FIRST NATIONS PARTICIPATION IN GRADUATE STUDIES

A Thesis Submitted to the College of Graduate Studies and Research in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Education in the Department of Educational Foundations University of Saskatchewan Saskatoon

By

Enos Cameron Willett

Spring, 2002

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Head of the Department of Educational Foundations
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ABSTRACT

Statistics on First Nations participation in postsecondary studies are abysmally dismaying (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN), 2002). Literature suggests that contributing factors include experiences of cognitive dissonance amongst First Nations students (Huffinan, Sill, & Brokenleg, 1986), a lack of respect for First Nations people in the academy (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991), and an under-representation of First Nations faculty (Hampton, 1995). To effectively address these issues, it is critical that postsecondary institutions understand the factors that contribute to motivation of First Nations people. The purpose of this naturalistic study was to describe the factors that motivated three First Nations adults in Saskatchewan to enrol in graduate studies.

I selected three first-year, First Nations students who were enrolled in graduate studies in the province of Saskatchewan using the snowball sampling technique (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 64). Two hour-long, open-ended interviews were used to allow each participant to describe the factors for enrolling in graduate studies in their own terms (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Hampton, 1995; Van Stone, Nelson, & Niemann, 1994) and to create a “discourse between interviewer and respondent” (Mishler, 1986, p. 53). I then incorporated my own voice into the data alongside the participants’ voices because I realized that “the researcher’s relationship to the inquiry and to the participants shapes the research text” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, p. 171).
In this study I found that the three participants were motivated primarily by factors of expedience, such as an increase in pay, career advancement, and prestige. However, for each participant, “traditional” First Nations education was seen as authentic education, while education in terms of accreditation, skills and qualifications is only “playing the game.” To put it another way, Indigenous knowledge is authentic to their experience, while economic rationalism is an “artificial context” (Henderson, 2000b, p. 12) which they cannot avoid, a game they must play in order to make a living. While the three participants are fulfilling the need to earn a living in the modern world, they have not forgotten or lost their Aboriginal identity; far from it. Alongside their individualistic, goal-oriented motivations, each participant was able to articulate an explicit, parallel, communal purpose to their participation. Each participant walks in two worlds as an embodiment of Little Bear’s (2000) “ambidextrous consciousness” (p. 85).
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Loving thanks to Shauneen for your love and support and to my children, Alina, Jordan, and Tara who are my inspiration.

Thank you to my committee members: my advisor, Dr. Reg Wickett, for providing the balance of guidance and latitude that I needed; Dr. Marie Battiste, for teaching me the framework of decolonizing Aboriginal education; Dr. Linda Wason-Ellam for her encouragement, for guiding me to key references, and for going out of her way to teach me qualitative methodology; and Dr. Sheila Carr-Stewart for her insight and challenging questions. Thanks also to Dr. Michael Collins for his friendship and for truly modeling the practice of adult education. Thanks to Don Cochrane for wielding his mighty editorial pencil.

Thanks to the family of the late Dr. André Renaud, whose endowment contributed financial support during my Master’s program.

Thanks to my father, Enos, for caring about what I do and for believing in me.

Thanks to my brothers, Carman and Colin, who cover my back.

Finally, thanks to my friends for their encouragement; you know who you are.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to the three First Nations people who graciously shared their time and knowledge for a better understanding of participation.

Also, to my mother, Velma, who made a sacrifice so long ago that I have come to fully understand only in the writing of this thesis. Thanks mom.
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>Canadian Teacher's Federation</td>
<td>CTF</td>
<td>Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations</td>
<td>FSIN</td>
<td>Indian Teacher Education Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITEP</td>
<td>Indian Teacher Education Program</td>
<td>National Indian Brotherhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIB</td>
<td>National Indian Brotherhood</td>
<td>Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples</td>
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<td>RCAP</td>
<td>Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples</td>
<td>Saskatchewan Indian Federated College</td>
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<td>SIFC</td>
<td>Saskatchewan Indian Federated College</td>
<td>Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies</td>
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<td>SIIT</td>
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PROLOGUE TO THE STUDY

As I have come to understand it from listening to the Elders and traditional teachers, the only person I can speak about is myself. That is how the Creator made all of us.... All I have to share with you is myself, my experience and how I have come to understand that experience.

(Monture-Okanee, 1995, p. 109)

Aware that they benefit, due to certain aspects of their personality from privileges devolved upon the dominant groups, otherwise dominated individuals understand the importance of literally spelling out their identity when they sign a work that the public might be tempted to consider “universal.”

(Noël, 1994, p. 210)

We are all the products of our past learning, and reflecting on the nature of this learning (our learning histories) is therefore my initial starting point.

(Hill, 1999, p. 310)

0.1 Contextualizing Aboriginal knowledge

I begin this study by reflecting on my own lived-through experiences. I do this because it is an “Aboriginal method of contextualizing knowledge” (Anderson, 2000, p. 21) and a decolonizing methodology (L. T. Smith, 1999) which I believe is appropriate here. By writing about ourselves first, we “acknowledge that no matter how much you try you can not divorce your research and writing from your past experiences, who you are, what you believe and what you value” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 34). In so doing, we pay respect to the experience and perspective of others. By including this section, I proudly and respectfully follow the example of many Aboriginal writers (Allen, 1998; Anderson, 2000; Ermine, 2000; Hampton, 1995; King, 1995; Monture-Angus, 1999). It
is my hope that this section will enhance the study by presenting my positionality at the outset.

0.2 My story, an introspective journey

My name is Cam. I am Cree. *Neyhiyaw*. I am from Little Pine First Nation in Saskatchewan, Canada. I am a Bill C-31 status Indian. That means that my mother lost her treaty status when she married my father, who is White. When band membership and registration under the *Indian Act* were amended in 1985, First Nations women in Canada who had lost their Indian status through marriage were reinstated, as were their children. It was perfect timing for me. I graduated from high school in 1986 and went right into summer session at the University of Saskatchewan.

Were it not for sponsorship from Indian Affairs, I would never have had the opportunity to participate in postsecondary studies. My family farmed. Like many other farm families, while we struggled to put food on the table, the farm income was enough to disqualify me, my brothers, and my cousins from eligibility for student loans.

I remember deciding at the age of 13 that I would never farm. Labor on the farm was hard, holidays were few, and money was always short. I took an aptitude test at school in Grade 10 that told me I might make a good lawyer or real estate agent. I decided that I would be a lawyer so that I could put criminals in jail, help people and make lots of money. A good student through elementary and secondary grades, I had always planned on attending university, although I wasn’t exactly sure what university was. I ran into some personal difficulties in Grade 12 and dropped out. After a 6-month stint delivering pizza in Saskatoon, I knew that I did not want to do that for the rest of my life. I reregistered in Grade 12 in January and graduated in June 1986. Like many
high school graduates, I had little idea of what field of study to enter. However, my mother was a third-year undergraduate student in the Indian Teacher Education Program (ITEP) at the University of Saskatchewan. With her encouragement and with the assistance of the Director, Orest Murawsky, I was admitted to ITEP in July.

My first and second undergraduate years were very exciting for me. In ITEP, I found a support network of other First Nations students like me. It was there in my first year that I met Shauneen, a pretty third-year woman in the program. I was elected Vice-Chief of the ITEP Student Council and Chairman of the Indigenous Student Council on campus. Against the advice of my academic advisor, I enrolled in more than a full course load, taking six full courses during my first year. I did relatively well, but I was not satisfied with the material I was learning. I wanted to learn about government and political structures. After my second year, I withdrew from the College of Education and was admitted to the College of Arts and Science.

In 1988, Indian Affairs provided me the monthly single student living allowance of $532. I moved in with Shauneen and, to make ends meet, we worked nights as security guards. I worked until 2:00 or 3:00 A.M. each night, and got up for an 8:30 A.M. class on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I remember my head bobbing each time I fell asleep in the front row of class. Although my grades were low that year, I decided to apply to the College of Law because I had heard that the chances of admission improved with the number of years you applied. To my amazement, I was admitted to the College of Law for fall, 1989 on the condition that I pass the Native Law Program during the summer. I passed the program and was admitted.
The academic year of 1989-90 was one of the most academically and personally challenging years of my life. The family farm was nearly bankrupt. Shauneen had a new teaching job that was highly demanding and stressful. In law school, I found myself surrounded by much older, more academically prepared and credentialed colleagues. There were students who had travelled, had Master's degrees, and who had parents or relatives in prominent administrative, academic, and judiciary positions.

My naivété probably worked to my benefit; I did not realize that I could “not win at a game with rigged rules” (Henderson, 2000a, p. 248). Never questioning whether I was in an even playing field, I simply threw myself into the task of studying. Six years younger than the average law student and with very little cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984), I found it difficult to make friends. I was not asked to join study groups or to attend social events. My family could offer no financial support and, with no academic background, could offer little emotional support either. Lacking the economic capital, I struggled with practical needs. To get books, I paid the $600 cost out of my rent and food allowance, then waited for Indian Affairs to reimburse me. I did not have a suit to wear to moot court, so I wore a sweater. Each month, I rode my bike or walked downtown to the Indian Affairs office to wait in long lines with other First Nations people waiting for social assistance or postsecondary allowances. Under pressure to achieve, I simply withdrew into myself and worked as hard as I knew how. Meanwhile, my relationship with Shauneen deteriorated and I moved out.

In the end, I passed all of my courses. I got 55% in Contracts, Property, Personal Injuries Compensation, and Constitutional Law, 62% in Criminal Law and 68% in Legal Writing. Not bad for a farm boy and considering that our 100% final exam grades were
placed on a bell curve. I can say that now because I am an expert in adult education. It was a different story back then. I was called into the Assistant Dean’s office to be presented with two options: (a) accept a decision that I be required to discontinue, or (b) appeal this decision. I was exhausted. I was morally degraded. I had had enough. I had given it my all. I quit without a fight.

With a newfound resolve, I married Shauneen that summer and returned to the College of Education in the fall. The next year, I graduated with distinction and began my teaching career in a reserve school. After one year’s experience, I was hired by St. Paul’s Roman Catholic Separate School Division in Saskatoon. Content with the challenges of the classroom and still smarting from my undergraduate experience, I had no desire to return to the academy full-time. Yet hardly a year went by when I wasn’t enrolled in one class or another. I completed my B.A. in English in 1995.

As I struggled in the classroom to give my students the best that I could, I began to wonder whether I might learn something in university that would make me a better practitioner. I applied for admission to a Master’s program in Educational Communications and Technologies. At the same time, I was hired as the Registrar of the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT) and I left the teaching profession altogether. Buoyed by the confidence placed in me in my new administrative job, my interest turned to administration.

Another major change came all too soon. In 1998, Shauneen and I decided to move to Arizona so that she could do a doctoral program there. I got a job as a recruiter for the Medical Student Research Program and tried to be content in a supportive role. Returning to Saskatchewan the following year, I was admitted to the MBA program but
was unable to secure band funding or student loans. I accepted a job as Director of Student Recruitment at the University of Saskatchewan and enrolled part-time. The travel demands of my job made it impossible to attend classes in the MBA program, but I felt a need to take something. I enrolled in a class in Adult & Continuing Education because it sounded interesting. The class changed my life.

Informed by his understanding of the principles of adult education, Professor Michael Collins had a way of facilitating discourse with a minimal number of words. This allowed the diversity of student experience to flow freely into each class, producing a dynamic, electric dialogue. Classes were so engaging that each one went well over the scheduled time, yet none of the students left early. The class was taught as a seminar and each class member was responsible for presenting a different section of the syllabus. For my presentation, I assigned a reading by Debbie Hill (1999) and asked the class to reflect on the major decisions they had made in their lives. I asked them to consider the question, “How do circumstance, social expectations, and power factor into the choices we make in life?”

Upon reflection, I could see that “the choices people have in their lives depend upon whether they are seen as real possibilities for them” (Hill, 1999, p. 311). I was shocked to have to admit to myself that I had never considered all things to be possible for myself. It was also revealing to consider the possibility that I had made life decisions as an effort to conform to social norms. In school, I had learned “that education is a kind and necessary form of mind liberation that opens to the individual options and possibilities that ultimately have value for society as a whole” (Battiste, 2000a, p. 194). Furthermore, as my good friend and mentor Wally Isbister (1998)
writes, I had "been counselled by educators... during my formative years that "happiness" can be secured by acquiring an education that makes it easier to acquire material necessities" (p. 83). With these values in mind, I "chose" to go to school so that I could get a job. I had to get a job so that I could buy things that would make my life better. Things?

Things. Material things. Yes, I did want material things. I wanted a new car and nice clothes and a nice place to live for me and my family. These things were important, but thinking about material things made me ask myself, "What do I really want out of life?" and, "What do I want at the core of my being?" When I looked deep within myself for the answers to these questions, I discovered that material things were not enough for me. Possessions could not bring true meaning and fulfilment to my life. I wanted to live a happy, purposeful life on this earth. When I am old and ready to die, I wanted to be able to look back on my life and say, "Yes, I have lived my life fully. I have thanked and honored the Creator for my life and for all my relations, living and non-living. I have no regrets." But how could I fulfill this purpose?

When I looked at myself in my position at Director of Student Recruitment, I did not like what I saw. My job was to recruit potential undergraduates to the University of Saskatchewan. Yet here I found myself questioning the very purpose of education. Unable to articulate the reasons behind my lack of enthusiasm for encouraging others to participate in the academy, I told my boss that I wasn't sure that I cared about my job anymore. She had exuberated an energy for managing student enrolment as efficiently as possible, yet without questioning the hegemony of the university and without really understanding other issues of participation such as attrition and achievement. She was
not impressed with my attitude and I eventually resigned and applied to the Department of Educational Foundations, to enrol in the Adult & Continuing Education strand at the University of Saskatchewan.

And so, I now find myself reflecting upon my life experience and articulating my motivation to participate in graduate studies as I write a thesis about First Nations participation. Participating in graduate studies provides me with “space and frameworks, with the help and support of others, to understand better, and revise, the story of... [my] life, even repair past damage and construct a stronger self in consequence” (West, 1995, p. 133).

0.3 Making the invisible visible

Native Americans, of course, never vanished, nor did they forget their own histories and heritages. They have always taught their children this culture. (McGuire, 1997, p. 77)

All of these years I had been thinking that I was alone in my experience. In the early development of this thesis, I read Chapter 6 of Courtney’s (1992) Why Adults Learn: Towards a Theory of Participation in Adult Education entitled “Adult learning and the social functions of education.” This chapter was particularly disturbing for me to read because it brought forth painful memories of my experience of first-year law. My memory of law is one of shame and intense loneliness. After being required to discontinue from the College of Law, I was unable to deal with the feelings of humiliation and rejection I felt. To cope, I had repressed these feelings and taken sanctuary in the College of Education. My newfound resolve to achieve as an education student had been, in part, a determination to make up for what I perceived to be my shortcomings as a law student.
Twelve years later, I can look at my experience in law as part of my past, and from the perspective of an expert in an adult education. For the first time, I am able to see my experience in a larger context and it moves me to do so. As I reflect on my experience, I learn to take pride in it because it “cannot be measured against any rod, or any curriculum, nor compared to someone else’s achievement” (Illich, 1971, p. 40). My family, my teachers, and my friends give me support to understand better, and revise, the story of my life as I discuss these issues with them (West, 1995, 1996). The literature provides me with a foundation upon which to reconstruct my experience.

Reading Tierney’s (1993) study of the Native American college experience was a milestone for me. Tierney interviewed over two-hundred American Indian students, faculty, staff, and administration. One student, “Delbert,” who had dropped out in his first attempt at college after two semesters, and then returned to the local community college 10 years later, said:

I think White people think education is good, but Indian people often have a different view. I know what you’re going to say – that education provides jobs and skills. It’s true. That’s why I’m here. But a lot of these kids, their parents, they see education as something that draws students away from who they are.... I would like to tell them [at the university] that education shouldn’t try and make me into something I’m not. That’s what I learned when I wasn’t here. Who I am. And when I learned that, then I could come back here. I sort of walked away for a while and then came back. It’s one of the best gifts I’ve ever had. But a lot of us just walk away. (p. 311)

When I first read these words, I was moved almost to tears. I sat back in my chair laughing hysterically with relief. “Thank God!... Thank God!” The words of this student in an academic context affirm and authenticate my experience; they tell me that I am not crazy and that I am not alone. Suddenly, I dropped my head and began to sob uncontrollably. I cried for the pain I had suffered within the walls of this institution, for
the humiliation and the dismissal of my experience and of my knowledge. I had thought that I was the only one. The sobs at first released the pain, and then slowly began to alternate with laughter - Laughter because I had thought that I was an Indian surrounded by White people. But now I realized that I was surrounded by Indians. Indians just like me. What’s more, I realized that I had always been surrounded by Indians. But, until that moment, they had been invisible to me (Tierney, 1993, p. 309). Now, in my being, I can feel them riding over a crest in the land towards me in a vision that is more incredible than I can describe. I choke on joy and sorrow and awe in the power of their presence. Tears well up in my eyes and flow down my cheeks. I can barely type. I have to stop to smudge. “Where have you been?” I laugh at them in joy, “You guys scared the shit out of me!”

My ancestors tell me that First Nations people of North America have survived since time immemorial. Survival is our experience and our purpose on this earth. First Nations blood is strong. It binds us together with a strength that transcends political and geographical boundaries, life and death, space and time (Hampton, 1995). The presence of my ancestors flows through me and gives me strength to find the words. My joy and my pain are theirs as theirs is mine. We are one. Because of this, we are still here on this earth after generations of persecution and genocide. Because of this, we will be here long after our guests have disappeared.

