered with hair. The words "It's the devil...!" screamed themselves out of Mlle D.'s throat. Everyone screamed. At that moment, the stranger turned and ran towards the door, which was closed. The devil-man raised its hands and planted them firmly on that wooden door. The room began to fill with the smell of putrefaction as smoke seeped from the place where the hands singed themselves into the door. The door was thrown thirty feet as his hands went through the door. Within seconds, the stranger disappeared into the night.

Of course, the stranger left a room of terrified Roman Catholics watching in horror. Abruptly, the party was over.

As you can imagine, it didn't take long for the word to get out. The next morning, the church was filled with parishioners as the priest delivered a very angry sermon from the pulpit. He was full of harsh reprimands and the people took it very seriously. It is said that the very same door later existed as the jail door because they knew no one would try to get through it.

Since then, on separate and unrelated occasions, the devil has been spotted in a number of venues, such as in the St. Albert bingo hall. Alternatively, Jesus Christ has also been sighted from time to time in a number of Metis communities, on the walls or in the window condensation of a home in Ile-la-Crosse.

Someone in the room asked Philippe if he had heard what happened later to the young people who were there that night. Philippe said that he had heard a story about the man who played the fiddle on that infamous night. This story is about the fiddler, who will be called Raymond (to protect his real identity). He probably wouldn't want his true identity revealed.

Raymond was from the village and had done a number of things in his time. One thing he had never done, however, was to play music. I know this sounds unbelievable, because Raymond was known far and wide for his fiddle tunes. He would win first prize in competitions; he would play at parties and levees. His neighbours could hear the melodies moving through the air and into their kitchen windows. The funny thing was, no one ever remembered a time when Raymond was learning to fiddle, making those scratchy, cat-screeching, sounds that families, usually lovingly and patiently, overlook when their young ones are learning the craft. Raymond seemed to, one day, just pick up

the fiddle and play with the skill and style of a master. It was later, after hearing the story from his cousin that I learned about what happened between Raymond and the fiddle.

Raymond had been to a number of dances with the young people of the area. These dances were held in the village as well as other places. In the old days the best parties happened at the end of the trading or a hunt, when the company would donate spirits for the celebration. What Raymond noticed most about these dances was the way that the girls were impressed by a really good fiddle player. He believed that sweet music had a way of wrapping itself around the ladies like some kind of enchantment. In spite of his friendly demeanour and good teeth, Raymond had never been recognized for his wit and charm. The town priest had convinced the people that the devil was everywhere, and easily summoned. It was then said that, on a particular day, Raymond decided to make a pact with the devil.

The agreement went like this: Raymond told the devil that he would give up his soul in exchange for playing the fiddle with perfection. Raymond would be unsurpassed in ability and acclaim. He would be the best. Raymond was not required to sign any papers, or leave any kind of deposit. It was a verbal agreement. This is what happened next.

Raymond began playing the circuit. He played at parties, at dances, at celebrations, and in competitions. In no time at all he was undeniably the best fiddle player from Rocky Mountain House to Fort William, and possibly beyond. In no time at all, Raymond was getting lots of attention from female admirers. He would travel from town to town, performing, shining, with endless acclaim.

I'm not sure how it came about, but one day Raymond changed his mind about fiddling. Raymond summoned the devil and reneged on the deal.

After that he never picked up the fiddle again. For a long while after, people would ask Raymond to play for them, at this party or that wedding, and he never would. Maybe it was because of the devil incident at the dance in Lac Ste. Anne, during the time of Lent. After that, Raymond became a family man and led a quiet life. He spent his time working and hunting to feed his family. Peter had heard that Raymond had developed a reputation as a pretty skillful bear hunter.

