INTERCULTURAL FRIENDSHIP RELATIONSHIPS

AMONG WOMEN:

LESSONS OF THE GRANDMOTHERS

A Thesis Submitted to the College of

Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree Master of Arts

in the Department of Women's and Gender Studies

University of Saskatchewan

Saskatoon

By

Kim Ann Morrison

October 2000

PERMISSION TO USE

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Postgraduate degree from the University of Saskatchewan, I agree that the Libraries of this University may make it freely available for inspection. I further agree that permission for copying of this thesis in any manner, in whole or in part, for scholarly purposes may be granted by the professor or professors who supervised my thesis work or, in their absence, by the Head of the Department of the Dean of the College in which my thesis work was done. It is understood that any copying or publication or use of this thesis or parts thereof for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission. It is also understood that due recognition shall be given to me and to the University of Saskatchewan in any scholarly use which may be made of any material in my thesis.

Requests for permission to copy or make other use of material in this thesis in whole or part should be addressed to:

Head of the Department of Women's and Gender Studies
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7N 5A5

ABSTRACT

Women of the "Intercultural Grandmothers Uniting" (IGU) group draw on the gendered identity "grandmother" to build bridges of understanding, respect, and friendship across boundaries of race and generation. This thesis examines important intersections of gender, race, class, age and cultural and family identity through an examination of elderly women's friendships within a network of Saskatchewan First Nations, Metis, and other Canadian older women. Historically, many women belonging to these groups have lived side by side without ever interacting. Building relationships among the groups is of increasing importance given Saskatchewan's aging population, the growth of Aboriginal populations and migration to urban centres.

An oral historical approach draws on the life experiences of ten IGU members and two coordinators to provide insights about specific social institutions and cultural processes that act to facilitate or hinder friendships among women. The connectivity between intercultural friendship relationships and perceived ability to engage in social activism is also examined and found to operate synergistically. The results of this study show that the Grandmothers build upon the common ground of "grandmotherhood" to bridge differences in cultural identities while at the same time cultural identities are maintained and prioritized. Operating within broader social ideologies that characterize such categories as mutually exclusive and segregated, it is paradoxical that the Grandmothers simultaneously occupy a categorical identity space and highlight the interconnectedness of the categories through their friendship.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

To my grandmother,

Christina Marie Baart,

for the gifts of love, strength, and listening.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1   Objectives of the Study

Friendships among women are complex relationships embodying many dimensions, impacting on identities and lived experience in many ways. Nonetheless, literature on women's friendships, intercultural friendships in particular, is limited in availability. Friendship literature often excludes women from its analysis and focuses on friendship formation and processes rather than its effects. The primary goal of this research is two-fold: first, to examine social factors that facilitate or limit women's ability to develop friendships with other women, and second, to examine how women perceive opportunities for social action created by their friendship. In keeping with this goal, the four specific objectives of this project are:

1. To understand how women experience and talk about their friendships;

2. To assess how race and cultural heritage influence these friendships;

3. To examine the impact of age on these friendships as perceived by older women;

4. To explore these women's perceptions of their ability to facilitate social action as a result of their friendships.

This study examines important intersections of gender, race, class, age and cultural and family identity through an examination of elderly women's friendships within

Intercultural Grandmothers Uniting (IGU). The women of IGU build bridges of friendship upon the common ground of grandmotherhood and then use their friendship to take a family-based identity beyond the private sphere to the public through community activism.

In this thesis I challenge assumptions about gender, identity and women's friendship and explore the interconnectedness of gender, race and age as demonstrated in the Grandmothers' intercultural friendships. The Grandmothers' perceptions of their friendships are analyzed and discussed within the context of friendship dimensions and identity issues.