At the same time as these reflections are therapeutic, they raise deep-seated questions for me that pull me towards a thesis topic. Where am I? Why am I here? Why do I choose to participate in graduate studies? Why do other First Nations people participate in graduate studies? What does participation mean to First Nations people in
the context of their past, present, and desired futures? What do First Nations people hope to accomplish through our participation in adult education? How can we balance the reality of globalization against our responsibility to ourselves and to our communities?
CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

1.1 First Nations participation

Statistics on First Nations participation in postsecondary studies are abysmally dismaying. Tait (1999) reported that in 1996, First Nations people in Canada between the ages of 20 and 29 were 50% less likely to complete their postsecondary studies than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Tierney’s (1993) summation of the participation rates for American Indians is equally bleak:

If one hundred [American Indian] students enter the ninth grade, sixty of them will graduate from high school and about twenty will enter academe. Of those twenty students, about three will receive a four-year degree. (p. 314)

The most current statistics indicate that in Saskatchewan, for youth between the ages of 15 and 24, “9% of non-Aboriginal and 2% of First Nations youth have been awarded a technical or vocational certificate or diploma, a 1 to 4.5 ratio…[and] 5% of non-Aboriginal and .3% of First Nations youth have been awarded a University degree, a 1 to 16.7 ratio” (FSIN, 2002, p. 3).

As an explanation for these dismal rates of participation, I stand by research that outlines such contributing factors as experiences of cognitive dissonance amongst First Nations students (Huffman et al., 1986), a lack of respect for First Nations people in the academy (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991), and an under-representation of First Nations faculty (Hampton, 1995). The end result, as “Delbert” so aptly put it, is that “a lot of us just walk away” and a vicious cycle of disjuncture is left between the academy and First Nations people.
In order to effectively address this disjuncture, it is critical that postsecondary institutions understand the factors that contribute to motivation for First Nations people. As practitioners of adult education, we cannot address “illnesses” of First Nations participation merely by suggesting strategies to deal with its symptoms (attrition, barriers).

Progressive educators today understand that:

the days of ‘survival’ education for Aboriginal students have given way to an educational experience which demands that education authorities find a way to educate Aboriginal[s]...so that they leave school with every opportunity available to them. First Nations directed initiatives that focus on promoting participation in science and technology and initiatives that celebrate First Nations languages as an avenue for the transmission of culture, demonstrate the course charted by Aboriginal leadership. It will be increasingly important for provincial educational leadership to move from cursory efforts at Aboriginal inclusion to collaborative and substantial efforts. (Canadian Teacher's Federation (CTF), 2001, p. 18)

Today’s reality is that First Nations people move in and out of the university as it suits us (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991) and we bring or take our knowledge with us. If First Nations knowledge and experience is not honoured and respected in mainstream universities, it seems likely that there may be future attempts to establish a separate First Nations system of universities. However, if mainstream universities are serious about recruiting and retaining First Nations students, they cannot continue to rely solely on entrance and/or support programs that help First Nations students adapt to the university culture. Addressing issues of First Nations participation should not simply mean “addressing their social and cultural adjustment” (Klein, 2002) because issues of First Nations participation can also be addressed by adapting the university to include First Nations culture (Lin, LaCounte, & Eder, 1988; Meyer, 1972). Universities must be willing to come half way. In order to determine what adaptations must be made to the
university, we must investigate why First Nations people choose to participate in adult education.

On the face of things, it appears that the factors that motivate First Nations people to enrol are not so different from mainstream society. Courtney (1992) profiled the average participant in adult education as “middle-class, increasingly women more than men, mostly white, mostly employed, and mostly people who seem to be taking advantage of educational opportunities for career advance or continuing professional upgrading in an increasingly stratified job market” (p. 33). Interestingly, Lin (1985) and Milone (as cited in Ledlow, 1992) found no statistically significant difference between Native American and White students with regard to their attitudes toward education. To use a metaphor, it would seem that if motivation were a four-legged beast, then we all ride the same kind of horse.

Contemporary mainstream literature and theory on participation tend to focus on motivational factors of expediency, usually related to career entry and advancement. For example, Selman, Cooke, Selman, & Dampier (1998) write, “Adults need to continue learning in order to maintain and advance themselves in their society” (p. 117). Holt, Christie, and Fry (1997) contend that in the majority of world countries “the juggernaut of economic rationalism [italics added] is driving the education agenda. This means that education is mostly seen in terms of accreditation, skills and qualifications” (p. 193).

This individualistic goal of earning a degree to acquire job skills needed to earn a livelihood is reflected today in the vision of the FSIN (1997; 2002). Yet in 1996, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) reported that Aboriginal people have
wider hopes for the education of their children. Not only do Aboriginal people "want
education to prepare them to participate fully in the economic life of their communities
and in Canadian society," but they also feel that "education must develop the whole
child, intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically" (Government of Canada,
1996, vol. 3, ch. 5). There are also those who argue that education for First Nations
people has little to do with individual aspirations for money, power, and prestige.
Garrod and Larimore (1997) report that, "according to many of our [First Nations]
authors, the wish to contribute to their home communities is what inspired them to
attend college in the first place" (p. 15). Motivations of expediency "are often linked to
aspirations with much broader collective/tribal considerations....We need to recognize
that there can be many reasons for pursuing a university education, reasons which often
transcend the interest and well-being of the individual student" (Kirkness & Barnhardt,
1991, p. 4). Hampton (1995) emphasizes that, "It is no light matter for an Indian
graduate student to articulate a communal purpose in his or her education. Virtually all
these students fulfil that purpose, working with and for Indian people" (p. 21).

If, as Tinto (1987) asserts, there is a "matrix of forces" that contributes to
participation, is the First Nations motivational "horse" some sort of mongrel breed? It
seemed clear to me that the factors that contribute to motivation for First Nations people
are more complex than can be explained by mainstream research. Therefore, I decided
to examine the underlying research question through multiple theoretical lenses. Most
importantly, the study was informed by postcolonial theory; secondly, by mainstream
theory on participation; and thirdly, by critical theory. I had hoped that these theoretical
lenses would allow me to develop a clearer understanding of the factors that motivate First Nations people to enrol in post-secondary education.

1.2 Taming a wild stallion

Early in my graduate coursework, I became aware of a cognitive phenomenon, a “wild stallion” racing up and down the margins of my consciousness. I began to struggle with a disjuncture between my experience and the socially constructed norms of economic rationalism. Jarvis (1992) explains, “Learning begins with a fundamental disjuncture between individual biography [italic added] and the socially constructed experience. This disjuncture leads people to ask questions and thus sets the learning process in motion” (p. 4).

At first, I had difficulty describing this disjuncture, this “stallion.” But through my interactions with other Aboriginal graduate students, I discovered that this phenomenon is common amongst us. As I turned my own participation in on itself, essentially participating in the study of participation, as I read and discussed literature on the subject, I realized that I am not alone. I have found in the actions of my peers “the basic strength” (Courtney, 1992, p. 96) for my own. Hampton (1995) assures me that this “out-of-place feeling is just forgetting our place. We have a place, it is here” (p. 39). Out of the language in the literature, I wove a rope of words and placed it gently around the neck of this “stallion,” naming her - Cognitive dissonance. Finally, by turning this dissonance in on itself, I have made it my friend, my motivation, my steed. This has led me to wonder about the motivational “horses” that other First Nations people ride and to ask, “What motivates First Nations people to enrol in graduate studies in Saskatchewan?”
1.3 Research questions

After an initial review of the literature on participation, my first inclination was to consider the question, “Why do some adults continue with learning while others do not?” (Selman et al., 1998, p. 117). Miller (1967) used this approach, measuring the degree to which positive factors influence participation against negative factors. However, for practical purposes, I chose to narrow the focus of this study to positive factors that affect participation.

Secondly, in Courtney’s (1992) words:

The quest for the causes of adult learning can take us in either of two directions. It may be a search for the origins of learning need or orientation. It may be a search for the conditions under which adults are likely to participate or not participate in organized forms of learning. (p. 82)

In other words, Rachal (1989) explains, the “two necessary ingredients for adult education participation” are motivation and opportunity (p. 11). Again, for practical purposes, I chose to narrow the focus of this study to motivation only.

Therefore, in an effort to understand the motivational factors that influence First Nations participation in graduate studies, the underlying research question of this qualitative study was, “What motivates First Nations people to enrol in graduate studies in Saskatchewan?” As I worked with my advisor to develop a thesis topic and write the proposal, I posed the following questions in an attempt to clarify these motivations:

1) What consequences do First Nations graduate students anticipate for their participation?

2) What consequences do First Nations graduate students anticipate for their nonparticipation?

3) Who or what serves as inspiration for First Nations graduate students?
4) What does participation mean to First Nations people in the context of their past, present, and desired futures?

1.4 Purpose of the study

In an effort to account for the origin of learning need amongst First Nations people, the purpose of this naturalistic study was to describe the factors that motivated three First Nations adults to enrol in graduate studies in Saskatchewan. I hoped to find out what participation meant to First Nations learners in the context of their past, present, and desired futures (West, 1996).

1.5 Significance of the study

Why document the factors that motivate First Nations people to enrol in graduate studies in Saskatchewan? First, First Nations people remain underrepresented at all levels of the academy (Tait, 1999; Tierney, 1993). Both mainstream universities (Klein, 2002; Tierney, 1992) and First Nations governments of Saskatchewan (FSIN, 1997; 2002) desire to increase the number of First Nations postsecondary graduates each year. The First Nations of Saskatchewan administer an annual postsecondary budget of some $40 million to its population of 110,000 treaty Indians. First Nations enrolment has increased tremendously during the past several decades as the First Nations of Canada play catch up with the enrolment rates of their non-Aboriginal counterparts. The Government of Canada (2000) reported that between 1993/94 and 1997/98, postsecondary enrolment of First Nations students in Canada increased by 18 percent, while over the same period of time postsecondary enrolment of First Nations students in Saskatchewan increased by 23 percent. In 1997-98, the 3,653 funded First Nations of
Saskatchewan constituted 13.5 percent of an approximate total of 27,000 funded First Nations students in Canada.

In order to effectively address issues of First Nations underrepresentation in the academy, it is critical that stakeholders in First Nations postsecondary education understand the factors that contribute to motivation for First Nations people. The findings of this study will be useful both to postsecondary institutions and to the First Nations of Saskatchewan in addressing the underrepresentation of First Nations people in the academy.

Secondly, this study fills a gap in the existing literature on First Nations participation as it pertains to motivation. Although several Aboriginal writers address the nature and purpose of Indian education (Cajete, 1994; Ermine, 2000; Hampton, 1995; Monture-Angus, 1995, 1999), I have found none that directly address motivation in participation.

Finally, people have a need to understand where they are and why they got there. West (1995) suggests that education

\[ \text{can offer a lifeline during periods of change and uncertainty: providing space and frameworks, with the help and support of others, to understand better, and revise, the story of one’s life, even repair past damage and construct a stronger self in consequence. (p. 133)} \]

This study provided four First Nations graduate students (including myself) with an opportunity to understand better and to revise the story of our life experiences. The study contributed to the general health and well-being of First Nations people in general by affirming and validating the experience of the three research participants and me as well as a wider community of First Nations people who have been and will be affected by us.
1.6 Definition of the terms

I use the words Aboriginal, American Indian, First Nations, Indian, Indigenous, and Native American somewhat interchangeably in the text depending on whom I am referring to. I use the words “American Indian” and “Native American” when I mean to be consistent with the language of a cited reference. I use the word “Indian” as a term of endearment, because of its historical derogatory connotation in reference to my people and I embrace it with pride and honor as a reminder of the endurance of my ancestors. The following is a list of definitions as I meant to use them:

1. **Aboriginal** – In this text “aboriginal… includes the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada” (Government of Canada, 1982, 35 (2)) and American Indians of the United States. However, the word “aboriginal” would normally include Indigenous people of other continents.

2. **American Indian** – Indigenous people of the United States. Also referred to as Native American in literature.

3. **Community** – a social group of individuals with a shared belief, goal, or characteristic.

4. **First Nations** – a term coined during the Constitutional discussions when Canadian politicians referred to themselves as “founding fathers.” The National Indian Brotherhood (NIB) then used the term “First Nations” to characterize their first place in Canada.

5. **Indian** – referring to Indigenous people of North America who are First Nations.

6. **Indigenous** – Native to a land; referring to peoples native to a land.
7. **Native American** – referring usually to American Indians of the United States, but can include Canadian First Nations people.

8. **Newly-enrolled** – I use the term “newly-enrolled” because I mean to delimit the study to graduate students who are in their first year of studies. I believe that students in their fifth year of studies will have a difficult time remembering the reasons they first enrolled. When I speak of graduate students who are “newly-enrolled,” I mean that it has been less than one year since they first registered either full-time or part-time in their program of graduate studies.

9. **Participation** – taking part in organized programs of education.

10. **White** – Caucasian; usually of European ancestry.

I also use several theoretical terms throughout the study, which I would like to define here:

1. **economic rationalism** - The ideological view that the purpose of education is to achieve accreditation, skills and qualifications in order to participate in the economy (Holt et al., 1997, p. 193; West, 1996, p. 206).

2. **dualism** – having two worldviews; walking in two worlds; split mind (Cajete, 2000, p. 186); ambidextrous consciousness (Little Bear, 2000, p. 85).

3. **enculturization** – the process of adapting one culture to fit another.

**1.7 Organization of the study**

This chapter laid the foundation for the research question and elaborated on the purpose, significance, and theoretical framework of the study. Chapter 2 provides a review of related literature and establishes the conceptual framework for the study. Chapter 3 presents the methods employed in the study. In Chapter 4, the analysis of
data derived from the data collection instruments are presented. The implications of the
data are discussed in light of the related literature in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this naturalistic study was to describe the factors that motivated three First Nations adults to enrol in graduate studies in Saskatchewan.

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I outline literature on colonialism, then move to a definition of participation and an overview of mainstream literature on participation, before summarizing contemporary literature on First Nations participation. Finally, I establish the conceptual framework for the study.

2.2 Colonialism

An understanding of colonialism is critical to any study of First Nations participation. The effects of colonialism are lurking variables that are commonly overlooked and which skew the data of most quantitative research designs. However, postcolonial theory can be effective in clarifying some of the contradictions that emerge in a naturalistic study.

Colonialism is a phenomenon seldom talked about in every day life. This is because everything in modern society is structured to make colonialism and oppression invisible to both the dominator and the dominated (Noël, 1994). Those who benefit from colonialism go about their daily business blissfully unaware of the depth of its lurking effects, while those who are oppressed by colonialism accept it as normal and inevitable. The dominated learn to accept that there are higher powers that control
fundamental aspects of our lives and who do this for our own good, because we are not capable of knowing what is good for us. The dominated struggle to live up to an invisible standard of values that reside as a system of our subconscious. This value system becomes the standard of the archetypical, normal, reasonable man. Yet, Noël (1994) asserts, it is inevitably the dominator who becomes “the implicit incarnation of the supreme model, the ideal type, the yardstick that measures the humanity of anyone who does not resemble him” (p. 12).

This invisible value system is commonly referred to as “common knowledge” or what Gramsci (1971) called “common-sense” (p. 275). These “traditional conception[s] of the world... have sturdy historical roots and are tenaciously entwined in the psychology of specific popular strata” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 275). Common sense is “a culture’s way...of seeing and believing” (Villaneuva Jr., 1993, p. 124) and is not taught in any educational institution, although we are often derided for not having enough of it. We learn this standard value system through informal and incidental learning which Hill (1999) calls “collateral learning” (p. 312). Hill (1999) defines “collateral learning” as:

The world of learning that is far greater than the world of schooling, yet...[a] world which remains almost invisible as a recognized and legitimate educational domain. Its very invisibility as an ‘educational’ field of enquiry has, in effect, removed it from critical scrutiny. (p. 312)

Without really having to think, we are able to pull out our bag of “common sense” whenever we need to decide whether something is right or wrong, good or bad. Because we learn our value system through collateral learning, it is never subjected to critical scrutiny. It is ironic that a society so caught up with efficiency and accountability so easily assumes its fundamental values to be “true”, “right”, and “good” without subjecting them to even basic levels of examination or evaluation.
Under the invisible oppression of colonization, the marginalized are both ignored and silenced. They are relegated to, and they accept, subservient roles. They are written out of history books without even being aware of it (Noël, 1994). It is the dominator who defines and epitomizes normality, competence, and legality. The very language of competence is that of the dominator. Even the standards of speech patterns and mannerisms of the dominator are elevated over those of the dominated. Scientists study the knowledge and experience of the oppressed, interpreting and evaluating it relative to that of the oppressor. Noël (1994) shows us that “science and the law thus allow...[the oppressed] to be treated against their will” (p. 47). The dominated are made out to be deviant, incompetent, and ultimately criminal simply by being different from the dominator.

I will briefly outline several conditions of colonialism, which I believe are relevant to this study: alienation, cultural imperialism, artificial contexts, and dualism or the split mind.

2.2.1 Alienation

Under the tutelage of colonial society Noël (1994) writes, both the oppressed and the oppressor become blind to the existence of colonialism. Noël (1994) calls this blindness “alienation.”

Alienation is to the oppressed what self-righteousness is to the oppressor. Each really believes that their unequal relationship is part of the natural order of things or desired by some higher power. The dominator does not feel that he is exercising unjust power, and the dominated do not feel the need to withdraw from his tutelage. The dominator will even believe, in all good faith, that he is looking out for the good of the dominated, while the latter will insist that they want an authority more enlightened than their own to determine their fate. (p. 79)
Through systematic objectification and violence, stigmas and stereotypes are attached to anyone who does not resemble the oppressor. As if this weren't enough, Noël (1994) demonstrates that oppressors portray themselves as victims while blaming the oppressed not only for their own plight, but for the ails of the oppressor as well.

### 2.2.2 Cognitive imperialism

Another of the conditions of colonialism is a sense of superiority of dominator over dominated. This condition has been named cognitive imperialism, cultural racism, and Eurocentrism (when referring to European colonized states). Battiste (2000a) writes, "cognitive imperialism, also known as cultural racism, is the imposition of one worldview on a people who have an alternative worldview, with the implication that the imposed worldview is superior to the alternative worldview" (p. 193). Blaut (1993) defines Eurocentrism as “a label for all the beliefs that postulate past or present superiority of Europeans over non-Europeans” (p. 8). Said (1979) demonstrates how this plays out between Western and Eastern nations: “The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, “different”; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, “normal” (p. 40).