An old trapper known as Marcel sat in the circle, and told the group that he had a lot of stories about his escapades with bears. He decided to tell one that he called "Murielle and the Bear." He began by explaining that bears have always been very important for the Metis and their Cree cousins, due to their special relationship between mother and child. Metis legend says that in the instant before a child is born, the Great Spirit, Gitchee Manitou, drops the spirit-child from the sky. When he lands on the ground outside the tipi where the mother is in labour, a bear approaches and bites the child on the bottom. The spirit-child then runs into the tipi and jumps inside its mother just in time to be born. This accounts for the blue spots that Metis babies have on their backside. Marcel explained that bear medicine has always helped mothers to keep children safe, in that same protective way a mother bear watches over her cubs. He went on to tell about one particular night, after a hunt, when he had brought home a bear. He said, "You'll never believe what happened!"

Many years ago, Marcel was seated at the kitchen table with his daughter Murielle. They talked as he combed fresh bear grease through her hair, believing this

would make the locks healthy and shiny. He told Murielle about what happens when a bear loses her partner. As he combed through her hair, Marcel warned Murielle to be careful that night, for it was legend that the grieving bear always comes back looking for her mate. If the mate can't be found, the bear then goes after the hunter who caused their separation. He warned Murielle to be especially careful if she needed to go out of doors to use the outhouse in the dark.

Later that night, when Marcel's daughter got up sleepily and opened the front door, a terrible sight befell her eyes! There in the dark, staring right at her, stood the distraught bear in search of her mate. Her teeth were bared and enormous claws were in full view. Murielle let forth a scream at the top of her lungs, waking Marcel from his sleep. Marcel came downstairs to his frantic Murielle, and showed her the hide of the dead bear slung menacingly over an old chair in front of the door. She was not impressed, and Marcel had a very good laugh. The folks in the guesthouse sitting room had a very good laugh as well. Murielle, who was staying at the guest house with her father, laughed and told the others how her father's stories had offered her such amusement. When she was growing up, Marcel always had a story to fit every occasion.

Murielle shared some of the stories about her childhood, and what it was like to grow up with a dad who was such a prankster and amazing storyteller. She told the story of how her family spent every summer camping in the bush. Sometimes, they were out for the whole summer, living in tents, fishing, swimming, and, of course, with guitar, fiddle, and song. As she and her brother Richard got a bit older, they started to realize that this wasn't what every family did. They started to feel different from other people. For Murielle and Richard, this difference became particularly noticeable at Christmas.

Murielle explained that Christmas wasn't a big deal in their home. Of course, it was heaps of fun, with a big meal, lots of family, and lots of music and singing. Murielle's family no longer went to church, since her dad was Roman Catholic and her mom was Presbyterian. They quickly resolved their difference by letting go of religion altogether. No one was sure why so many Catholic men married Presbyterian women, but it seemed to happen a lot in the area. Maybe they met in the churchyard, because some of the churches held Presbyterian services at 10 a.m. and Catholic ones at 11 a.m. Basically, if you were an early riser you were Presbyterian and, if not, Catholic.

In later years, formal religion became more of a social thing. So was celebrating religious holidays like Christmas. Of course, a reason to celebrate was always good, but there was little money, so presents were not the main thing.

Any presents there were tended to be more like "joke" presents. Murielle's dad was always amusing, and annoying, the family with jokes and pranks. For example, one year when Richard had lost his fishing line in the lake, it appeared in a Christmas box attached to an old boot. Another time, Marcel received a chamber pot with a hole in it from his brother, after being told he was going to get some holy water for Christmas. However, Murielle's parents always tried to save enough for a small toy for the young ones. One year, Richard and Murielle started to notice that their friends seemed to get tons of presents. They would get bikes and dolls and lots of fancy things that they would brag about in school after the holidays. One year, Richard asked his dad why Père Noel brought some kids a lot of toys and some kids only one or two. They had never heard the theory that presents were a reward for good behaviour.

Murielle wasn't sure whether her dad was expecting that question, but he had a story ready to explain how things worked. Then, he told a story about the best Christmas he ever had – the one when he received his very own pair of rubber boots. Marcel's story went like this.