1.2   Research Questions

With the aforementioned objectives as a framework I developed several research questions which I pursued through a variety of methods. My hope was to gain insight into the women's experiences and perceptions as they engage in intercultural friendship and community activism. Specific focus was on the friendships they developed with other women in the group. A list of guiding questions follows. How do the women experience friendships with other women in the group? What are the barriers to developing these friendships? What factors helped to overcome these barriers? How has cultural heritage influenced these friendships? How does being a grandmother affect these friendships? What impact do the women perceive age having on the friendships? What have been the benefits of these friendships? Do the women believe these friendships influence their ability to carry out social action projects?

Of importance to my research interest is the fact that I was born and raised in North Battleford, a small city in North West Saskatchewan. North Battleford is of

historical significance to Euro-Canadian and First Nations relationships and my

exposure to interrracial and intercultural relationships while growing up there certainly

increased my interest in the project. I grew up in a community that was, for the most

part, racially segregated. I am a white woman of German and Dutch descent and grew

up in predominantly white, working and middle-class neighbourhoods.

Segregation was plainly evident in my community, with a public hospital for

general use and the Battlefords' Indian Hospital for those of First Nations heritage.

There are a number of First Nations communities around North Battleford and many

First Nations people live in the city. I remember that up to second grade, children

played freely with no apparent consideration for background (although I do recall some

parents expressing racist ideas, usually couched in the rhetoric of health, such as

preventing First Nations children from coming into Euro-Canadian homes because of an

unsubstantiated fear of lice). Between the third and seventh grade I went to a school

with no apparent Aboriginal presence, an absence that was not noted at the time by

either other children or myself.

During my high school years, I had a number of Aboriginal acquaintances, but

our relationships were circumscribed. If Euro-Canadian and Aboriginal students got too

emotionally close, Aboriginal students were teased by the others about being an

"apple," supposedly red on the outside and white on the inside. Similarly, Euro-

Canadian students would be asked by other Euro-Canadian students if they were "going

bush" or "going native." Physical violence was a strong deterrent. A First Nations girl

with whom I was developing a friendship had her head bashed against the sidewalk curb

for being a "traitor," an accusation that metaphorically marks the segregated cultural

"sides" that were, according to some, meant to be kept separate. At the time, I recognized the racism inherent in the situation and was extremely bothered by it but the prevalence and power of racist ideologies created and sustained a hostile environment, making barriers between the races appear insurmountable and interracial friendships seem dangerous.

As an adult, I have been able to cross this barrier of segregation and maintain friendships with women from diverse backgrounds. However, there is still great room for improvement and there is certainly a need to explore the dynamics of intercultural friendships among women from diverse backgrounds. When I learned of the Grandmothers and their desire to build bridges, I was fascinated and felt hopeful about a solution that addresses upcoming societal shifts. I set out to learn from the Grandmothers about the barriers they had discovered and how they had been successful at building bridges.

The remaining chapters of this thesis explore intercultural friendships among women in an attempt to address the above objectives and questions. The thesis begins with a discussion of the study's context, including information on the historical and intercultural climate in which these friendships occur and the identity indicators of age, grandmotherhood and social activism. Chapter 3 provides the methodological framework used as well as information on the participant group, the research and data analysis methods. The specific analysis of my findings is in Chapters 4 and 5 with the former organized around the dimensions of friendship as revealed in the study and the latter examining identity perspectives that are illuminated through the women's friendships. Additional observations and conclusions are drawn in Chapter 6, which

outlines the lessons of the Grandmothers and broader implications of the study's

findings.

Chapter 2

Contextual Elements

2.1   Historical Context

IGU is a network of Saskatchewan First Nations, Metis, and other Canadian older women. The First Nations people of Saskatchewan have a long history with the land. In the seventeenth century, Europeans came to the land currently called Canada seeking natural resources with which to increase their wealth. Through unions of European traders and the First Nations people, the Metis people were born, although contemporary Metis identity is, according to some, specifically tied to the Red River community.

Intercultural relationships in Saskatchewan have a complex history and I only sketch out the contours of it here. Jim Miller (1989), in *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens,* described early relationships between Europeans and First Nations people as cooperative but by the nineteenth century European settlers were taking more and more of the resources and began viewing the First Nations people as an impediment to expansion (pp. 268-273). In order to facilitate expansion, the British Crown entered into treaties with First Nations providing them with treaty rights in exchange for use of the land they occupied.