### 2.2.3 Artificial contexts

In explaining the dimensions of an “artificial context,” Henderson (2000b) first defines a paradigm or “context” as “fundamental assumptions... [as well as] systems of theories, principles, and doctrines” (p. 12). Unger (as cited in Henderson, 2000b) argues that “if a context allows people to move within it to discover everything about the world that they can discover, then it is a ‘natural’ context.” Henderson (2000b) concludes then, that any context which maintains the invisibility of colonialism must be an
“artificial context.” Henderson (2000b) makes the case that, since “modern society is a human artefact” (p. 13), its foundational theory can be replaced with “an Indigenous theory of society.”

2.2.4 Dualism: the split mind

Little Bear (2000) explains the parameters of yet another condition of colonialism: dualism. Little Bear (2000) gives evidence that dualism is the common Aboriginal condition of having a fragmented and contentious worldview. He points out that “colonization [has] left a heritage of jagged worldviews among Indigenous peoples. They no longer had an Aboriginal worldview, nor did they adopt a Eurocentric worldview” (Little Bear, 2000, p. 84). He proposes that “No one has a pure worldview that is 100 percent Indigenous or Eurocentric; rather, everyone has an integrated mind, a fluxing and ambidextrous consciousness, a precolonized consciousness that flows into a colonized consciousness and back again” (p. 85). Colonized Aboriginals flounder in a world in which we cannot win since we find ourselves rejected by modern society on the one hand while we have rejected our Aboriginal worldview on the other. Cajete (2000) calls this condition “pin geh heh, which means ‘split mind’” (p. 186), and warns that having a split mind can lead to a loss of identity, low self-esteem, and even suicide.

Without forgetting the significance of literature on colonialism, but temporarily setting it aside, I will now move to the literature on the phenomenon and study of participation before narrowing the focus to literature in First Nations participation.

2.3 Participation

As a theory, participation attempts to explain why some adults continue with learning while others do not, accounting for elements of motivation alongside elements
of opportunity, studying the psyche of the individual while simultaneously accounting for social contexts (Courtney, 1992; Cross, 1981; Miller, 1967; Selman et al., 1998; Tough, 1968). Understanding why adults voluntarily choose to learn has been the focus of research in the field of participation (Courtney, 1992; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Tierney, 1992). Yet, participation is a complex, elusive phenomenon (Courtney, 1992) and there is a notable lack of theoretical depth in the field. A relative few researchers (Cross, 1981; Houle, 1961; Miller, 1967; Tough, 1968) have ever dared proffer a theory.

This lack of a compelling theory would seem to be partially responsible for the sporadic nature of research in the field of participation. Thus, researchers of participation tend to study its elements in relative isolation. There are studies of econometrics (Gintis, 1972; Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989), motivation (Perna, 2000; Tough, 1968; West, 1995, 1996), barriers (Archibald & Urion, 1995), persistence (Benjamin, Chambers, & Reiterman, 1993; Patton & Edington, 1973), retention (Beaty & Chiste, 1996; Falk & Aitken, 1984; Kleinfeld & Kohout, 1974; Tate & Schwartz, 1993), attrition (Ledlow, 1992; Pavel & Padilla, 1993; Tinto, 1982, 1987), leave-taking (Tierney, 1993), achievement (Huffman et al., 1986; Rindone, 1988), and experience (Edgewater, 1981; Hoover & Jacobs, 1992; Huffman, 1991; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Lin, 1990; Lin et al., 1988; Tierney & Wright, 1991) among others, which overlap with one another. No comprehensive theory of participation has yet been attempted.

Research in the field of participation can be divided into two general categories: (a) psychological studies, and (b) sociological studies (Courtney, 1992; West, 1996). Psychological studies try to explain participation through the study of individual
motivation. Sociological studies, on the other hand, try to explain participation as a social phenomenon realized within a social world.

Interestingly, one of the earliest authorities in the field of adult education, Lindeman (1926), took a sociological perspective, arguing that the purpose of adult education is to maintain existing social systems and social relationships and to transmit the social culture. Lindeman explained participation as part of the social strata in a particular culture and treated the concept of participation as a function of the purpose of adult education.

Lindeman's perspective is interesting because, aside from him, research on participation and why adults learn has a historical bias towards psychological explanations of motivation (Courtney, 1992; Cross, 1981; Galbraith, 1991; Kidd, 1973) "to the neglect or exclusion of social and cultural perspectives" (West, 1996, p. 6). Stalker (2001) laments that, "Motivation and attitudes are given prominence, [in contemporary literature on participation] and often macro-level factors are ignored" (p. 290).

2.4 Studies of participation

Lorimer (as cited in Courtney, 1992) conducted "the first systematic survey of a potential adult learning population that we have on record" in 1929 (p. 25) and found that the best predictor of participation is one's educational level. This study was replicated and its findings verified by McGrath (cited in Courtney, 1992) in 1938, Kaplan (cited in Courtney, 1992) in 1945, and Johnstone and Rivera (1965), among numerous others. In their widely-cited study, Johnstone and Rivera (1965) drew a profile of the average participant in adult education:
Just as often a woman as a man... typically under 40, has completed high school or better, enjoys an above-average income, works full-time and in a white-collar occupation, is white, Protestant, married and has children. (p. 78)

However, these quantitative studies could do little to explain or to predict participation. In 1979, a landmark study by Anderson and Darkenwald (cited in Courtney, 1992) once again confirmed the significance of prior education in predicting participation but also found something new and even more significant. Although their sample was very large (n=79,631),

only 10 per cent of the variance associated with participation and persistence could be accounted for statistically. In other words, 90 per cent of whatever it is that leads adults to participate in and drop out from adult education has not been identified by this or by other similar studies conducted in the past. (Anderson & Darkenwald, as cited in Courtney, 1992, p. 6)

The phenomenon of participation seemed elusive to quantitative researchers and called for a different approach.

Houle (1961) criticized the limitations of early survey studies, arguing that “such research merely establishes probabilities” (p. 8). Unsatisfied with the ability of existing theories of participation to explain why some people overcome great barriers to attend school while others of more opportune circumstance choose to opt out of formal educational opportunities, Houle recognized that participation is a more complex concept than can be explained by statistical analysis. Using qualitative data gathered by interviewing twenty-two “exceptionally active” adult learners, Houle (1961) developed his now well-known typology of adult learners: (a) Goal-oriented learners – people who learn in order to achieve a concrete objective, (b) Activity-oriented learners – people who learn for the joy of participation itself, and (c) Learning-oriented learners – people who pursue learning for its own sake.
Inspired by Houle’s (1961) research, Tough (1968) studied “the conscious reasons for learning that were in the adult’s mind at the time he initiated the learning project” (p. 3). Tough interviewed thirty-five adult learners using a model of participation in which he listed thirteen possible motives for learning. Tough found that adults usually have more than one reason for choosing to participate. It seemed that participation was, indeed, a more complex concept than originally thought.

Analyzing and borrowing from existing foundational theory on participation, Cross (1981) proposed her now well-cited Chain-of-Response (COR) Model for Understanding Participation in Adult Learning Activities. In her model, Cross characterized participation not as an isolated, single action in a linear line of thought, but as a dynamic, cyclical decision process in which many factors are constantly considered and reconsidered. She offered her theory as a reference point, a framework on which to discuss a more comprehensive theory, admitting that, “it is still far from the kind of theory that can be used to predict who will participate” (p. 124). However, the fact that Cross’ model has stood the test of time as the most sophisticated explanation of participation in the field is a testament to the complexity of participation as a phenomenon and is evidence of the lack of theoretical depth in the field.

Tinto (1987) considered the causes and cures of student attrition. Criticizing prior attempts to explain student departure for relying too “heavily upon psychological models of educational persistence” (p. 86), he argued that purely psychological models of departure failed to take into account that “individual behaviour is as much a function of the environment within which individuals find themselves” (p. 87) as it is a function of the person. Tinto (1987) synthesized an integrational model of attrition. Using
former theories of student departure while also drawing from the work of the Dutch anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep, he represented college students as individuals in transition between old associations and new associations. Tinto then used Emile Durkheim’s theory of egotistical suicide as an analogical explanation of institutional departure.

Tierney (1992) described two conceptual problems with Tinto’s (1987) model: First, college culture is homogeneous, White, and middle-classed. It is unnatural, then, for marginalized students whose culture is different from that of the university to undergo a rite of passage that is native to another culture. Second, Tinto assumes that departure from old associations is normal and healthy. Under Tinto’s model, Tierney explains, First Nations students would be expected to drop a lifetime of cultural identity formation and moral development at the doorstep of the university in order to receive the benefits of a formal education. For some First Nations students, Tierney contends, the suppression or abandonment of the self that is necessary for participation is an impossibility.

Tierney’s point is supported by Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991), who demonstrate that, while First Nations students have unique reasons for going to university, initiation into the culture of the university is not one of them. They explain:

For the First Nations student coming to the university (an institution that is a virtual embodiment of modern consciousness), survival often requires the acquisition and acceptance of a new form of consciousness that not only displaces, but often devalues their indigenous consciousness, and for many, this is a greater sacrifice than they are willing to make. (p. 6)

Yet enculturization remains the popular approach of mainstream universities to issues of First Nations participation (Klein, 2002; Polson, 1999). Efforts are commonly
focussed on “addressing their [First Nations] social and cultural adjustment” (Klein, 2002, p. A4), without addressing any social and/or cultural adjustment on the part of the university. Battiste (2000a) notes that non-Aboriginal people “do not know or understand the cognitive shock they would be forced to endure if Aboriginal consciousness and language were to be respected, affirmed, and encouraged to flourish in the modern classroom” (p. 198).

In order to explore these issues more fully, I will now turn to literature more narrowly focussed on First Nations participation.

2.5 First Nations participation

Several themes emerge when I consider the First Nations perspective in the literature on participation. First, in asking about First Nations motivation to enrol in graduate studies, questions must be asked about the nature and purpose of First Nations education. While Battiste (2000a) suggests that “the real purpose of education is to affirm the political and social status quo” (p. 196), the majority of mainstream literature gives unquestioningly glowing accounts of the benefits of education and the need for more education (Falk & Aitken, 1984; Kleinfeld & Kohout, 1974; Tate & Schwartz, 1993). Research in the field of participation views nonparticipation as an illness of sorts and is generally prescriptive in nature (Courtney, 1992; Tinto, 1987), suggesting strategies to overcome barriers and to increase retention.

While I have no doubt that education can be a means of overcoming poverty, an increasing body of literature cautions against the dangers of allowing calls for more and more education to go uncriticized. Informed by Battiste (1986; 2000a) and Battiste and Barman (1995), the Canadian Teacher’s Federation (CTF) has recognized “that a
growing Aboriginal population does not benefit equitably from education” (CTF, 2001, p. 16). Hampton (1995) goes so far as to say that, “the failure of non-Native education of Natives can be read as the success of Native resistance to cultural, spiritual, and psychological genocide” (p. 7). Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) argue that “the very nature and purpose of higher education for First Nations people must be reconsidered” (p. 12). Holt et al. (1997) echo this idea, writing, “We need to think more laterally and holistically about what the term education means. Who benefits? Education for what, for whom, and why?” (p. 194). We would do well to remember Illich’s (1971) criticism of the dangers of schooling.

Therefore, in asking the question, “What motivates First Nations people to enrol in graduate studies in Saskatchewan?” I also needed to ask, “What does participation represent to First Nations graduate students in the context of their past, present and desired futures?” (Hampton, 1995; West, 1995, 1996)

Second, First Nations writers articulate a communal purpose in their education (Garrod & Larimore, 1997; Hampton, 1995; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). First Nations have a worldview in which the purpose of survival supersedes individual advancement in society. This is because we believe that our individual survival is dependent upon the survival of the world around us (Cajete, 1994). Therefore, our motivation to participate has an embedded communal element.

Third, in my review of literature in the field, I could find no study of First Nations participation in terms of motivation. Yet, I believe that understanding why First Nations people choose to participate is critical in addressing First Nations underrepresentation in the academy. Studies of First Nations persistence and retention
can do little to address issues of First Nations participation if they focus only on ways of changing First Nations people to better suit the culture of the university (enculturization) (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). To attribute the problems of attrition and poor academic performance to the First Nations student “is like blaming the victim of rape for being a woman” (Lin et al., 1988, p. 14). The onus to change must be focused also on educational institutions rather than solely on the student (Garrod & Larimore, 1997). A more effective strategy to address issues of First Nations participation would be to learn “Aboriginal thought and apply it in current educational processes” (Battiste, 2000a, p. 192).

I can only surmise that past researchers of First Nations participation have focused their studies on opportunity and social contexts as a reaction to the fact that the larger proportion of general research on participation has focused on psychology and individuality. However, conducting sociological, quantitative studies on First Nations people as a means of addressing attrition and underachievement amongst this population in mainstream universities is an ineffective strategy. It is ineffective because it fails to acknowledge that there are two parties to this issue: First Nations people and mainstream universities. Frankly, centering research and strategies solely on First Nations people is racist and shameful because it assumes that there is some kind of innate fault within the First Nations psyche.

In any case, and whatever the cause of this sociological focus, there is a clear need for studies of First Nations participation with a psychological focus and a qualitative methodology, “a kind of cultural psychology” (West, 1996, p. xi). We cannot purport to be able to suggest strategies to address such pressing issues as First
Nations attrition and achievement until we have studied the very nature and purpose of Indian education because we need to understand the reasons why First Nations people participate in the first place.

### 2.6 Hampton's model of Indian education

Hampton (1995) developed a model of Indian education that illustrates the unique nature and purpose of Indian education. Using the six directions, north, south, east, west, earth and spirit as a mnemonic and a matrix for ideas about Indian education, Hampton described twelve standards of Indian education: spirituality, service, diversity, culture, tradition, respect, history, relentlessness, vitality, conflict, place, and transformation. He found that in Indian cultures, “the individual does not form an identity in opposition to the group but recognizes the group as relatives included in his or her own identity” (p. 21). Hampton (1995) believes that education “transmits the values, knowledge, and behaviors of white culture” and that “the call for higher standards of education is invariably a call for the standard of the whites” (p. 37).

Study of Hampton’s (1995) model might be useful in helping university administrators and faculty understand the changes that are necessary within the academy to meet the needs of an ever-diversifying student population. At the same time, it is also important that future studies focus on positive aspects of First Nations participation. In this way, academic research can serve not just to create or search for knowledge, but also to inspire researchers, participants, adult educational practitioners, and others who have a vested interest in First Nations issues. In effect, research can become a means to institutional and social change (Collins, 1998; Freire, 1974).
2.7 Summary

I have shown in this chapter that an understanding of colonialism is critical to any study of First Nations participation. The effects of colonialism are lurking variables which have skewed the data of most quantitative research designs. Furthermore, there is a notable lack of theoretical depth in the field of participation. This lack of theory has been largely responsible for a sporadic, inconsistent approach to research in the field. Perhaps this deficiency might be an appropriate topic for a certain forthcoming doctoral dissertation. Finally, several themes emerge when I consider the First Nations experience in light of the literature on participation: (a) In asking about First Nations motivation to enrol in graduate studies, questions must be asked about the nature and purpose of First Nations education, (b) First Nations people have unique reasons for enrolling in adult educational programs, and (c) A study of First Nations motivation is essential to address First Nations underrepresentation in the academy.
CHAPTER 3 - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Life history methods can reinvigorate teaching, research and social purpose education. The idea...is to listen, to ground the struggle for theory and explanation in real lives rather than the metaphysics of dialectic or the privileging of white, male, class-based accounts of oppression.

(West, 1994, p. 103)

Indigenous Peoples bring with them a knowledge that is grounded in subjective relationships with a spiritual universe.

(Ermine, 2000, p. 45)

3.1 Design of the study

I based this study on a qualitative research design using open-ended interviews and collective narrative to collect and present data to understand the underlying research question: "What motivates First Nations people to enrol in graduate studies in Saskatchewan?" The study investigated what participation represents to the three participants in the context of their past, present and desired futures (Hampton, 1995; West, 1995, 1996).

While quantitative studies of motivation in participation have "barely scratched the surface of the personal and social dialectics which may be involved" (West, 1996, p. 1), qualitative research methods are particularly well-suited to "soliciting emic viewpoints [and] in determining the meanings and purposes that people ascribe to their actions" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110).
Researchers of participation have called for more qualitative and longitudinal studies (Houle, 1961; Johnstone & Rivera, 1965) and for an investigation into the subjective perceptions of a small selective sample of students (Huffman et al., 1986). It is argued that subjective, individual micro-level thought processes are crucial to understanding motivation to participate (Courtney, 1992; West, 1995, 1996).

Hampton (1995) found that, when working with First Nations participants, open-ended questions facilitated a collaborative process of learning between the researcher and the participants. Open-ended interviews allow participants the space, time, and framework to answer questions in their own words and in their own context (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; West, 1995, 1996).

3.2 Criticisms of quantitative methodologies

It has been argued that survey designs are unable to expose factors of motivation at more than a superficial level (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Van Stone et al., 1994; West, 1995, 1996). Even more strikingly, Benjamin et al. (1993) found that standard statistical analyses hold little correlational or predictive value towards American Indian participation, suggesting only that something “appears to be operating among American Indians... for which standard measures appear unable to account” (p. 30). Even if the predictive value of statistical analysis were proven, Courtney (1992) contends that “the survey approach is inadequate without a theory of motivation and action” (p. 82) because motivation is far more complex than can be explained by demographic variables.
3.3 Selection of participants

Three participants were selected by use of the snowball sampling technique (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 64). I conducted several informal pilot interviews with First Nations graduate students whom I already knew. During each interview, I asked these participants to recommend others for the study. I continued to choose and interview new people until I found three newly-enrolled, First Nations graduate students in the province of Saskatchewan who would agree to participate in my study. The sample was essentially a sample of convenience and access.

This method of selection was the most reasonable because (a) at the time of writing there were only two institutions in Saskatchewan where graduate studies could be pursued: 1) the University of Saskatchewan, and 2) the University of Regina, and (b) the number of First Nations graduate students was small (there were only 107 First Nations graduate students sponsored by First Nations of Saskatchewan in 1997-98 (Government of Canada, 2000, p. 135)).