The best Christmas Marcel ever had was the one where he was given a brand new pair of rubber boots. When he opened up the package and saw his brand new boots, he was the happiest kid alive. Before that, "I only ever had used ones," he told us. "I always dreamed of having my very own rubber boots." This was the first time that he ever got new boots or shoes, and they really fit him too. There were nine kids in his family, and he only ever got hand-me-downs. Usually, his boots were passed down from older brothers or cousins, and sometimes a few kids had worn them before he got them. After he told that story, Richard and Murielle felt kind of lucky – at least they didn't get rubber boots for Christmas. That would have been a really bad present.

Everyone had a hearty laugh, and then Murielle continued to tell another story about a childhood Christmas.

One year, my mom told me that I was going to get something really special, something that I would really like. Part of me felt hopeful, but another part didn't want to build up my hopes. She really built things up, and reminded me several times about this wonderful present that awaited me under the tree. As Christmas morning arrived, and it was my turn to open my present, I took a deep breath and prepared myself. I knew that I probably wouldn't like it, and that this would be the only present for me. In that moment I made a decision that I would pretend this was the greatest present in the entire world.

As predicted, I opened the wrapping and my heart sank. It was a sweatshirt, and not a particularly stylish one at that.

At that point, I put my plan into action. I told my mom and dad that I loved that sweatshirt more than anything and that it was just what I wanted. I put it on right away, and remarked several times about how great it was. Throughout the day, I reminded Mom how much I loved this sweatshirt. Without expecting it, that sweatshirt story became one of our most-told family stories.

In the months and years that followed, Mom would tell everyone about how this funny old sweatshirt, how I wore it to bed at night because I liked it so much. She told about how I was always telling her how great it was, and how I wore it for years until it became impossibly small. She ended up telling that story every single Christmas. I probably grew fond of that sweatshirt because it became so famous.

Dad used to tell a lot of stories like the one about the rubber boots. He always had a story to make us laugh and feel better. When we were little, we thought those stories were true and later we realized that, as often as not, he had made them up. Those stories were always funny and we would laugh for hours, and ask him to tell us the stories over and over again. We actually had it pretty good and, now, we always appreciate everything that we have.

Madeleine, who was staying at the guesthouse enroute to Edmonton told a story about her grandmother's sister – a girl named Sophia who ran away from home. With Marcel's family in mind, Madeleine announced, "I wish life had been that kind to my grandmother's sister, Sophia. On account of some bad times, she left her mother's home when she was just thirteen."

At the time of Madeleine's great-aunt's youth, there was no such thing as adolescence. Thirteen was considered quite grown up. At the age of thirteen, most young people could manage a small farm, raise cattle, work the horses, and earn an income selling eggs and milk. At thirteen, Sophia could run a kitchen and her family's farm. She was a strong girl, big like her Aunt Henrietta. At fourteen, girls were considered marriageable, after their menses started.

Sophia's mother had first been married to Donald McKay (not his real name). He was killed fighting at Batoche. Everyone said he deserved it. He was a hothead, and dumb enough to get himself killed. If you are going to do something, you might as well do it right. Annie later remarried. It was after that marriage that Sophia left home so suddenly.

Sophie left the day that her mother forced her second husband John (not his real name) off the farm at gunpoint. At thirteen, Sophia rigged up the cart and horses, filled the buggy with provisions, and left. She told her mother she was going to her grandmother's in Grand Forks (Michigan). That was before the drawing of the border, when Grand Forks was still seen as a part of the Red River Valley. When she got there, she picked up two of her cousins, Felix who was eight, and John who was ten. The three young cousins ran away together.

The story goes that they headed west and got mixed up in the Gold Rush. Sophia ended up settling in Seattle. She had a good head for business and ended up running a boarding house. She collected archival information about early Seattle and ended up donating her large collection to a museum in Seattle in her later years. As far as anyone knows, she never had any children, nor married. Her family never saw her again.