IGU has focused its efforts on the Treaty 4 area with activities centred around Fort Qu'Appelle which is the site of the Treaty signing. Treaty 4 was signed October 13, 1874 with the Cree and Saulteaux and extends from just east of the Saskatchewan/Manitoba border to just west of the Saskatchewan/Alberta border in

Southern Saskatchewan and includes the city of Regina and several other cities and towns.[1] The purpose of Treaty 4 is described as follows:

> To obtain consent thereto of Her Indian subjects inhabiting the said tract, and to make a treaty and arrange with them, so that there may be peace and good will between them and Her Majesty and between them and Her Majesty's other subjects, and that Her Indian people may know and be assured of what allowance they are to count upon and receive from Her Majesty's bounty and benevolence (Duhamel, 1966).

Clearly, harmonious intercultural relationships were presented as an integral part of the Treaty's purpose, and yet these were not consistently realized because racism has marked intercultural encounters since early contact. Increasing pressure as a result of the growth in European settlement overshadowed the importance of intercultural harmony. The need for more land for settlers led to a "coercive policy of land acquisition and directed cultural change" (Miller, 1989, pp. 273-274), including the use of forced residential schooling for First Nations children. Indeed, Constance Deiter (1999) found that the assimilation program has caused, among other things, a loss of parenting skills, identity and self-esteem as well as the "vilification of [First Nations] culture and language" (pp. 78-79).

It is an understatement to say that First Nations people have been mistreated at the hands of the European settlers who have come to their lands, and today's intercultural relationships exhibit the strain of this history. Furthermore, the damages of residential schooling are believed to have contributed to increased social problems in First Nations communities (Deiter, 1999, p. 78). As a result, there is a large disparity in social status indicators with incomes, employment and life expectancy statistics being

---

[1] The treaty was negotiated and signed before Saskatchewan was a province so the use of the current Canadian map to describe the area is for convenience only.

7

far lower for First Nations people (Saskatchewan, 1999). While First Nations are moving to re-establish self-government, positions of social power are held primarily by Euro-Canadians. The women participating in this study repeatedly used the word "segregation" to describe this disparity in power and the ways in which it gets played out in the daily lives of Saskatchewan residents. This segregation, along with other social factors, makes choosing friendship difficult.

While generalizations are difficult to make, it is fair to say that white Canadians do not like to think of themselves as racist. In fact, denial of racism has been put forward as an integral part of the white Canadian identity (Razack, 1998, p. 11). A review of Canadian history shows that racism is indeed a fact of life:

> It is essential to recognize that racism is located in the systems and structures that girded the legal system of Canada's past. Racism is not primarily manifest in isolated, idiosyncratic, and haphazard acts by individual actors who, from time to time, consciously intended to assert racial hierarchy over others. The roots of racialization run far deeper than individualized, intentional activities. Racism resonates through institutions, intellectual theory, popular culture, and law...Racialized communities were denied the right to maintain their own identities, cultures, and spiritual beliefs. Education, employment, residence, and the freedom of social interaction were sharply curtailed for all but those who claimed and were accorded the racial designation 'white' (Backhouse, 1999, p. 15).

The legacy of this systematic and legalized racism is evident in Saskatchewan today.

As I write this thesis, Saskatoon police officers have admitted to dropping a First Nations man off outside the city limits in freezing cold weather and two First Nations men have died under seemingly similar circumstances. A peaceful vigil of Aboriginal grandmothers at the courthouse where the officers were before the judge was interrupted by a Euro-Canadian woman unleashing a racist tirade. It is little wonder Ken Noskiye (2000), a First Nations newspaper columnist, describes himself as

"discouraged" and "disillusioned" (p. 53) when considering the events of the recent past. He undoubtedly reflects the discouragement and disillusionment felt by many people of diverse cultural backgrounds. These are schisms that, at times, seem too great to bridge. Yet, bridging them is of increasing importance given the changing demographics in Saskatchewan and Canada and the need for justice and equality.