3.4 Data gathering procedures

Two open-ended interviews were used to allow each participant to describe in their own terms the factors that motivated them to enrol in graduate studies (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Hampton, 1995; Van Stone et al., 1994). Both interviews were approximately one hour in length and were audiotaped and transcribed. It was important to me that traditional protocols for the treatment of Indigenous knowledge and First Nations people be followed; yet the range of protocols across indigenous cultures is widely diverse. Therefore, as a Plains Cree man, I followed the appropriate protocols of my people in my treatment of Indigenous knowledge and First Nations people. All
shared knowledge was treated with due respect according to the oral teachings of my elders. All participants received gifts of tobacco prior to the interview as an offering of thanks and respect for their knowledge and as a symbol of my continuing relationship with them. Although there is much more to the traditional protocols for the treatment of the knowledge of my people, I respectfully refuse to write any further explanations of these teachings here, since my elders have taught me that it is not appropriate to write down the knowledge of my people.

Each interview progressed roughly as follows: During the first interview, if I was meeting the participant for the first time, I first positioned myself by explaining who I was and where I was from (Monture-Angus, 1999). The participants reciprocated. Once we had made introductory connections, I informed the participants about the purpose of the study and obtained informed consent. The format of each interview was “neither question-and-answer nor a critical discussion but a reflective discussion” (Hampton, 1995, p. 13). At first, our conversations went in many directions as we made connections through our positionality and our experience. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) explain that “the purpose this chit-chat serves is to develop rapport (p. 94). However, at a moment that I sensed to be opportune and appropriate, I directed the interview towards open-ended questions about participation of the following type:

1) Describe how you came to decide to pursue graduate studies.

2) What issues did you have to consider when you made the decision to begin graduate studies?

3) Tell me about what motivated you to pursue graduate studies. Were there people who encouraged or discouraged you?
4) What benefit do you see for yourself and others in your participation in graduate studies?

5) What consequences do you anticipate for your graduate studies?

6) What direction do you think your life would have taken had you chosen not to attend this graduate program?

7) Who or what serves you as an inspiration?

8) What does your participation in graduate studies mean to you in the context of your life story?

Bogdan and Biklen (1998) explain that such open-ended questions allow “the subjects to answer from their own frame of reference rather than from one structured by prearranged questions” (p. 3). Although I used these questions as a guide, the interviews more closely resembled conversations than formal, one-way interviews.

I discussed my interest in each question with each participant and responded freely to his or her answers. I attempted to paraphrase the answers back to each participant to be sure that I understood their meaning. In this way, I had hoped that this study would enable “the participants, including me, to build our thoughts together in a cumulative or sometimes exponential way” (Hampton, 1995, p. 13) so that each participant would become more of a “conversational partner” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 11) than an interviewee. Mishler (1986) elaborates on this type of interview process:

Rather that serving as a stimulus having a predetermined and presumable shared meaning and intended to elicit a response, a question may more usefully be thought of as part of a circular process through which its meaning and that of its answer are created in the discourse between interviewer and respondent as they try to make continuing sense of what they are saying to each other. (p. 53)
Bogdan and Biklen (1998) describe the difference between qualitative and quantitative methodology: “Qualitative researchers...do not search out data or evidence to prove or disprove hypotheses they hold before entering the study; rather, the abstractions are built as the particulars that have been gathered are grouped together” (p. 3). Accordingly, after the first interviews, I transcribed the audiotapes and did a preliminary analysis of the data (see section 3.5 Data analysis) to look for patterns or questions. The first thing that struck me was that James and Noreen had both used the phrase “self-empowerment” or variations of it several times. Since Marshall and Rossman (1995) state that “Indigenous typologies are those created and expressed by participants and are generated through analyses of the local use of language” (p. 114), I held onto the phrase “self-empowerment” as a name for the theme it represented, even as I struggled to define what they had meant by it. Sylvia had, in response to both the question, “Describe how you came to decide to pursue graduate studies,” and to the question, “Do you feel a responsibility to be a role model?” used the phrase “to better myself.” These words and their contexts gave me an initial sense that the three participants were enrolled in graduate studies to get a credential in order to be heard and respected. I could see a general connection of this theme to Indian politics.

Although the theme of “self-esteem” seemed important, at this stage I was not yet able to articulate the way in which it was important. I was also perplexed by what I saw as contradictions in the responses of the participants. At the end of the first interview, I had told Noreen, “I think that you may have contradicted yourself there. But it’s all right. I probably would have done that, too.”
After the preliminary data analysis, I promptly sent a short note on my thoughts together with a copy of each transcript to its corresponding participant for review. Within two weeks, I followed up with short telephone conferences in which I asked each participant for feedback on my comments, and for clarification and verification of what they had said. Perhaps due to the busyness of their occupations and their studies, the participants were all quite agreeable, verifying the accuracy of the transcripts but offering little feedback in terms of interpreting what they had said. Without pressing them for more feedback, I reminded each participant of their right to delete from, add to, or augment the transcript at any time so that it accurately reflected what they wished to share. I drafted a one to three page summary of what I perceived to be the perspective of each participant and his or her motivations to enrol in graduate studies. In keeping with the design of qualitative research, from these summaries I developed a unique list of questions for each participant to take back to the second interview.

The second interviews were conducted in much the same manner as the first but were used to pose new questions about self-empowerment, self-esteem, and balancing Indigenous knowledge with academia. After transcribing the second interviews, I again did a preliminary analysis of the data (see section 3.5 Data analysis). The themes and their titles began to solidify. After the preliminary data analysis of the second interviews, I e-mailed a copy of the transcripts to each participant for review. Again, the participants were all quite agreeable, verifying the accuracy of the transcripts but offering little feedback in terms of interpreting what they had said. A first draft of the data analysis was drafted and sent to each participant for review and feedback. For a third time,
little feedback. I followed with a second conference in which we discussed the contents of the data section and data analysis and its implications. I again asked each participant for feedback on my comments, and for clarification and verification of what they had said. In this way, the participants were directly and continuously involved in the data analysis and writing process.

3.5 Data analysis

After the first interview, I transcribed the audiotapes. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) define qualitative data analysis as an ongoing process in which themes emerge throughout the study. In other words, Marshall and Rossman (1995) explain, “Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data; it builds grounded theory” (p. 111). With this in mind, I began a preliminary analysis by reading through each transcript several times to get an initial feel for it. I then conducted a preliminary stage of coding. Without following any preconceived list of motivations, I wrote any motivations that I saw in the text in the margins with a red pen. Quickly going back through each transcript, I copied these motivations into an unstructured list. I then grouped these motivations together into several key categories and intuitively transposed them onto a continuum of motivations that reflected Houle’s (1961) typology (see Figure 3.1). Simply by tallying the number of references to each category, I gleaned a crude but roughly quantifiable indication of its collective significance amongst the three participants.

After the second interviews, I did a preliminary analysis of each transcript and sent the analyses to the participants for review and feedback. For a secondary analysis, I initially tried using my word processor to search for recurrences of key words or
Figure 3.1 Continuum of motivations to enrol in graduate studies

1) Anticipation of high salary job
2) Pay increment in current job
3) Career advancement
4) Employer expectations
5) Prestige
6) Certification
7) Respect
8) Self-esteem/confidence
9) Personal development
10) Fun
11) Reaction to positive past experience
12) Reaction to negative past experience
13) Live up to collective identity (family)
14) Inspired by role model
15) Encouraged by others
16) To act as role model for children
17) Social responsibility
18) To build community
19) Desire to make a difference
20) Something to do
21) Knowledge
22) Practical skills
23) Theory

Goal: money, career advancement, prestige
Activity: learner
Learner:

Figure 3.1 Continuum of motivations to enrol in graduate studies
phrases. However, I found that with only six transcripts I could code the data more easily by methodically reviewing each transcript and summarizing the essence of relevant and key paragraphs in the margins with a red pen. Themes and patterns began to emerge across all transcripts as a whole as I strayed to create, delete, and restructure categories of data. I sat down at the kitchen table one day with a box of colored markers. Remembering what each participant had said in each interview and in each transcript, I summarized my perception of what had motivated each individual to enrol in graduate studies. I was disappointed to have to admit that the three participants seemed mostly motivated by factors of expedience such as an increase in salary, career advancement, and prestige. Self-esteem and self-empowerment seemed also to be powerful themes. I went through each transcript many more times, systematically coding them with various colored pens. Each color represented a different theme: green for Indigenous knowledge, red for self-esteem, and yellow for self-empowerment. I then used my word processor to cut and paste excerpts of text into these categories as separate documents.

My first draft of Chapter 4 seemed to be evolving into three themes, but I was having difficulty articulating what each of them meant and how each theme was different from the others. At this point, I was familiar enough with the words of each participant to summarize his or her perspective. In my living room at home, I pretended that I was giving a presentation of my findings to an audience of professors who were fascinated by my study. The initial themes: self-esteem, self-empowerment, and individual biography vs. economic rationalism, began to materialize as I explained their meaning to my imaginary audience.
It was obvious to me that the three participants and I had all struggled with self-esteem. But I eventually renamed the theme of "self-esteem" to "overcoming feelings of inferiority" because this phrase better describes what the theme is about. Since I was having trouble defining the theme of "self-empowerment," I renamed it "empowerment," to better reflect Kirkness and Barnhardt's (1991) conclusion that "it is the notion of empowerment that is at the heart of First Nations participation in higher education" (p. 12). However, I later changed the title of this theme to "overcoming nepotism and cronyism" because I thought this phrase more intuitively summarized the gist of the theme.

I labored over analysis of the third theme. I wanted to argue that the three participants and I had enrolled in graduate studies partly as an attempt to balance communalism with individualism. I was frustrated because I had expected my participants to be guided by a communal purpose and to struggle over the dichotomy between the communalism of their individual biography and the individualism of economic rationalism. Yet, I could see very individualistic goals in their narrative and could sense no struggle here. I realized that I had to rename this theme, since individual biography could be economic rationalism. In searching for a better name, I realized that what I was really talking about was the communalism of the Aboriginal experience vs. the individualism of economic rationalism.

As Marshall and Rossman (1995) explain, "The researcher is guided by initial concepts and guiding hypotheses, but shifts or discards them as the data are collected and analyzed" (p. 112). After many months of struggling to understand the themes in the data, one day I was reading a section of the transcript of my interview with James in
which I thought he had directly contradicted himself. In an effort to understand how he could have said two seemingly contradictory things in quick succession, I replayed the conversation in my memory, complete with pauses, expression, and nuances. To my utter surprise, I realized that I had completely misunderstood what James was saying! His change from past to present to future tense indicates that, while James did not enroll for communal purposes and did not currently give back to a larger Aboriginal community, he wanted to give back to the community in the future. Excited, I went through James' transcripts for verification of this idea, circling places where he had discussed this theme. As I reviewed the transcripts of Noreen and Sylvia, I finally understood what they had said. I summarized these themes in prose, and quickly sketched them in diagrams to develop a more concrete understanding of them.

Finally, as I wrote up the final analysis, I realized that “the researcher’s relationship to the inquiry and to the participants shapes the research text” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, p. 171). I decided that it would be appropriate to weave the three participant’s voices together with my own throughout the three themes.

3.6 Behavioral ethics

It was important to me that traditional protocols for the treatment of Indigenous knowledge and First Nations people be followed; yet the range of protocols is widely diverse across Indigenous cultures. While I understand that Indigenous knowledge may be written under other traditions, my elders have taught me that written texts are not appropriate ways of recording, teaching, or learning the knowledge of my people. I can tell you that all participants received gifts of tobacco prior to the interview as an offering of thanks and respect for their knowledge and as a symbol of my continuing relationship
with them. However, I respectfully refuse to write any further description of the protocols I followed. As one of my Cree participants explained, you don’t learn our knowledge from reading a book, “you have to go to the elders and visit them for six months and stay there with them (Sylvia, TC2, p. 6).

Finally, ethical procedures of the University of Saskatchewan were followed and confidentiality was respected. All individuals gave voluntary, informed consent to participate in the study. See Appendices A through E.
CHAPTER 4 – STUDY FINDINGS

The purpose of this naturalistic study was to describe the factors that motivated three First Nations adults to enrol in graduate studies in Saskatchewan.

4.1 Introduction

Through an ongoing analysis of each reflective conversation, three main themes emerged in the factors that motivated these three First Nations people and me to enrol in graduate studies: (a) overcoming feelings of inferiority, (b) overcoming nepotism and cronyism, and (c) “playing the game”: balancing Indigenous knowledge with economic rationalism.

The first theme, “overcoming feelings of inferiority,” developed in the writing of this chapter. While it was obvious to me that the three participants and I had struggled with self-esteem, it was a long time before I could put a name to this category of data.

The second theme, “overcoming nepotism and cronyism,” was central to the motivation of all three participants and me to enrol in graduate studies and was so powerful as to be immediately obvious after a preliminary analysis of the transcripts of the first interviews. Questions surrounding this theme then were taken back to the participants during the second interview for testing and further clarification.

The third and most significant theme, “‘playing the game’: balancing Indigenous knowledge with economic rationalism” evolved out of seemingly contradictory statements and stories which all three participants related about Indigenous knowledge,
on the one hand, and economic rationalism on the other. After several months of consideration, it has become clear to me that these three participants did indeed enrol in graduate studies to fulfil individualistic goals such as an increase in pay, career advancement, and prestige. However, they only fulfilled these goals because they knew that “you gotta play that game whether or not you truly believe in it” (TB2, p. 3). While Indigenous knowledge is authentic to their experience, economic rationalism is an “artificial context” (Henderson, 2000b) which they cannot avoid, a game they must play.

In the final data analysis, it also became clear that my own voice in the conversations was as powerful and consistent as that of each participant. I realized that “the researcher’s relationship to the inquiry and to the participants shapes the research text” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, p. 171). It seemed only appropriate that I should include my own voice in each theme area.

In this chapter I begin by briefly introducing the participants. Pseudonyms have been assigned randomly to each participant and to the names of all people, occupations, and locations described in their narrative in order to protect the anonymity of both participants and non-participants without deterring from the richness of the data. I then go into more detail about the life experience that each participant brings to the study. I have excluded myself from this section because I believe that I have sufficiently introduced myself already in the prologue to this study. Finally, I present the data by weaving the voices of each participant together with my own, through the three themes that emerged in the data analysis. In this way, I blend four individual First Nations voices into a single, more powerful, voice.
4.2 The participants

It was my belief that students in their later years of graduate studies would have a difficult time remembering the reasons they first enrolled. Therefore, all participants chosen were newly-enrolled First Nations graduate students in the Province of Saskatchewan during the 2001-2002 academic year. By "newly-enrolled," I mean that at the time they were selected, it had been less than one year since they first registered either full-time or part-time in their program of graduate studies. As a graduate student nearer to the end of my program, I had never met any of the three participants prior to the commencement of this study. Yet, each of them graciously agreed to participate in the study without reservations, no pun intended. All three participants were Status Indians as defined by the Indian Act (1985).

4.2.1 James

I met "James" on two separate occasions over breakfast in a quiet corner of a restaurant. A young, Cree man from a First Nation in northern Saskatchewan, James immediately struck me as someone I could easily identify with. We began our conversation in the usual First Nations way, asking questions like, "So, where are you from?" and, "Who's your father?" The shared acquaintances and experiences that we found established and positioned ourselves in relation to one another. After the necessary formalities of informed consent, I asked James' permission to turn on the tape recorder. Soon we were visiting like old friends, joking and laughing over the gentle din of restaurant chatter as the waitress continually refilled our coffees.

James began graduate studies in the fall of 2001, although he was still employed by his band. I discovered that he is married and has no children. While he understands
and is able to speak some Cree (his First Nations language), James is not a fluent Cree speaker. A successful First Nations administrator, James’ story is one of triumph over adversity and one in which I have come to admire and respect. James’ Christian faith has been a powerful influence on his life since he began undergraduate studies. While I suspect that James would attribute most of the successes in his life to God, there is no doubt that his determination and sheer will have also contributed to his success. He has overcome many obstacles in his life that would have led many others, including myself, down a more troubled path.

4.2.2 Sylvia

“Sylvia” is a middle-aged, professional, Cree woman from a First Nation in northern Saskatchewan. A very busy woman, she graciously scheduled two separate hour-long meetings with me in her office. The First Nations professional community in Saskatchewan is small, and we made connections right away. I found out that Sylvia’s first language is Cree (she did not speak English before she started school) and she is a fluent Cree speaker. A shy person by her own account, she answered my questions patiently in a soft voice and with the same perfect English that my mother developed in boarding school, occasionally throwing questions back at me. Sylvia told me about growing up on her reserve and attending school there. Like so many Cree women of her generation, she married early and began a family right away. She did not begin undergraduate studies until later in life when her own three children were in grade school.

Since completing her undergraduate degree, Sylvia has worked in various professional occupations both for First Nations and non-First Nations organizations. A
woman of Christian faith, Sylvia articulated a clear sense of priorities in her life: “For me it’s God first, my family, and then my job. You have to have a balance” (TC2, p. 4). She was recently appointed to her current professional occupation and began her graduate program in the fall of 2001, largely because she felt that it was an expectation of her new employer. As we visited and shared stories, we found that we shared a lot of opinions and perspectives. I was comfortable sharing my personal viewpoints without fear of being dismissed or criticized and both interviews seemed all too short.

4.2.3 Noreen

“Noreen” is a young, professional, First Nations woman from out-of-province. We met twice in an empty classroom on campus where our voices echoed against the bare walls. I was taken right away by her confident, but fun demeanour, her sharp intelligence, and by the way she challenged my questions and statements. Noreen is a woman of powerful character and with a clear sense of purpose. Strong and proud but also humble and sincere, she sets a fine example for First Nations people everywhere.

As the tape recorder rolled and we spoke excitedly and animatedly to one another about issues of participation, her life story spilled out at the seams. Noreen has contemplated deeply the issues of her own participation and the data she provided was rich. All I had to do was put the pieces of her story together.

While she does not speak her First Nations language and has never lived on her reserve, Noreen holds very close personal and political ties to her First Nation adopted through marriage. Noreen started her family soon after graduating from high school and completed her undergraduate studies while simultaneously working and raising a family. She has also found time in her career to sit on various boards and committees. On an
educational leave from a professional job in a non-Aboriginal organization, she has moved her family to Saskatchewan in order to pursue a graduate program. Although her children factor in to her motivation to participate, Noreen explained, “I wanted to go to graduate school even before I had my kids” (TB2, p. 10) and, “it was something I had decided a long time ago...I wanted to get my doctorate...I’m not sure where I got that from but ever since I was in my teens...that was a goal of mine. Part of it was because I did well in school” (TB1, p. 1).