John ended up living in Texas where he became a rancher. Felix, the little one, ended up in Redding, California. There he became mayor of the town and had five girls. Because of leaving the Red River Valley and their land of origin, the children didn't learn so much about their Metis ancestry.

A Metis elder was staying in the guesthouse with his daughter. Samuel, the elder, began to speak of the dangers that can occur when Metis people leave their homes, their Metis communities, to live away from their people in other places. He shared the following story. Over recent years, Samuel saw more and more Metis young people moving away from their families. He knew that the cities were filled with White people with no understanding of the Metis way of life. Samuel foresaw a lot of difficulties for Metis children who were raised in cities. He told about a young boy he once knew named Louis.

Louis Baptiste was from a Metis community in northern Alberta. He was born into a large family, and he had nine or ten brothers and sisters. Troubled times arrived for Louis' family. Louis' mom began having troubles, and took to alcohol to relieve her sadness. She was told she could not look after her children. Once the child welfare people removed her children, it was unlikely that she would ever see them again. Being among the youngest, Louis was sent out of his home community, with one brother and sister, to a foster home in the south.

At first Louis lived with his brother and sister in one house. Later, those people decided they didn't want to have foster children any more, and sent the Baptiste children back to the child welfare department. Louis was then separated from his brother and sister, and was put in a number of different homes, where he would stay for a few months

at a time. Soon, Louis became so downhearted that it made him angry and ill. He was getting really thin, doing really poorly in school, and he was becoming very unhappy. The angrier Louis became, the quicker each foster home was to hand him over to another family. Finally, one day, Louis decided to take his life. He wrote a letter saying that he just couldn't stand it anymore and that it was too hard to live without love. He had stopped being interested in love because there were just too many disappointments. Louis hanged himself from a tree in the yard of his thirteenth foster family. That home was only one hour away from his mother's house, but the child welfare people never once took him there for a visit. Even the siblings that were placed nearby did not get to visit with their brother Louis in the years before his death.

Louis' sister was devastated by the loss of her brother. She remained in foster care until she was thirteen, and then she ran away. She went to Edmonton and lived on the street. The city offered no comforts for this Metis girl. After getting into some trouble, she ended up pregnant and homeless. She had a child that was removed, almost right away, by the child welfare department. That child was placed in a White home and no information about the child's mother was shared. The social worker told the parents that the child had been abandoned. That child grew up as part of that White family. She was treated well and accepted as blood, even though she did not look like the other family members. While they were fair, descended from English and Scottish stock, the young girl, whom they called Rebecca, was dark-haired and dark-skinned.

While Rebecca was growing up, people would ask her about her background. They asked if she was Italian, French, Mexican, and yes, even part Indian. She couldn't account for these questions, and would reply that her parents were English and Scottish.

Everyone saw that she was “something else.” Eventually Rebecca started feeling badly in her own skin. Her parents finally admitted that she was adopted, but they didn’t have any information to share about her natural family.

Rebecca was thrown into complete confusion. When she would talk to her school friends about her discover, they were not very sympathetic and asked why she was making such a fuss about it. After all, she had nice parents who loved her and gave her everything she needed. They told her it was weird to want to meet any parents who would give her away – that they would surely be horrible people. And what did it mean to have parents who gave away their children?

Eventually Rebecca drifted away from those friends and towards friends who were able to relate to her problematic and complicated life. Together they began to use drugs and were drawn to activities involving more risk, danger and intrigue. Suddenly her old life seemed like a lie. Her parents tried to reassure and talk to her about her situation. Rebecca felt caught in a troubling situation. At the same time as she loved her parents, she saw them as the traitors who kept her away from her real family. She would tell her friends that she felt like Tarzan living in a family of apes.