4.3 Their stories

Individual life experience shapes the value systems and worldviews that human beings develop (McMurtry, 1998). Every decision we make is informed by a lifetime of experience (Hill, 1999). In order to understand the individual elements in the answers provided by these three participants, let us first contextualize them by listening to their stories.

4.3.1 James’ story

James lived with his parents and two sisters on his reserve until the age of five, when they moved to an urban setting where his father was a laborer and his mother stayed at home with the children. Alcoholism played a large role in the nature of James’ upbringing: “My sisters and I used to wait outside the bars, you know, wait for mom and dad to get out of the bar” (TA1, p. 15). However, while his parents struggled with alcoholism both before and after his early childhood, James remembers his early childhood with more fondness than his later childhood because

interestingly enough, my parents didn’t drink from [Grades] K to 5. They didn’t drink. They stopped drinking for five years and when we moved to Minnedosa my parents were introduced to their old friends again and it was only a matter of
time before they lost their license... 'cause they did a lot of drinking and before you know it we were back in Winnipeg, poor urban Indians again.” (TA2, p. 13)

The rest of James’ school years put his mettle to the test. “Grade 8 to 12 were, more or less, screwed up I think for the most part.” James’ parents got a divorce and he was sent to residential school. Then, “In grades 10 to 12 that’s when things kind of got a little haywire.” While his father moved back to the reserve, he lived in the city with his two sisters and his mother, who was usually away.

Of course I was 18 at the time or 17, 18 and when you’re that age you think, “Hey! Without the boarding home anymore, now I can have my own parties at my house! I don’t have to worry about the influence of my dad.” (TA2, p. 11)

Without guidance, role models, or encouragement James faced the responsibility of making sure his little sister went to school.

I always felt like I was the man of the house now. My mom usually was gone to Minnedosa so it was just my sisters and I. So I kind of felt like I was an authority. My sister was only 12, 13, my youngest sister. And I’d chase her off to school. I’d say, “O.K. I’m gonna catch the bus.” I caught the bus and checked up on her after school and made sure she went to school and that. (TA2, p. 11)

Despite being largely unsupervised, James continued to attend high school, mostly for the benefit of the social relationships he had there.

I’m surprised that I got up in the morning ‘cause I didn’t have to. My sisters both decided to quit school and I just said to myself, “I’m just going to go. I don’t want to sit in the trailer all day and do nothing.” I like to visit with my friends. I’ve got friends at the school and certainly even though I’ll miss the odd class and go for coffee with some of my friends, I always had a social life that was part of school. If I was to stay home, I didn’t have a social life. It was boring for me. So every morning I’d get up. (TA2, p. 11)

James experimented with drugs and alcohol through high school, though surprisingly, not because of his friends.

I had my fair share of drugs. Interestingly enough, most of the drugs, in fact the first time I ever done drugs, just marijuana, hash, was from my family. My
cousins, my older cousins.... You know all my friends. Most of them didn’t do drugs. And it was only when I hung out with my family, my cousins and that, that I experimented and tried.

However, with the encouragement of his friends and largely by his own determination, James graduated from Grade 12 having given up the use of drugs and with a newfound resolve to achieve. He explained, “I quit [using drugs] when I was 18. I said, ‘I’m through with this. I’ve got to start thinking about my career.’ And I’m glad I did” (TA2, p. 11).

4.3.2 Sylvia’s story

After the first interview, I was disappointed by the sparsity of data on Sylvia’s life. I considered various reasons why this might have been: Had I talked too much? Would it have been better if the interview had been longer? Was there a generation gap between us? Was she intimidated by me or by my questions? During the second interview, I tried not to talk as much and pressed Sylvia more about her life experience. However, the quality of data from the second interview was the same as the first. I briefly considered writing about what Sylvia didn’t say rather than what she did. However, I realized that, while she had revealed little about her early life experience, she had revealed a lot about her current experience and, more importantly, about her motivations to enrol in graduate studies. The following are what little details she told me about her life story.

Sylvia grew up with her parents and three siblings on her reserve in northern Saskatchewan. When she started school, she
didn’t know one word of English and then my parents adopted my nieces, three girls, they’re about my age and they spoke only English so that influenced me to speak English after I started school with the school and with them. I mean I still
spoke Cree because I heard it all my life and my parents never, ever spoke English to me or my brothers. It was all Cree. (TC2, p. 4)

Sylvia remained on the reserve with her sister and two brothers until the age of 15, when she moved to the city where she attended high school until her graduation. After graduation, she returned to the reserve for two more years before marrying and moving away. Sylvia had her children fairly young and did not begin undergraduate studies until her oldest daughter was a teenager.

4.3.3 Noreen’s story

Noreen lived with her parents and two siblings in a northern community until Grade 3 when her family moved south to live on the outskirts of a large, Western Canadian city where her father got a job.

We were in like a non-Aboriginal neighborhood. It was predominantly White...there was another family that was Aboriginal...they lived... right next to our apartment building.... and the school I went to we were like the Indian kids so that wasn’t very good.” (TB2, p. 11)

When Noreen started Grade 8 her father got another job in a smaller urban center and the family moved again. Although in her new community “we were still the only Aboriginal family” (TB2, p. 11), Noreen “did well in school” (TB1, p. 1) and had a good experience: “I was one of the smart kids and [was] accepted for that. And we knew everyone” (TB2, p. 11). Noreen remained there until she returned to her northern community for Grade 11, where she eventually graduated. She enrolled in a university program full-time while simultaneously starting a family. As a single parent, her parents usually kept one and sometimes both of her two children during her undergraduate studies. She worked part-time to make ends meet, eventually
convocating with her bachelor’s degree and having a third child. She soon found employment in her profession and has been working ever since.

4.4 Overcoming feelings of inferiority

The theme of overcoming feelings of inferiority developed in the writing of this chapter. It was obvious to me that the three participants and I have all struggled with self-esteem, but it took a while for me to decide how best to categorize this data for presentation and what to call it.

I chose “overcoming feelings of inferiority” as a name for this category because I sense that a disproportionate part of our motivation to participate in graduate studies is deeply rooted in a desire to prove ourselves. The media is filled each day with a constant barrage of messages about Aboriginal people. From newspaper columns to radio shows to television programs to conversations had or overheard, Aboriginal peoples are examined, discussed, and dissected in the public eye every day of the year. There are an ever-growing number of careers built upon the objectification and commodification of Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous culture, and Indigenous peoples (G. H. Smith, 2000).

Furthermore, Aboriginal people are almost always portrayed as the victim or as the problem - as a subject to be fixed or solved. While other ethnic groups have the choice to either pay attention to or ignore these messages, as the subjects of scrutiny Aboriginal people have no choice but to pay attention. Eventually, this constant stream of derogatory messages begins to take its toll and we begin to believe some of it; we start to internalize guilt for Aboriginal “problems.” To make matters worse, many First Nations people are already plagued by painful past experiences of racism and other scars
of humility that surface to remind us of our inferiority each time we make the slightest mistake. The end result is that we develop almost a kind of inferiority complex that we struggle with every day.

Enrolment in graduate studies, then, is one strategy that James, Sylvia, and I have chosen to compensate for the personal sense of inadequacy we feel. In an effort to overcome deeply rooted feelings of inferiority, enrolment in graduate studies for us is about trying to overachieve. We feel an overwhelming need to “better ourselves.” This does not seem to play out so much in Noreen’s case, although perhaps in a small way.

4.4.1 James

There is a strong presence in James’ story of a little boy who is still trying to prove himself to his father, to his teachers, to God and, most importantly, to himself. His story is pervaded by a cumulative sense of struggle to overcome the rejection, derision, and low expectations that he received from various figures throughout his life. Clearly, the most significant of these figures was his father, who derided him constantly and praised him only indirectly, through his mother. James recounted the time, “When I was going to the university...mom said to me... ‘You know, your dad’s proud of you.’ What? You know that’s strange because he would never tell me himself” (TA1, p. 15). James even spoke of abandoning hockey from the ages of 18 to 24, in part, because of comments his father made to him and about him.

I used to hear comments from my dad, you know, “You stupid ass. You stupid this. You damn lazy.” You know these things...even when I played hockey. I used to walk into the hockey rink and I used to hear my...there was always a joke about me playing hockey. I never did do well in hockey and it’s probably because...the reason I’d come home and hear all these jokes and these comments and so that kind of carried with me into adulthood. Thinking that, “O.K. I’m not. I’m just...” (TA1, p. 15)
In addition to being ridiculed, James also remembered bitter experiences of racism.

I grew up in an urban setting where racial discrimination was around. My own backdoor, my neighbors. I don’t remember any of my neighbors every coming over or ever inviting us. I remember we got chased off as kids. “Don’t play with those kids! They’re not allowed to come into the house!” I was, I remember I, one kid I grew up with I never did go inside his house. I wasn’t allowed to but all the other non-Native kids could go inside. Those are the experiences that, I guess, motivated me to seek a higher education, to seek some self-empowerment and to help those that are disempowered to feel empowered. (TA2, p. 5)

As we discussed his grade school years, James remembered the low expectations that his teachers had of him. “Well, I’ll tell you, a lot of the... teachers wouldn’t think I could” (TA2, p. 12). When James finally began his undergraduate program, he worked very hard to overcompensate for his fears of inadequacy.

I really wanted to do well since I didn’t do so well in high school... when I got to university I took notes... and then I would basically go home and I’d rewrite them and study them. This was like, religiously, every night. (TA1, p. 3)

What is even more disturbing to me as an adult educator is that James recounted an incident where he felt discouraged by one of his undergraduate professors:

So, yeah, that... just having that “Oh, you can’t do it”... one time, Eileen Bear she told me this one time I think I was in my fourth year Commerce she says, walking down the hallway, “What are you going to do after this?” I said, “I don’t know; I was thinking like the Native Law program.” “Oh, isn’t that hard?” she said. And I thought, “You know my dad used to say something similar to that. ‘Oh, you couldn’t do that you stupid ass.’” You know? And so I thought, “You know, I’m gonna do it!” (TA1, p. 16)

Regardless of what topic we discussed, James’ narrative reflected the theme of overcoming feelings of inferiority. After briefly outlining Houle’s typology, I asked James whether his primary motivation was goal oriented. James answered,

[I’ve] been in the city most of my life so I’m used to competition. I’m used to being second or third or even sometimes being last and having to battle things all the time. From racial slurs on the school grounds to not getting selected to participate in school activities in the regular classroom. Like I only got a chance
to read one paragraph in high school... from a teacher... and when I finally did read...I was reading Hamlet and I analyzed that book to a T, proving to myself that I could do it but proving to anyone else who didn’t think that I could do it that I could. (TA2, p. 4)

In spite of the challenges that James’ self-esteem has endured, he remains optimistic about the future for his First Nation. He says, 

I think in our community at Lynx River... we are starting to develop academically now. We have our own school and that. We’re starting to get our self-esteem back so, “Hey! I’m Native, I’m proud of my culture, I’m proud of where I live and where I’m growing up and I see an achievement here.” (TA1, p. 17)

4.4.2 Sylvia

In Sylvia’s case, the theme of overcoming feelings of inferiority is far subtler but present nonetheless. I suspect that this theme would have been more evident had I been able to spend more time with Sylvia. When I first asked her to describe how she came to decide to pursue graduate studies, she replied that she thought it was expected of her in her new position “and also because...to better myself, I guess” (TC1, p. 1). She wasn’t sure what department to apply to because she hadn’t wanted to apply to graduate studies in the first place. Sylvia recounted that when she first started her program, “I wasn’t sure how I would make out. Would I pass?” (TC1, p. 1). While Sylvia reported that she eventually felt more comfortable as term one progressed, now in term two, “I kind of feel...I don’t know about intimidated but I do kind of feel maybe out of place a little bit” (TC1, p. 7).

I asked Sylvia whether there is a possibility that she might never finish the program since she feels so out of place and since graduate studies wasn’t her idea in the first place. She replied, “That’s possible. I think I would like to finish, you know, just for my own satisfaction; to prove to myself that I can do it” (TC1, p. 2).
4.4.3 Noreen

Noreen is different from James and Sylvia in that, while she has experienced discrimination later in life, she has simply channeled her energy into clearly defined goals. She was not discouraged or discriminated against as a child and she was hard-pressed to think of anything negative about her early childhood. Because, like me, her father is White and her complexion is fairer, she senses discrimination in her early childhood only in retrospect. Her early grade school years and most of her teachers there were positive and encouraging. In the urban grade school they attended, she says, “My brother was fair skinned and me and my sister...but they’re fairer. And they blended in. And so they weren’t, and I wasn’t discriminated against...everyone knew we were Native but it just wasn’t an issue there and I had an awesome experience” (TB1, p. 11).

Ultimately, the schools she attended had a positive influence on her motivation to participate. Noreen explained, “When I went to high school it wasn’t ‘Are you going to graduate?’ it was, ‘What college are you going to?’ That was the type of peers that were in this school” (TB1, p. 2).... It wasn’t until the north that I noticed discrimination teachers had towards Native people” (TB1, p. 4).

Although Noreen is “the first high school graduate, college graduate, university graduate in my family” (TB1, p. 1), she notes,

A lot of the encouragement I got was from my parents to do well in school and they expected me to do well...and also a lot of...every school I went to had at least one or two teachers that really pushed and encouraged me. (TB1, p. 3)

While Noreen comes across as confident and intelligent, she does question herself in the back of her mind, but not any more than an average person might. She
worries about her ability to study at the graduate level because it has been six years since her undergraduate studies and also because of the fact that she completed her first degree through distance education. However, she exudes confidence in her manner and in her words. As for me, I have no doubt that Noreen has what it takes to be a successful graduate student.

4.4.4 Cam

As I reflect upon the words of my participants, I am perplexed by the high degree of power that self-esteem holds over us. This is evident in my response to James' narrative about the deriding remarks his father made to him in his childhood.

What I find amazing about my relationship with my father is that whatever he says about me I believe. Even though I am critically conscious, even though I am a grown man and I've had years of experience, he is like the backbone of my own self-esteem. If my father told me that I was a loser I would think that of myself. I don't understand why that is but when I look for my own self-esteem, when I think, "Am I good at this?" or, "Can I do this?" or, "Can I do that?" I always think of my father whispering in my ear and he'll tell me, "You can do it." Even when I don't think I can he'll say, "Well of course you can. You can do it." And then I believe it. And once I believe it, then I can do it. (TA1, p. 15)

In another conversation, Noreen had just described to me the discrimination that her brother experienced from his grade school teachers. I responded,

It's just amazing to me how deeply entrenched that becomes. It's funny how your childhood is so powerful to think that you're going to refer to that for the rest of your life somehow. It sort of determines who you are, how you see yourself or something. (TB2, p. 12)

As I read Noreen's description of her positive early childhood experience, I am reminded of my own positive early childhood experience. My father, too, was White and my brothers and I were amongst a very small handful of First Nations children in Maidstone elementary school. As a young child, I don't think I really saw myself as an Indian per se. My mother, my brothers, and I didn't have Indian status and even though
we only lived ten miles north of our reserve, my family associated far more with the White people in our community than with our First Nations relatives on our reserve. I saw myself as equal amongst the other children in my school and I always felt I had a place there - that I belonged. I know that my older brother struggled with name-calling and self-esteem issues as a child and I have always wondered whether my early childhood memories are more positive than his because he is or was more aware of discrimination than I am.

My teenage years were not nearly as positive as my early childhood, in part, because “my teachers were not always encouraging” (Cam, TB2, p. 12) and, in part, because of other personal issues. When James told me about how hard he studied during his first year of undergraduate studies, I was able to identify with him.

When I think about your first year in undergraduate studies I’m assuming that it was very similar to mine and that your resolve was about, in the back of your mind thinking, “I think I can do this. I think I’m a good student and if I work hard I can get good marks. I’m pretty smart.” But not really being sure because you haven’t done it for so long because you spent all this time in grade 12 and grade 11 and whatever doing all kinds of crazy stuff and not really concentrating. And then you’re always questioning whether you can. (TA2, p. 12)

I have a great deal of respect for First Nations people like James, Sylvia, and Noreen, who are first generation university graduates. They set an example for their children and their relatives. Compared to them, I told Noreen, I didn’t need to find the courage to attend university; I simply followed in my mother’s footsteps.

My mother went to ITEP and I think if she hadn’t have come...not I think, I’m pretty sure if she hadn’t have come that I certainly wouldn’t have followed and I’m not sure that my brother would have gone and done his bachelor’s degree. It sets an example and paves the way for people to come behind you. And then my mother did her Master’s degree too. And so that’s another thing. It’s just kind of almost like...not that you’re expected to do it, but you compare yourself to your parents. (TB1, p. 4)
4.5 Overcoming nepotism and cronyism

As I stated in the introduction to this chapter, the theme of “overcoming nepotism and cronyism” was so powerful as to be immediately obvious after a preliminary analysis of the first interviews and was usually articulated by the words “self-empowerment” or “empowerment.” While the theme of “overcoming feelings of inferiority” is about overcoming our personal feelings of inadequacy, the theme of “overcoming nepotism and cronyism” is about using meritocracy as a means of overcoming the nepotism and cronyism that permeates the workplace. The goal of overcoming nepotism and cronyism was central to the motivation of James, Noreen, and me to enrol in graduate studies. Since James, Noreen, and I are all reluctant political players, our only means of achieving “success” (fame, fortune, and power) is through earning credentials. We hope that a graduate degree will command a higher salary, more prestige, and better chances for career advancement in the workplace than our current level of certification affords us.

Sylvia is the exception to the group. While she acknowledges that nepotism and cronyism pervade the workplace, overcoming them was not central to her motivation to enrol in graduate studies. She was recently appointed to her position and is satisfied there.

Questions surrounding the theme of “overcoming nepotism and cronyism” were taken back to the participants during the second interview for verification and further clarification.
4.5.1 James

During both of our meetings, James spoke at great length of the frustrations he felt with band politics on his home reserve. He complained, “We’re never going to get ahead if we always hire just based on nepotism or favoritism. That’s what’s kind of stalled our system” (TA1, p. 10). Yet, while he is aware of and understands the nepotism and cronyism that is commonplace there, his principles and his faith forbid him from participating in such relationships. He is adamant in his refusal to play politics: “I’m not going to get ahead by brown-nosing. I won’t go there. And I won’t play politics; you know, pull out the political card” (TA1, p. 6). For James then, the only ethical, viable way to get promoted within the reality of band politics is through meritocracy. He describes how he came to conclude that education was the only option: “So I thought, ‘Well, the only way to gain self-empowerment is through education; moving into a higher degree’...You get into a certain level of certification that gives you power over others” (TA1, p. 6).

4.5.2 Noreen

Noreen’s motivations are slightly different from James’ in that she knows she doesn’t need a graduate degree to get a job promotion. She has the necessary academic credentials for her current job placement and for future job advancement. She also has extremely good political connections. Yet, Noreen experiences a lack of respect from her colleagues in the workplace. When, during my first conversation with Noreen, I tried to make the case that education generally makes us unhappier, Noreen explained the practical value of her graduate studies.

Noreen: But you know what it’s given me? When I first...I only had a diploma and I...[only had] three years of education and then I was supervising staff with
their degrees and then with their Master’s and I don’t think I was given the credit that I knew as much as I knew and that I’m as good as I am at what I do. That’s not out there. My staff know it...my staff I work with.

Cam: That’s because you don’t have the certificate. Because to give you that respect, they want to see some letters after your name.

Noreen: I believe that. I believe that. Initially I didn’t have it. I gained it through experience. But I also recognize that this staff won’t always be with me. I won’t always be working with this staff and the problem will still arise so...but I also saw that there would be merits if I did...you know I’d still get practical use out of coursework. (TB1, p. 12)

I continued to press Noreen into a debate on the nature, meaning, and value of education, attempting to gauge her position on the Aboriginal struggle “to balance academia with traditional knowledge” (Noreen, TB1, p. 8). I asked the question, “Would things be better for the Aboriginal community if there were more educated [Aboriginal] people? I mean educated in this sense; people with bachelor’s, master’s degrees, doctoral degrees?” to which Noreen answered, “To some degree I think it will. It’s not going to solve everything. It will help with retention and maybe we’d have more educated people but then what?” (TB1, p. 12). When I contended that “there are reserves in Canada that have lots of money and money doesn’t solve their problems and neither will education,” Noreen responded, “But education is empowering” (TB1, p. 13).

4.5.3 Sylvia

Sylvia’s motivations are unique from the other participants in that she is not attempting to advance into a new career path. She was recently appointed to her current position. However, she too has experienced a lack of respect for her knowledge in her current workplace. She discussed the way she is treated by the administrators in her organization:
It seems that they’re the ones who control everything. They don’t want to bend. If you try to suggest something they just look at you like you’re crazy. You go to a meeting and you say something and everybody looks at you like, “Huh? No, we’re not going to do that!” (TC2, p. 10)

Sylvia also verified the presence of cronyism and nepotism in Aboriginal organizations.

In the Aboriginal world, like, even people who know that you have a Master’s, that doesn’t really matter unless you’re related to them or unless you’re friends with them. What I’ve noticed about Aboriginal people is you’ll be hired if you know...[the chief] or whatever, you know. Because I know that even FSIN, a lot of people that work there... with big high paying jobs, is because they know the chief or whatever, you know. So it wouldn’t even matter if you had a Master’s and tried to get a job there. It would depend on if they knew you. (TC2, p. 10)

Sylvia is not currently struggling with nepotism or cronyism in her workplace, although she did not mention her reasons for leaving her prior workplace. She claimed to have been motivated to enrol in graduate studies primarily because she felt that it was an expectation of her new position. When I first asked her to describe how she came to decide to pursue graduate studies, she replied,

Well, because of the job that I have...I think I’m required to do it. For myself, I think I would have waited for at least another couple years ‘till I was more familiar with exactly what I was doing because I’m kind of...not really sure about...where I want to go. So I thought I would try this program because it was required of me to do it. (TC1, p. 1)

I asked her how she came to perceive this expectation. She replied, “I wasn’t forced into it. I mean I didn’t have to start when I did” (TC2, p. 1). However, Sylvia sensed a strong message that she should enrol in a graduate program through “just hearing people talk and then some of them encouraging me to do it” (TC2, p. 1).

Rather than an attempt to overcome nepotism and cronyism, Sylvia’s goal of empowerment is centred around her family. She works primarily to support them and to be a role model for them, although money is not a significant part of Sylvia’s motivation.
to participate in graduate studies either. While she is conscious that “we all need money to live” (TC1, p. 3), she values time with her family more than material wealth. When I asked Sylvia, “What is the cost of pursuing graduate studies for you?” her answer exemplified her priorities:

Well, for me, I love... I like my own time. I value my time so for me I'm losing time with my grandson, my family. So it's hard for me just to be away from them because I'm just a new grandma and I like being a grandma so for me it's kind of hard to not see my grandchild as much as I'd like to because I'm busy with my classes and my readings (TC1, p. 2).

Sylvia’s family is what grounds her and centres the goals in her life. When I joked about taking five years to complete my undergraduate degree compared to her four, she laughed and said,

I think when you’re older like I had my kids already and I had already experienced the work it’s...you know what you want so you work. You work and work and sometimes you don’t sleep but that’s O.K. You work because you have kids that... you have to support and so I think when you’re older like that you have more of a goal. You don’t have any distractions like parties or anything. You just want to get your degree and get it over and done with and get a job. So I think it's easier for older people like me. (TC1, p. 10)

**4.5.4 Cam**

I would like to think that my own enrolment in graduate studies is not primarily an attempt to overcome nepotism and cronyism in the workplace and that I have some higher, altruistic, ethical purpose. However, deep down I must admit that this theme is core to my motivation. I harbor bitterness toward past organizations I have worked for where I felt that my knowledge, experience, and credentials were overlooked because of nepotism and cronyism. Rather than being entirely altruistic, my own explanation of my enrolment in graduate studies reflects a hint of individualistic motives.

Graduate studies for me is part of a whole context of my life. It’s part of my identity, it’s part of my past, it’s part of my hopes for the future and it’s more
about personal development for me than it is about career. It's about me doing something that I'm interested in for myself and becoming a better person, not that anyone can teach me how to be a better person but I teach myself by reading and reflecting and writing and interacting with other students like in our classes. (Cam, TA1, p. 5)

While I have not completely given up my faith in meritocracy, my confidence that a graduate degree will enable me to circumvent the reality of nepotism and cronyism in the workplace is limited. I have been in the workplace long enough to have seen the way politics affects hiring practices in a good number of institutions. At the end of my last interview with Sylvia, I spoke of my fears for other First Nations graduate students:

Cam: I’ll tell you one thing that scares me... I see my participants saying that they’re in graduate studies for self-empowerment and not only for that but for money and career advancement and those things and there’s nothing wrong with that because I’m in it for the same reasons but my perception is that this system is not created to privilege us and even when you graduate you still won’t get the job, you still won’t get the money, and you’re not going to be self-empowered. People still won’t listen to you even if you have your Master's degree; even if you have your Ph.D.

Sylvia: That’s true.

Cam: And that’s what scares me for some of the people ‘cause I’m thinking, “You’re putting a lot of faith in...” and not to say you shouldn’t do it ‘cause look at me! I’m doing it! And what am I going to get? And the reality is I will get something from it. Of course! (TC2, p. 9)
4.6 “Playing the game”: Balancing Indigenous knowledge with economic rationalism

*On the various paths to decolonization, colonized Aboriginal people must participate in Eurocentric society and knowledge.* (Henderson, 2000a, p. 248)

The third and most significant theme that evolved through the process of data analysis was that these three participants did indeed enrol in graduate studies to fulfill individualistic goals such as an increase in pay, career advancement, and prestige. The term “economic rationalism” is used by Holt et al. (1997) to describe this modern ideology whereby “education is mostly seen in terms of accreditation, skills and qualifications” (p. 193). While these three First Nations people participate in formal educational programs and value them inasmuch as they acquire accreditation, skills, and qualifications, more traditional forms of education and Indigenous knowledge as held by their elders are valued, even revered, at a much higher level.

For James, Noreen, and Sylvia, traditional education is authentic education; education in terms of accreditation, skills and qualifications is only “playing the game.” To put it another way, Indigenous knowledge is authentic to their experience, while economic rationalism is an “artificial context” (Henderson, 2000b) which they cannot avoid, a game they must play. As Noreen put it, she has enrolled in graduate studies because “you gotta play that game whether or not you truly believe in it” (TB2, p. 3).

The development of this theme was a huge learning curve for me because, while I have been struggling for two years to resolve the dichotomy between Indigenous knowledge and economic rationalism (which I perceived to be completely incompatible absolutes), all three participants had already found a personal balance between the two. For months, I was completely perplexed because all three participants had related stories
and made statements which, to me, seemed incongruous and, therefore, hypocritical. For example, Noreen said, “What is also important to me…is to balance academia with traditional knowledge” (TB1, p. 8). She later seemed to contradict herself when I asked her whether there is “something different about the way we [Aboriginal people] do things or see things?” Noreen replied, “There was. But whether we like it or not, a lot of us are more mainstream than we’d like to believe or we’d like to admit” (TB1, p. 15). Recognizing these contradictions immediately after the first interview, I used the second interview to ask each participant how they resolved this dichotomy. However, I perceived only more contradictions from the second round of interviews, and then spent the next four months puzzling over these contradictions because, to me, they indicated a kind of hypocrisy in the value systems of my participants.

I have come to realize that, while James, Noreen, and Sylvia are fulfilling the need to earn a living in the modern world, they have not forgotten or lost their Aboriginal identity - far from it. Alongside their individualistic, goal-oriented motivations, each participant was able to articulate an explicit, parallel, communal purpose to their participation. They are able to do this because they are experts at turning chaos into consonance. Like makers of musical instruments, each participant has integrated the seemingly incongruous parts of Indigenous knowledge and economic rationalism into a single instrument, capable of playing beautiful harmonies. Each participant walks in two worlds as an embodiment of Little Bear’s (2000) “ambidextrous consciousness.” They live with the ambiguity and shoulder the responsibility of transforming two opposing worldviews into one.
4.6.1 James

Frustrated with the way James switched back and forth between Indigenous values and “Western” values, I pressed him during the second interview to justify his participation in light of my argument that a university education only teaches First Nations people to have a Western worldview. James’ answer here was key:

Well, it’s the qualifications that...[are] set for us! If you have a degree, then you’re able to speak. If you have a certification, then you’re able to do this. And I’ve learned the game [italics added]; competition, self-motivation, no community or it’s not cooperation it’s individualism. It’s not cooperation it’s just...I remember reading a poster when I was in Grade 11. I always kind of think about what made me go this far and it said, the poster said, “You control your own destiny.” It didn’t say anything about community! (laughter) (TA2, p. 5)

I had opened the interview by asking whether there is a communal purpose to First Nations participation in graduate studies. James had expressed a desire to “be a contributor to my community” (TA2, p. 1) and proceeded to explain the way in which band politics inhibited him from doing that. However, when I later returned to this theme, asking James whether he felt an obligation to be a role model and to help in the community, I was perplexed by his response: “No. I mean I always kind of thought my degree is going to get me ahead and it’s going to get my wife and I ahead and it’s going to get my immediate family ahead.” Yet in the very next paragraph, James again described how some Indigenous people

get an education and then they go back to the community and then they give back...That education is not theirs specifically. It’s the community’s now...I would like to do that now. Like now that I understand more and I’m getting all this baggage off of me, this individualism. (TA2, p. 9)

I was very confused because my perception was that James was saying, “No. I don’t feel obligated to give back to my community,” while at the same time saying, “I
want to give back to my community now.” I can see now that I misinterpreted what he meant to say. By looking at the raw data and remembering the context of James’ words, I discovered that my first mistake was in asking a poor question. I had tried to ask James about giving back to the community:

Do you feel any sort of responsibility for, I don’t know, based on what, based on the circumstances of your life, your Aboriginality, the sponsorship you got, the gifts that God gave you I guess and the blessings that you have to be a role model and to help in the community or help students or...

James was primed to answer this question because he had been thinking about it already. He interrupted me to ask, “Like to give back?” I clarified, “Do you feel a responsibility generally?” James began to answer the question, “Actually I never really felt tied to the reserve until I read…” but I cut him off to clarify, “It’s not responsibility. The word I’m looking for is ‘obligated.’ Do you feel obligated?” It was in this context that James said, “No.” (TA2, p. 9) as I mentioned before. But he did not mean, “No. I don’t feel obligated to give back to my community.” I had interrupted his train of thought; he wanted to tell me about “giving back” and with the word “No” he was taking control over the conversation. He meant, “No. I don’t feel obligated. I WANT to give back.” James was trying to tell me how much he wants to give back to his community even though he knows that he doesn’t give back right now. For a variety of reasons, he is not able to give back as much as he would like.

It is clear from his words that James started graduate studies for personal reasons - “To get me ahead” (TA2, p. 9). But James also ended our first interview with the words, “From a First Nations perspective, sharing is probably one thing that I feel sets us apart” (TA1, p. 19). Clearly, James has not forgotten the communalism of Indigenous experience. He knows who he is and where he comes from.
4.6.2 Noreen

Noreen did not embrace her Aboriginality until later in life, suggesting that if Native people are “going to stand true to being Native people...I think a lot of people my age and younger a lot of it’s reclaiming [Indigenous knowledge]” (TB2, p. 8). Even so, she is a woman of very powerful character; she knows who she is. It took me four months to understand what Noreen was trying to teach me about “playing the game.”

Noreen values Indigenous knowledge over formal education and recognizes that “to talk of role models...you don’t necessarily have to do it through formal education.”

Yet, at the same time, she articulates very clear goals for her participation:

I’ve been told that, “Oh, you’re just buying into that game” [italics added] and maybe I am to some degree but I’m also, but also give me credit; I know who I am. I know what I need to learn yet and I don’t know it all. But those letters [behind your name] help! (TB1, p. 12)

Noreen recognizes the need to get a formal education. Her values are reflected in her words:

What is important to me but I haven’t acted upon it enough...is to balance academia with traditional knowledge. So I’m up here [indicating her head] and I’m not quite there here [indicating her heart] and it is important to me and probably mostly because I was raised with my father in a White family so that was important. And I didn’t have this [Aboriginal] background before so I didn’t place any importance on it because I didn’t know about it so I was ignorant about our history. You know, it was almost a shame sometimes because I didn’t know and because I was being picked on sometimes. So I’ve had to come a long way in feeling more comfortable with who I am and being proud of who I am and I’ve still got further to go. (TB1, p. 8)

I’m in graduate studies so that this White world will accept more what I’m doing....I’m gaining that respect and now I’ll get more liberty to speak up and what I’m saying now will hold more merit....I’m going to feel more confident because I’m meeting what their criteria is and...my voice will hold more validity. (TB1, p. 16)
Noreen explained that getting a formal education is not enough to fulfill her or empower her as a First Nations person. Because she values Indigenous knowledge over formal education and her worldview is grounded in Indigenous knowledge, she knows that her education must also be balanced by traditional education.

I don’t think it’s empowerment, total empowerment to be educated you’re going to be empowered. No, I think that’s just one factor that works for me. Because I’m choosing a formal education but I’ve also chosen to learn traditional education also in different things that I’ve tried to learn and that is empowering. That is very empowering. And if I chose just to do that [learn traditional knowledge] I’d probably be very empowered if I didn’t have this other goal [finishing a Master’s degree]. That would be empowering in itself because I’d feel more grounded and more rooted in that aspect. (TB2, p. 3)

I argued that it shouldn’t be that First Nations people are forced to “play the game,” that we should be able to find fulfillment in our First Nations communities. Noreen agreed but chastised this argument, contending hotly that, “Whether or not it should is irrelevant!” The reality is that we have to “play both sides sometimes” (TB2, p. 4).

We also discussed the issues around creating policy or legislation to incorporate Indigenous knowledge into education. Noreen was against this idea for several reasons: First, she pointed out, the teachers themselves do not necessarily have Indigenous knowledge to teach. Second, she said, not everyone wants to learn Indigenous knowledge. Finally, she explained, policy is usually not accompanied by the necessary funding and support structures.

4.6.3 Sylvia

Of the three participants, Sylvia expressed the least number of concerns with balancing Indigenous knowledge with economic rationalism. She enrolled in graduate studies as she felt her employer demanded. Amazed at the ease with which she
consented to such influence, I repeatedly asked Sylvia about how she resolved the individualism of modern society with the communalism of Indigenous knowledge, trying to make her see the conflict. She would not bite. This issue was not a problem for her. She clearly expressed the highest regard for Indigenous knowledge and stated that elders "are the most important role models for us," even though "all their knowledge is from experience" (TC1, p. 4). She chastised younger generations of Aboriginal people for claiming that "elders are important" while all the while failing to acknowledge or seek out their elders in their every day lives.

When I asked Sylvia whether there is a communal element to First Nations motivation to participate, she responded,

I'd like to think it would be for the community but how many people after they finish their degrees go back to the home communities or to their own people and try to help them? I don't know of any.

Perplexed by what I perceived to be confliction in these answers, I changed the topic to a parallel issue. I claimed that part of my motivation to participate in graduate studies is for personal development. Impressed, Sylvia lamented, "I'd like to do that but, so far, the classes I've taken haven't given me that opportunity to explore that. Maybe later on it'll happen but right now, no" (TC1, p. 8).

Still rather confused, I used the second interview to ask Sylvia whether she enrolled in graduate studies to learn skills or "to be more comfortable with who you are. To be happier sort of thing." Sylvia responded that she is simply here to learn skills: "I never thought about if it would make me feel better" (TC2, p. 2). She went on to describe the skills she is learning that will be useful to her job. I reminded her of the high cost of her participation in graduate studies and asked, "So what would be the big
pay off in graduating?” Sylvia replied immediately, “Probably more money” (TC2, p. 9).