In an effort to be helpful, Rebecca’s mother told her that, if Rebecca wanted, she would contact the child welfare department and try to find any information about Rebecca’s natural family. Even though Rebecca was petrified by the idea, she liked it and wanted to try to get more information. Together, they found out that child welfare was not allowed to give out any information, but they could put a letter into the file stating that there was a request for contact with any relatives. Rebecca carefully wrote such a letter, asking to meet members of her family. When the child welfare people placed the

letter in the file, they found that a similar letter had already been placed there by Rebecca's natural mother. Once again, Rebecca was thrown into a state of confusion.

She took her time replying, but eventually did arrange to meet her mother. It was a really trying time for everyone – for Rebecca, Rebecca's parents, and for Rebecca's birth mother.

Rebecca discovered that her mother was a Metis woman living in Fort McMurray. She was in her early thirties, and worked in an oil refinery. Her name was Hazel and she brought a whole stack of photographs of family members for Rebecca to see. It took a long time for Rebecca to be able to ask questions. She found the whole meeting to be overwhelming, and spent a lot of time just sitting there and looking at Hazel for as long as she could without feeling uncomfortable.

It took a while, but things settled down for Rebecca. Slowly, she met different members of her family, and found out she had a brother, or half a one, as the White people call it. Rebecca's relationship with her mom and dad got better too. She began to feel calmer about things, and to do better in her school work. Throughout her teenage years, she started feeling like she had two families and in her last year of school she went to a family reunion in her mother's community north of Lake Athabasca. She would never meet her uncle Louis, but she did eventually come home again, at least for visits.

The folks in the guesthouse were moved by Rachel's story, and the reference to Lake Athabasca sparked another story by a visitor named Guy.

Guy was a trapper from Fort Chipewyan. He was on his way to Edmonton to buy his winter supplies. He told the guests that he has a trapline on the Athabasca River, but

that he used to have one on the Slave River. There, he had a neighbour named Roger, who told him about some of the strange things that happen around there.

Roger has a trapline on the Slave and always talks about the stuff that goes on up there. They say that a lot of bad medicine happened there, spells and stuff, between the Cree and the Chipewyan in the early days when they used to fight over land. You can go along there in your boat and see weird people along the banks, and then when they see you they slide into the river. There are people you can see through. Roger told me that the devil lives under a tree behind one of the cabins. The story goes like this.

One day, Roger's friend Joseph and his wife were inside their cabin when they heard a terrible noise outside. Joseph went outside and saw a horrible-looking demon who began to attack Joseph. They had a big fight and Joseph came back into the cabin all bloody and ripped up. He was covered with blood and scratches, and he was missing an arm and a leg. He was in really bad shape. Joseph's wife and her mother had the knowledge to combat bad spirits and they set to work to make some medicine. They mixed in plants, branches, roots and whatever they needed for it to work. Because this was a particularly powerful demon, it required that Joseph's mother-in-law use her own life essence in the mixture. Thus, the mother-in-law gave her life force in the fight against evil.

When the mixture was prepared, Joseph's wife handed it to Joseph in a container and asked him to take it outside to the demonic force. There, Joseph summoned the demon and covered him with the medicine. Almost instantly, the demon was shrunk into a small cloud and disappeared into the ground underneath a particular tree. That tree later became known as the devil's tree. When Joseph went back in the house, his body was

restored – his arm and his leg were back and the scratches had healed. The grandmother was back and life was restored to its usual quality. They did, however, do their best to stay away from the devil tree. The story goes that the devil still lives there, but nobody is really sure about that. Some people believe that it travelled south, and was recently seen in a dance hall at Lac Ste. Anne.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: BEING METIS TODAY

### *A Temporary Conclusion*

When I read the eulogy at my grandmother's funeral, I tried to honour her memory by not using the word 'Metis' in the address. Instead, I described her as being descended from a proud family of Orkney Islanders and early Canadians who helped build this country through their activities in the Hudson's Bay Company and in the fur trade. I remained vague enough to say what I felt was important, but to conceal her Aboriginality from her friends and community, as she had always done. She would have wanted it that way. Metis or not, self-identification is a defining feature of who we are, so I can describe her, but I cannot define her.