I went away even more confused by Sylvia than I had been after the first interview. How could she make such seemingly incongruous statements with such ease? After four months of pondering over what Sylvia said, I have come to the following conclusions: Sylvia is the only Cree speaker of my three participants. Since I know that spirituality and an Indigenous worldview is embedded in the Cree language, I know that she is more firmly grounded in her Indigenous worldview than are James, Noreen, and I. Furthermore, she is the oldest of the three participants and has spoken Cree since infancy. Not only has she had more time to find a balance between the two worldviews, but she would have made these negotiations between Indigenous knowledge and economic rationalism as a child, from the first time she was exposed to English and the provincial educational system. Sylvia knows who she is: as a fluent Cree-speaking woman, she came to terms with the issue of duality years ago. She values Indigenous knowledge because it is part of her worldview and she values economic rationalism because she has a need to provide for her family. She does this all instinctively because she must and she seldom gives it a second thought.

4.6.4 Cam

One of the reasons that I enrolled in graduate studies was to resolve my individual need to succeed with my desire to give back to the community. Yet, because I saw Indigenous knowledge and economic rationalism as two irreconcilable absolutes, I have agonized over trying to balance them from the first day I enrolled. All through this study I have struggled to understand what my participants knew all along. In
conversation with James, I complained about First Nations institutions like the
Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (SIFC):

They have this mission statement that talks about the community but what they
do in practice reflects meeting the standards of North American educational
institutions. Like, for example, obviously they’ve taken that to the far extreme
because they are a degree-granting institution. They are a member of the
Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada. And to get that status you
have to meet their standards right? They’ve done it! Well then they’re, to me
they’re on the far end of the extreme. What about the community? (TA2, p. 2)

It has taken me a number of years and a great deal of critical reflection to resolve
the negotiations that I, as First Nations man, have been forced to make in order to
remain in the academy. Yet I believe I have found the answer in the words of my three
participants. At the same time as I believe that “it is important to recognize...
traditional knowledge and to hold it up at the same level as a Ph.D.,” I also have no
doubt that we First Nations have a practical need to meet the standards of the global
economy. Our survival depends on our ability to adapt to a changing environment while
simultaneously retaining our Aboriginal identity. We must do both.

I worry about the Aboriginal people who will come behind me because I know
the negotiations that will become hurdles for them to jump over. I know that some of
them, maybe a lot of them, won’t make it because they lack even what little cultural
capital (Bourdieu, 1984; Collins, 1998) I have. Having been set up to fail, “the students
internalize [their failure]… I feel terrible for them because then they go, ‘Oh, I failed. I
don’t know if I can do this” (Cam, TC2, p. 11).

Graduate studies for me has a communal purpose. To be honest, I’m not sure
whether I worry about other Aboriginal graduate students because Indigenous education
is communal or whether Indigenous education is communal because I worry about other
Aboriginal graduate students. Maybe it’s a bit of both. In any case, I will continue to believe that we must be critical of both sides of the issue.

You have to see yourself as part of a whole world and not just a me and not just a family and not just a community but our survival depends on what we do in the rest of the world. And if that means in our economic development we’re out cutting down all the trees, yeah we’re making money and our standard of living may be rising, but what’s that going to mean for our children? (Cam, TA1, p. 13)

4.7 Summary

Through an ongoing analysis of each reflective conversation, three main themes emerged in the factors that motivated these three First Nations people and me to enrol in graduate studies: (a) overcoming feelings of inferiority, (b) overcoming nepotism and cronyism, and, (c) “playing the game”: balancing Indigenous knowledge with economic rationalism. The implications of these three themes will be discussed in light of the related literature in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 5 – INTERPRETATIONS, SUMMARY, AND SUGGESTIONS

The purpose of this naturalistic study was to describe the factors that motivated three First Nations adults to enrol in graduate studies in Saskatchewan.

5.1 Reflections on the study

5.1.1 Literature review

The cognitive dissonance I spoke of in Chapter 1 reared its head again as I completed my first draft of this thesis. As the panorama of all five chapters came into view, I could see that this thesis itself was a model of dualism. I recognized that there were two distinct sections in Chapter 2: my opening section on participation and the subsequent literature review, which now appear as sections 2.3 and 2.4 respectively, were completely normative, while the section on First Nations participation, which now appears as section 2.5, was informed by postcolonial theory, mainstream theory on participation, and critical theory. As I began to reflect on the structure of my thesis, I decided that I could not leave Chapter 2 the way it was. I added section 2.2 on colonialism last, in order to bring a balance to the two voices: my normative voice, on the one hand, and my Indigenous voice, on the other.

5.1.2 Framing of the study

The purpose of this study was framed as a means of addressing issues of First Nations participation in the academy. First Nations people are sorely underrepresented in the academy (FSIN, 2002; Tierney, 1993). In order to address these issues, I
reasoned, we must first understand what motivates First Nations people to participate in the first place. My initial review of literature on participation revealed some useful theoretical models. I have found Houle’s (1961) typology to be extremely useful and I kept it in the forefront of my thinking to frame the first interview. It was clear that these participants are in graduate studies to achieve a goal.

More importantly, my review of the literature on First Nations participation revealed three themes: (a) In asking about First Nations motivation to enrol in graduate studies, questions must be asked about the nature and purpose of First Nations education, (b) First Nations people have unique reasons for enrolling in adult educational programs, and (c) A study of First Nations motivation is essential to address First Nations underrepresentation in the academy.

In light of the findings, theme (a) is key to addressing issues of First Nations participation in the academy. In asking about First Nations motivation to enrol in graduate studies, *questions must be asked about the nature and purpose of First Nations education*.

Regarding theme (b) “First Nations people have unique reasons for participating in adult education,” although Garrod and Larimore (1997) suggested that “the wish to contribute to their home communities is what inspired...[First Nations authors] to attend college in the first place,” my study findings suggest the contrary. James, Noreen, and Sylvia were more motivated to enrol in graduate studies by the desire for social mobility than by the wish to give back to their home communities. Contrary to Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991), who wrote that reasons for pursuing a university education “often transcend the interest and well-being of the individual student” (p. 4), I believe that
these three First Nations graduate students enrolled in graduate studies simply to obtain a university degree to get a better job.

Regarding theme (c), “A study of First Nations motivation is essential to address First Nations underrepresentation in the academy,” in light of the findings I now believe that a study of First Nations motivation is important to address issues of participation in the academy, but not essential.

5.1.3 Methodology

I selected naturalistic inquiry as a methodology because the literature on participation quickly revealed the limited ability of quantitative studies such as Lin (1985) and Hoover and Jacobs (1992) to reveal any significant insights into the phenomenon of participation. While the findings of this qualitative study are not generalizable because the story of each participant was shared “in a specific context of time, place, and relationships” (Cathro, 1993, p. 222), their deep richness gives us valuable insight into what motivated these three First Nations adults to participate in graduate studies. In a quantitative study I would not have extrapolated the reverence that these three participants have for Indigenous knowledge or their desire to give back to their community because I would have had to have hypothesized these ideas first in order to ask them of my participants.

5.1.4 Selection of participants

In retrospect, adding one or two additional participants would have enriched the data and would still have been manageable for my Master’s thesis. I did not find the task of transcribing the interviews particularly arduous. However, for a doctoral dissertation, I would expect to interview a higher number of participants over a longer
period of time - perhaps 10. At some time in the distant future, I would like to conduct a major study with about 30 participants.

I do, however, believe that it was a good idea to limit the participants to first-year graduate students because I am quite sure that it was easier for these three people to remember why they started since it was still fresh in their minds.

5.1.5 Conducting interviews

I fear that I may have talked too much in each interview. I was concerned with ensuring that I was really having a conversation with my participants. I wanted to engage them by really listening, paraphrasing their words, and reacting to their stories. I wanted to share my own story. I did not want to ask them questions mechanically. However, I am concerned that I may have led Sylvia a little much and perhaps this affected the richness of the data. In retrospect, I would advise future researchers that it's O.K. to have small sections of "dead air" on the tape. In an open-ended interview, the interviewer should try not to talk incessantly. It is necessary to give your participants sufficient time to consider the question and formulate an answer (plus it is easier to transcribe when there are sections of dead air that give you a chance to catch up typing).

5.1.6 Data analysis

The process of data analysis was tedious and exhausting. I read through the transcripts over and over again, systematically grouping, categorizing and looking for patterns. I was frustrated at first because the data did not say what I expected. As the first two themes developed - (a) overcoming feelings of inferiority, and (b) overcoming nepotism and cronyism, the three participants seemed to have been motivated to enrol by factors of expediency rather than by the communal purposes that I had postulated
might exist. Given what James, Noreen, and Sylvia shared about their motivations to enrol in graduate studies, it is no surprise that Lin (1985) and Milone (as cited in Ledlow, 1992) found no statistically significant difference between Native American and White students with regard to their attitudes toward education. But what did this mean?

It would have been a lot easier for me if I had followed the qualitative methodology more closely by not going into the study with any preformulated hypothesis. As Marshall and Rossman (1995) explain, “The researcher is guided by initial concepts and guiding hypotheses, but shifts or discards them as the data are collected and analyzed” (p. 112). I found it extremely difficult to let go of my hypothesis and accept that, if motivation were a four-legged beast, then we all ride the same kind of horse.

It was only in the development of the third theme - (c) “playing the game”: balancing Indigenous knowledge with economic rationalism, that I could see that there was more here than meets the eye. As I searched and searched again for meaning, it was an exciting day when I finally broke through the barrier of my assumptions and realized that these three First Nations graduate students are simply “playing the game.” Suddenly everything that they were saying seemed to make sense. Indigenous knowledge and economic rationalism can reside within one person at the same time. These three First Nations graduate students wanted to give back to their community and they valued Indigenous knowledge very highly but they had to “play the game.” I was comforted by this revelation and I became more and more respectful of my participants when I realized what they had done. Here I have been struggling for years to resolve
this “dichotomy” while my three participants have been living at least as long as
embodiments of dualism.

5.1.7 Findings

I had hoped to find out what participation meant to First Nations learners in the
context of their past, present, and desired futures (West, 1996). The findings of this
study would suggest that Garrod and Larimore (1997) may have been mistaken when
they said that that, “according to many of our [First Nations] authors, the wish to
contribute to their home communities is what inspired them to attend college in the first
place” (p. 15). Participation for the three First Nations graduate students of this study
means contributing to their home communities only in the context of their desired
futures, not in the context of their past or present lives. In the context of their past and
present lives, participation means “playing the game.” While Indigenous knowledge is
authentic to their experience, economic rationalism is an “artificial context” (Henderson,
2000b) which they cannot avoid, a game they must play in order to make a living. Only
in the context of their futures is participation about “giving back” to the community.

The literature on participation would have us believe that we can address the
issue of First Nations attrition by providing programs to enculturize First Nations
students (Klein, 2002; Polson, 1999; Tinto, 1987). Yet, my study supports Tierney’s
(1993) suggestion that First Nations people are resistant to enculturization. While they
“play the game” because they know that they have to make a living, First Nations people
have a strong sense of identity and a unique worldview which values wholism,
communalism, and cooperation over individualism, competitiveness, and consumerism
(Cajete, 1994; Hampton, 1995). These three First Nations graduate students value
Indigenous knowledge over economic rationalism. This would suggest that, while it is likely that potential First Nations students would be attracted by the potential for higher earnings afforded by a university degree, it may prove more difficult to retain these same students if their worldview is not reflected in the academy and even more so if they lose faith in their Western values in the midst of their studies. As evidence, we can point to the fact that the University of Saskatchewan “has about 2,000 Native students registered, but as many as half are either required to withdraw or quit because of poor marks” (Klein, 2002). The findings of my study suggest that a high percentage of Native students have trouble because they do not value a formal education in the same way as other students might.

5.2 Suggestions for further study

Without being completely informed by a critical discourse, I mistakenly focused my study on First Nations people. I now believe that in order to address the issues of First Nations participation in the academy, researchers must train a critical eye upon the academy itself rather than trying to address the “social and cultural adjustment” (Klein, 2002) of First Nations people. The White, middle-class values which form the foundation upon which the university is built and which maintain an unequal playing field in the academy are, and will remain, invisible (McMurtry, 1998; Noël, 1994) until they are subjected to scrutiny. Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) articulated this call over ten years ago:

It is not enough for universities to focus their attention on “attrition” and “retention” as an excuse to intensify efforts at cultural assimilation. Such approaches in themselves have not made a significant difference, and often have resulted in further alienation. Instead, the very nature and purpose of higher education for First Nations people must be reconsidered [italics added], and
when we do, we will find that the entire institution, as well as society as a whole, will be strengthened and everyone will benefit. (p. 10).

Furthermore, in studying the nature and purpose of institutions of higher learning, we need to reconceptualize the theoretical framework and the structures of higher learning (Tierney, 1992, 1998). Research must be done to examine and evaluate the philosophical foundations of our educational institutions and the theoretical frameworks that inform these philosophical foundations. If universities are public institutions, do these philosophical foundations reflect the philosophical foundations of the public? If one-fifth of the population of Saskatchewan is Aboriginal, is one-fifth of the philosophical foundation of the University of Saskatchewan, “the peoples’ university,” based on Aboriginal philosophical foundations? What does today’s public have to say about the way that the university serves the community compared to the way that it serves corporate interests?

At the same time, this study has focused on what motivates First Nations students to enroll and says little about other elements of First Nations motivation in participation. It might be useful to study the negotiations that First Nations students must undertake in order to complete their academic programs. This study also focused on elements of motivation at the expense of elements of opportunity. There are a countless number of other factors that must also be studied in order to address issues of First Nations participation including persistence, retention, experience, achievement, barriers, and attrition.

Furthermore, I have narrowed the focus of my study to graduate students in order to make it suitable for a master’s thesis. Yet it seems likely that there might be a difference between the motivation of undergraduate students and graduate students to
enroll in postsecondary studies. It would be prudent that further studies be done on the
motivation of First Nations undergraduate students to enrol.

It is also my hope that more naturalistic studies of First Nations participation will
be conducted at all levels of study and in other provinces and states so that there might
eventually be enough qualitative studies for triangulation of the data to search for
common themes.

5.3 Recommendations

While I recognize that the findings of this study are not generalizable and,
therefore, should not be used to prescribe any action, I believe that they suggest several
things:

With regards to my first theme, “overcoming feelings of inferiority,” for you
Aboriginal students who suffer from feelings of inferiority, hope can be found in the
voices of your peers. You are strong. Look to the stages of decolonization: mapping,
diagnosing, healing, and visioning (Battiste, 2000b). As you examine your own
victimization you will overcome it (Noël, 1994). For you who teach Aboriginal people,
remember to be encouraging, understanding, and particularly careful not to be derisive
in your dealings with them.

With regards to my second theme, “overcoming nepotism and cronyism,” each
of us carries a responsibility to avoid such practices. I have also come to believe that
further decolonizing research must be undertaken to understand the colonial mentality
that allows nepotism and cronyism to exist in Aboriginal organizations.

With regards to my third theme, (c) “playing the game”: balancing Indigenous
knowledge with economic rationalism, if I am correct in my interpretation of the data,
then there is little that must be done to adapt current recruitment strategies for potential First Nations students. They will be attracted to universities by the same recruitment methods that are effective with non-First Nations people. However, if participation in graduate studies is only about “playing the game” for First Nations people, this raises a couple of related issues for the academy: First, in light of this theme it does not seem likely that traditional upgrading, access, or student support programs such as recommended by Baptiste (1994) will do much to affect the dismal retention rates of First Nations students if their focus is entirely on integration (Tinto, 1987) or socialization (Polson, 1999) because “it is not enough for universities to focus their attention on ‘attrition’ and ‘retention’ as an excuse to intensify efforts at cultural assimilation” (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991, p. 12). I entirely agree with Tierney (1992) that a better approach to address these issues lies in “conceiving different theoretical horizons” to reconceptualize student participation in the academy, and so “will enable us not only to offer alternative strategies for developing multicultural environments, but such horizons will enable us to reconfigure the social conditions of power that give voice to some and silence others” (p. 616). That being said, support programs that help First Nations students to make negotiations between Indigenous knowledge and economic rationalism might prove more successful at increasing the level of persistence amongst this population.

Second, the fact that the three First Nations participants of this study value Indigenous knowledge above the things they learn in graduate school indicates that the university should be respectful of Indigenous knowledge, including both process and substance. In Kirkness and Barnhardt’s (1991) words:
If universities are to respect the cultural integrity of First Nations students and communities, they must adopt a posture that goes beyond the usual generation and conveyance of literate knowledge, to include the institutional legitimation of indigenous knowledge and skills, or as Goody (1982) has put it, to foster “a revaluation of forms of knowledge that are not derived from books. (p. 7)

5.4 Conclusion

The purpose of this naturalistic study was to describe the factors that motivated three First Nations adults to enrol in graduate studies in Saskatchewan. The study found that the three participants were motivated primarily by factors of expedience, such as an increase in pay, career advancement, and prestige. However, for each participant, “traditional” First Nations education is seen as authentic education, while education in terms of accreditation, skills and qualifications is only “playing the game.” To put it another way, Indigenous knowledge is authentic to their experience, while economic rationalism is an “artificial context” (Henderson, 2000b) which they cannot avoid, a game they must play in order to make a living. While the three participants are fulfilling the need to earn a living in the modern world, they have not forgotten or lost their Aboriginal identity. Alongside their individualistic, goal-oriented motivations, each participant was able to articulate an explicit, parallel, communal purpose to their participation. Each participant walks in two worlds as an embodiment of Little Bear’s (2000) “ambidextrous consciousness.”
EPILOGUE

At my thesis defense, my committee members asked what the writing of this research text has meant to me. The writing of this thesis has indeed provided me with "space and frameworks, with the help and support of others, to understand better, and revise, the story of...[my] life, even repair past damage and construct a stronger self in consequence." While I have had reservations about putting my thoughts and experiences on paper for others to see, it has been important for me to write this text because I believe that, someday, someone might find hope in it.

I have found the process of writing and defending this thesis to be, for the most part, a healthy course of professional development. In negotiating with supervising faculty for every part of the work, from its title (I wanted to call it "Playing the game") to each and every word I chose, I learned a lot. Almost all of the suggestions of my committee improved this work.