I have been working on this research project since 1999. Many times I have felt like I was travelling upstream in a canoe, sometimes without a paddle. Then, something would shift and I would be propelled forward. I was always heading in a particular direction, but could not always see the destination, due to the varied landscape in between. Where to go and where not to go was always a question, because so many different routes can lead to the same goal.

Along the way, I remember someone asking me if I was sure I wanted to do this. I felt compelled to do this, as if I were carrying a lot of others in the boat along with me. I hope I am mapping out a path for other Metis people to follow. The fact that I didn't have a map isn't surprising, because there is no Metis map – only survival strategies. When you are up the creek without a paddle, you rely on everything you've been taught, and the odd ancestral nudge here and there.

I wanted to write this research to create a map that might help some other Metis who journey into academia, or who want to conceptualize social services in a way that strengthens Metis people and communities. I hope this will be one map among many. My predisposition was to mix things together until I found a way that worked. I relied on my committee to advise me whether the mixtures were workable, or a confusion of unresolved contradictions and clashing perspectives.

So what have I learned about being Metis today? I know that each individual Metis life intersects fundamentally with all other Metis lives. We are all related, sometimes more literally and closely than I imagined. All the Metis participants had some connection to the struggles for Metis land in the prairies. Many of our ancestors fought together, and lost their lives, at Batoche or Frog Lake. We were the ones they were fighting for. This is quite a humbling prospect. I hope that when they look upon us, they find us worthy. Perhaps, as we see parts of them in ourselves today, they also see themselves in us. As they are our ancestors, we are theirs.

#### *Future Use of this Research*

I hope that this study can be used to teach people about Metis self-formation and identity processes. I hope it will advance a discussion about how to best serve Metis children and families in human services work. I hope it will explain why Metis spaces, or any given cultural spaces for marginalized groups, are so very important for the evolution and understanding of issues and traditions from the perspective of those group members. Although some may consider this position to be isolationist or segregationist, I believe it is crucial for the survival and cultural regeneration of a people who are culturally threatened.

This study brings to the fore questions for further exploration. Among numerous questions that emerge for future study, the following have captured my imagination: “How do Metis people achieve the most success in educational settings?” “What do traditional Metis child-rearing practices look like, and how can they be incorporated in prevention and child welfare work?” “How do Metis people thrive without a homeland? Can traditional practices be adapted to urban settings?” “Can Metis spirituality be conceptualized as a metissage of traditions?” These are all important questions for developing knowledge and research-based approaches to social services for Metis people. Until more is known about what approaches are helpful for Metis people, the Metis will continue to expend a lot of energy adapting to the various cultural environments, in addition to studying, working, and trying to better themselves. Many of life’s tasks, which are quite challenging to begin with, become doubly so with these extra struggles to “fit in.”

Personally, I would like to further explore, in the form of a discourse analysis, the detailed ways in which Metis people have resisted colonization and assimilation, and managed to keep their spirit free. Finally, I believe it is difficult to describe “being Metis today” with any kind of totalizing description. The Metis have more challenges than the mainstream population, yet they appear to have mobilized many strategies for keeping some aspects of their culture and their spirit alive and resistant to colonization. Metis people tend to challenge authority or prescribed behaviour, and this has implications for the types of programming that could be effective for Metis families. Metis people prefer flexibility and prefer to be autonomous and self-directing. Metis people are able to move freely between various cultural spaces. They are able to survive and thrive in the

dominant culture, but this depends somewhat on being able to experience belonging, respect, dignity, and the comfort of being with people who understand them implicitly. Metis people require a “comfort zone” where they can feel safe , and find respite from the many identity challenges, and other real challenges, that they face as a result of being mixed-race, Aboriginal people in Canada.

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