I have mixed feelings about parts of the text that have been toned down because my committee found my arguments to be unsubstantiated. I had been deliberately critical and bitter towards the academy because it has been a source of pain for me. At the same time, I also recognize the privileges and comforts it has afforded me. My committee members were trying to teach me that a controlled, reasoned argument is more persuasive than the bitter, angry voice that I had used in some places. While I concede this, I cannot shed all of the bitterness that I feel for the institution that caused me such pain and I remain adamant that universities must take more responsibility to change and to reflect the "multicultural environments" of the modern world of globalization (Tierney, 1998, p. 616).
I sensed that some of the reluctance of my committee members to rail at the institution from within, is based in a fear of the repercussions. I am younger, less experienced, more idealistic, and I cannot so easily be reprimanded. I remain undeterred. While I do not yet have a vision for institutional change, I intend to develop one during my doctoral studies.

I feel very grateful to everyone involved in my program of studies and in the development of this thesis. They serve as reminders to me of the ways in which I am privileged and blessed. While many of my fellow students worked full-time while pursuing their studies, I did not have to. My wife, Shauneen, worked as an assistant professor in the department of Educational Foundations while I studied, providing our family with an income. The André Renaud Scholarship of $1000, which I received for the 2001-02 academic year, helped to ease the financial pressure.

Everyone has been supportive in his or her own way. My brother has paid the cheque whenever he and I went out. When I complained that it was hard to work with my kids playing games on my computer, he gave me his old one. When I complained about my small workspace at home, my mother gave me her big desk to work on.

In addition to financial and moral support, my family, friends, and colleagues have provided me with a soundboard to bounce my ideas off of. I am sure that my brother would have been relieved if my long, boring explanations of postcolonial and critical theory had ended sooner. I cannot say enough about the advantages of having a spouse with a Ph.D. in your field while you do your master’s degree.

Clearly, graduate studies have been, and remain, important to me. I am going on to a doctoral program in Toronto. How, then, can I argue that graduate studies is just a
The answer, I think, lies in the words of my participants: "Hey, I’m Native [and] I’m proud" (TA1, p. 17). I feel pride and power in my Aboriginality. It wouldn’t care if I had spent most of my life in jail or addicted to drugs or alcohol. It is unimpressed by my credentials. But it always draws me close and wraps its large, warm hands around me. I am home in it. And I know who I am. Everything else that I do is relative.

I acknowledge that one of the reasons I enrolled in graduate studies was because I wanted material things. I wanted a new car and nice clothes and a nice place to live for my family and me. But I have come to understand from James, Noreen, and Sylvia that in fulfilling these individualistic goals I am only “playing the game” because Aboriginal people “gotta play that game whether or not you truly believe in it” (TB2, p. 3). While the communalism of Indigenous knowledge is authentic to my experience, the individualism of economic rationalism is an “artificial context” which I cannot avoid, a game I must play. And now I know how. *Kinanâskomitinawaw.*
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APPENDIX A - APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH PROTOCOL

UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON ETHICS IN BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE RESEARCH
Application for Approval of Research Protocol
ORS USE ONLY
File Number
Date Received

1) Graduate Supervisor:
Dr. Reg Wickett, Professor
Student
Adult & Continuing Education
Department of Educational Foundations
University of Saskatchewan
Ph: (306) 966-7642
Fax: (306) 966-7020

1a) Name of Researcher:
E. Cam Willett, Graduate
Masters Program
Adult & Continuing Education
Department of Ed. Foundations
(306)966-7711

1. b) Anticipated Dates of the Study: January 7, 2002 – April 4, 2002

2. Title of the Study:
FIRST NATIONS PARTICIPATION IN GRADUATE STUDIES

3. Abstract:

First Nations people are grossly underrepresented in the academy (Benjamin et al., 1993; Tierney, 1992). In order to effectively address this issue, it is critical that stakeholders understand the factors that contribute to motivation for First Nations people. At the same time, in order to understand First Nations motivation, it is also important to understand the nature and purpose of Indian education. (Garrod & Larimore, 1997; Hampton, 1995; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). The proposed study will investigate the factors that motivate First Nations people to enrol in graduate studies in Saskatchewan by asking 3 First Nations graduate students “what participation represents to them in the context of their past, present and desired futures” (West, 1995, p. 133).

4. Funding: The study will be funded by the graduate student, Cam Willett.

5. Participants: 3 participants will be selected by use of the snowball sampling technique (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 64). This method of selection is the most reasonable because (a) at the time of writing there are only two institutions in
Saskatchewan where graduate studies can be pursued: 1) the University of Saskatchewan and 2) the University of Regina, and (b) the number of First Nations graduate students is small (there were only 107 First Nations graduate students sponsored by First Nations of Saskatchewan in 1997-98 (Government of Canada, 2000, p. 135)). Due to the small number of First Nations graduate students, it is possible that I may know or be distantly related to some of them. I will conduct several informal pilot interviews with First Nations graduate students I already know. During each interview, I will ask these participants to recommend others for the study. I will continue to choose and interview new people until I find 3 newly-enrolled First Nations graduate students in either the University of Saskatchewan or the University of Regina who will agree to participate in my study. The sample will be essentially a sample of convenience.

6. Informed Consent: It is imperative that the traditional protocols of the First Nations participants of this study be respected. As a First Nations person I will follow appropriate protocol in my treatment of Aboriginal knowledge and First Nations people. All participants will receive gifts of tobacco prior to the interview as an offering of thanks and respect for their knowledge. The researcher will describe to each participant the nature of the study and will explain the concept of informed consent in detail. It will be explained to participants that they are free to withdraw at any time without loss of services and that if they choose to withdraw all of the data from their interview(s) and observations will be destroyed. The consent form (see Appendix C) will be provided to each participant to read and this will be followed by an opportunity to ask questions. The participants will then sign the consent form to indicate their agreement to participate before the study proceeds.

7. Research Methodology: The most appropriate method of facilitating a process of learning together between the researcher and the participant is the semi-structured interview (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Hampton, 1995). Qualitative data is more readily attained when research participants have time for reflection, are able to use their own words, and have the opportunity to ask for clarification (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Two semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions will be used to allow each participant to describe the factors in their own terms (Hampton, 1995; Van Stone et al., 1994). Both interviews will be approximately 1 hour in length and will be audiotaped and transcribed.

The interview will be guided by the following open-ended questions:

1) Describe how you came to decide to pursue graduate studies.
2) What issues did you have to consider when you made the decision to begin graduate studies?
3) Tell me about what motivated you to pursue graduate studies. Were there people who encouraged or discouraged you?
4) What benefit do you see in your participation in graduate studies?
5) What consequences do you anticipate of your graduate studies?
6) What direction do you think your life would have taken had you chosen not to attend this graduate program?
7) Who or what serves you as an inspiration?
8) What does your participation in graduate studies mean to you in the context of your life story?

Although I will keep these questions as a guide, the interview will be more of a conversation than a formal interview. I will discuss my interest in the question with the participants and respond freely to their answers (Hampton, 1995). I will attempt to paraphrase the answers of the participants to be sure that I understand their meaning.

The first interview will be transcribed and a copy of the transcript will be provided to the participant for review. Each interview will be followed up with short a conference in which we will review the transcripts together for clarification, verification, and interpretation and to search for themes, patterns, and further understandings of the question. The participant will have the right to delete, add, or augment the transcript at any time so that it says what the participant wishes to share.

The second interview will be conducted in much the same manner as the first but will be used to pose new questions that surface from the data analysis and the conference. The second interview will be transcribed and a copy of the transcript will again be provided to the participant for review. This will be followed by a second conference for clarification, verification, and interpretation and to search for themes, patterns, and further understandings of the question. The final data analysis will then be drafted.

8. Data Storage: All data (field notes, transcripts, tapes, and artifacts) will be securely stored and retained by the researchers for a minimum of 5 years with Dr. Reg Wickett, Adult & Continuing Education, Department of Educational Foundations in the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan in accordance with the University of Saskatchewan guidelines.

9. Dissemination of Results: Participants will be informed that at the end of the study, their contributions (which they agree to share in the Data/Transcript Release Form) will be written as part of a thesis and may later become part of a scholarly journal article and/or conference presentation(s). Each participant will receive a copy of the final draft of the thesis.

10. Risk: There are no risks or deception in the study. Participants will be made aware of the purpose of the study and why they are participants.

11. Confidentiality: Efforts will be made to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. All transcripts will be coded and pseudonyms will be used to identify participants or their organizations in publications and presentations if participants choose to remain anonymous. However, due to the small population of First Nations graduate students, participants will be advised that they may be identifiable to other people on the basis of their comments and quotations that they provide.

12. Data Transcript Release: (See Appendix D)

13. Debriefing and Feedback: The participants will be involved at each stage of the study, reviewing their transcripts and conversing with the researcher. Participants will
review all transcripts and the final report to feel reassured that the researcher is interpreting and representing their intellectual property that is their thoughts, feelings, and concerns.
14. Required Signatures:

The Research Proposal has been approved by:

Dr. Reg Wickett, Professor
Adult & Continuing Education

Dr. Linda Wason-Ellam, Professor
Curriculum Studies

Dr. Marie Battiste, Professor
Indian & Northern Education Program

Don Cochrane, Department Head
Educational Foundations

15. Contact name and information:

Cam Willett
1706 Kilburn Ave.
Saskatoon, SK  S7M 0K3

Ph:  (306)343-6146
Fax:  (306)966-7020
E-mail: cam.willett@usask.ca
APPENDIX B - LETTER OF INTENT

January, 2002

E. Cam Willett
1706 Kilburn Ave.
Saskatoon, SK  S7M 0K3

Dear

My name is Cam Willett. I am from Little Pine First Nation. As you may be aware, I am currently enrolled in a Master’s program in the College of Education, University of Saskatchewan. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study which will partially fulfill my Master’s degree requirements. As I have studied the principles and practice of adult education, I have become interested in exploring First Nations participation in graduate studies. I plan to conduct interviews with 3 First Nations graduate students in Saskatchewan to find out what motivated them to enrol in graduate studies and what graduate studies represents to them in the context of their past, present, and desired futures.

Two 1-hour interviews will be conducted with each participant. I anticipate the interviews will be more like informal, two-way conversations than formal, one-way interviews. I will follow appropriate protocol in my treatment of Aboriginal knowledge and First Nations people. I would like to tape-record the interviews and transcribe them. Each participant interviewed will receive a copy of their interview transcripts and/or notes for their review. Since I intend to work with each participant to analyze, verify, and interpret the meaning of your responses, I would appreciate the opportunity to contact each participant to review the transcripts either in person or by phone. You would be free to change or delete any or all of the transcript at any point in the study.

Your interview transcripts, notes and audiotapes would be participant coded and pseudonyms will be used to maintain your anonymity, if you so choose. Nevertheless, due to the small number of First Nations graduate students, be advised that you may be identifiable to other people on the basis of the comments and quotations you provide. This data would be kept in a secure place at the University of Saskatchewan with Dr. Reg Wickett, Department of Educational Foundations, for 5 years according to the University of Saskatchewan guidelines before being destroyed.

The results of the study will be used for my master’s thesis. Later, the study might be published as an article in a scholarly journal or presented a conference.

You would be free to withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of services at the University of Saskatchewan. If you withdrew after being interviewed, the data collected from your interviews would not be used.
I anticipate scheduling interviews to start during the first week of January, 2002. I will be contacting you by telephone during the next few weeks to discuss this matter. After my study has been approved, if you agree to participate in the study, I will contact you again in January to arrange a mutually agreeable meeting place and time.

Yours truly,

_____________________________
E. Cam Willett
APPENDIX C - INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE AND TO BE AUDIOTAPED

I appreciate your participation in the research study: FIRST NATIONS PARTICIPATION IN GRADUATE STUDIES. The purpose of the study is to describe the factors that motivate 3 First Nations people to enrol in graduate studies in Saskatchewan. I hope to find out what participation means to First Nations learners in the context of their past, present and desired futures. It is possible that this information will be useful to First Nations and universities alike, in addressing the underrepresentation of First Nations students in the academy. It is also possible that participation in this study may clarify and/or reaffirm your own purpose in your graduate studies.

In order to protect your interests we will adhere to the following guidelines.

1. I will follow appropriate protocols as I understand them in my treatment of Aboriginal knowledge and First Nations people.

2. The researcher will interview you to discuss the factors that contribute to your motivation to enrol in graduate studies.

3. You will be interviewed twice, approximately 60 minutes each time, and the interview will be audio-recorded. You may turn off the tape recorder or discontinue the interview at any time during the process.

4. The tape will be transcribed and analyzed for patterns and themes. The researcher will then contact you by phone or meet with you again at your convenience to verify and clarify your responses in the transcriptions. You can add, delete or change information to reflect what you want to say. You will receive copies of all final transcripts. You will be asked to sign a Release of Transcripts Form.

5. After the completion of the thesis, tapes and transcripts of your interviews will be kept in a secure place at the University of Saskatchewan with Dr. Reg Wickett, Department of Educational Foundations, for 5 years according to the University of Saskatchewan guidelines before being destroyed.

6. You are free to withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of services at the University of Saskatchewan. If you withdraw, the data collected from interviews and tape recordings will not be used and will be destroyed.

7. The results of the study will be used for a Master’s thesis. Later, the study might be published as an article in a scholarly journal or presented a conference. Although your interview transcripts, notes and audiotapes will be participant coded and pseudonyms will be used to maintain your anonymity, be advised that due to the small number of First Nations graduate students, you may be identifiable to other people on the basis of the comments and quotations you provide.
I wish you a successful and informative study.

Valerie Thompson, Chair
University Advisory Committee
on Ethics in Behavioural Science Research
Participant Consent

I, ____________________________, understand that this research project
(Please print your name)
was approved by the University of Saskatchewan Advisory Committee on Ethics in
Behavioural Science on December 19th, 2001. I have read and understand the guidelines
above and I agree to participate in Cam Willett’s study “First Nations Participation in
Graduate Studies” I have been given a copy of this consent form for my records.

Date: ____________________________

Participant’s Signature: ____________________________

Researcher’s Signature: ____________________________

Thank you for participating in this study. If you further questions about your
participation in the study you can contact Cam Willett at 343-6146 or 966-7711 E-mail:
cam.willett@usask.ca, Adult & Continuing Education, and/or Dr. Reg Wickett 966-
7642, Department of Educational Foundations or the Office of Research Services,
University of Saskatchewan at 966-4053 for more information about your rights as a
participant.
APPENDIX D - TRANSCRIPT/DATA RELEASE FORM

I, ______________ have read my transcripts and agree to release them. I have had the opportunity to read the transcripts and to clarify, add or delete information so that it accurately represents my words. The procedure and its possible risks have been explained to me by Cam Willett and I understand them. I understand that my participation is completely voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. I understand that the data from this study may be published and/or presented at seminars and/or conferences. I understand that interview transcripts, notes and audiotapes will be participant coded and that pseudonyms will be used to maintain anonymity, but that there remains a risk that I may be identifiable to other people on the basis of the comments and quotations I provide, due to the small number of First Nations graduate students.

I understand that this research project has been approved by the University of Saskatchewan Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioural Science on December 19th, 2001 and I agree to participate. I agree to the guidelines above. I have been given a copy of this form for my records.

___________________________________  __________________________
Signature of Participant                  Date

___________________________________  __________________________
Signature of Researcher                    Date

Thank you for participating in this study. If you further questions about your participation in the study you can contact Cam Willett Ph: 343-6146 or 966-7711 E-mail: cam.willett@usask.ca, Adult & Continuing Education, and/or Dr. Reg Wickett 966-7642, Department of Educational Foundations or the Office of Research Services, University of Saskatchewan at 966-4053 for more information about your rights as a participant.
APPENDIX E – REQUEST TO WAIVE ANONYMITY

I, __________________ have participated in the study First Nations Participation in Graduate Studies conducted by Cam Willett. I have reviewed the final transcripts of my interviews. I wish to claim a voice in the study and am, therefore, requesting the use of my real name in the final thesis document.

I HEREBY REQUEST THAT MY RIGHT TO ANONYMITY BE WAIVED AND THAT MY REAL NAME BE USED IN First Nations Participation in Graduate Studies

______________________________  _______________________
Signature of Participant                Date

______________________________  _______________________
Signature of Researcher                Date
APPENDIX F – APPROVAL OF RESEARCH PROTOCOL

UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

UNIVERSITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE
ON ETHICS IN BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

NAME: Reg Wickett, (Adult & Continuing Education) E.C. Willett

BSC#: 2001-222

DATE: 19-Dec-2001

The University Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioural Science Research has reviewed the Application for Ethics Approval for your study: "First Nations Participation in Graduate Studies" (2001-222).

1. Your study has been APPROVED subject to the following minor modification(s):

   - Given that your participants are graduate students, is it necessary for you to read the consent form to them? Unless there is a culturally-based reason for doing otherwise, please allow your participants to read the form, and then provide an opportunity to ask any questions they might have.
   - Your consent form should not guarantee confidentiality. Instead, because of the small number of participants that you plan to enroll, participants should be advised that they may be identifiable to other people on the basis of the comments and quotations that they provide.

2. Please send one copy of your revisions to the Office of Research Services for our records. Please highlight or underline any changes made when resubmitting.

3. The term of this approval is for five years.

4. This letter serves as your certificate of approval, effective as of the time that you have completed the requested modifications. If you require a letter of unconditional approval, please so indicate on your reply, and one will be issued to you.

5. Any significant changes to your proposed study should be reported to the Chair for Committee consideration in advance of its implementation.

6. In order to maintain ethics approval, a status report must be submitted to the Chair for Committee consideration within one month of the current expiry date each year the study remains open, and upon study competition. Please refer to the website for further instructions: http://www.usask.ca/research/ethics.shtml

Office of Research Services, University of Saskatchewan
Kirk Hall Room 210, 117 Science Place, Saskatoon SK S7N 5C8 CANADA
Telephone: (306) 966-8576 or (306) 966-2084 Facsimile: (306) 966-8597 http://www.usask.ca/research/