Aboriginal populations in Canada are expected to grow rapidly (Canada, n.d.). Using only moderate growth predictions (rather than rapid) the Registered Indian population growth is projected to increase from about 500,000 in 1990 to 700,000 in 1999 and 900,000 in 2015 (Canada, 1995). Saskatchewan is expected to experience the largest proportional gains with an increase from 15% of the population currently to 17% by 2015 (Canada, 1995). The Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations believes "First Nations are the fastest-growing segment of Saskatchewan's population" and identifies the importance of relationships between First Nations and non-Aboriginal people (FSIN, n.d.). This study speaks to the shifting demographics of the province and may lead to other relevant investigations.

2.2   Age

Changing demographics with regards to age further increase the need for this study. The proportion of Canadians over the age of 65 in 1996 was 12.2% (Canada, 1996) and this is projected to increase to 20% by 2015 with a projected median age of 41 years (Canada, 1995). While the Aboriginal population is on average younger than non-Aboriginal, the Aboriginal senior population is still projected to grow rapidly to almost 5% of First Nations people (Canada, n.d.) and to continue growing: "the median age for Registered Indians has increased from 17 years in 1975 to 23 years in 1990 and

could reach 31 years by 2015" (Canada, 1995). This aging trend is occurring in an ageist society in which the voices and visibility of aging women are often compromised. Even though older women face a disproportionate amount of problems associated with aging, such as poverty, illness, abuse and caregiving, they have often been left out of both feminist and gerontological studies (Browne, 1998, p. xxiv) leading to a lack of information on their realities and lived experiences. This lack of accurate information allows misinformation, in the form of myths and stereotypes, to flourish. Euro-Canadian culture, influenced considerably by a youth oriented popular culture that values a particular form of beauty emphasizing wrinkle-free skin and a thin body, leaves little place for older women to occupy outside this construction. Furthermore, there are "pervasive cultural associations of aging with decline and old age with stigma" (Furman, 1997: p. 93). As a result, older women can experience condescension thus creating a feeling of invisibility. Euro-Canadian ageism contrasts with views on aging in some Aboriginal, and specifically, First Nations traditions where elders, particularly grandmothers, are held in high esteem and respected for their wisdom and experience. These differing perspectives and constructions of age contribute to the value of studying intercultural friendships among older women.

2.3 Motherhood and Grandmotherhood

Mothering and motherhood have been commonly represented as one uniting aspect among women, supposedly bringing the diverse experiences of women together in one discursive and experiential realm. This approach must be tempered with the recognition that it can lead to an essentialist reduction of women to their mothering role, but because mothering has indeed been so central to women's constructed identity,

10

exploring the ways in which women unite in friendship under this auspice is significant.

Claiming authority to act on the basis of socially understood and accepted motherhood

concepts provides access to areas often restricted to women even though oppressive

systems are built upon the very same concepts. Therein lies the paradox:

> In order to claim positions of power and influence, women have to accommodate prevailing notions that women possess special knowledge or moral qualities by virtue of being mothers. Such claims reinforce the very ideology that justifies women's subordination, that is, the notion that women are essentially different from men and thus should be relegated to specific functions in society (Glenn, 1994, p. 23).

While aligning oneself with essentialist notions of womanhood and mothering poses

risks for women, social constructions of motherhood have been used as common ground

to organize from and as justification for engagement in political action. Nancy Naples

(1998) cited the example of:

> women community activists in Harlem during the late 1960's [who] drew upon their social experiences as mothers. They did so in both essentializing and strategic ways. In other words, they described their motivations for political action as a natural extension of their identities as mothers as well as understood that such claims increased their credibility as political actors (p. 329).

The risks and benefits of aligning along the identity of motherhood must be carefully

weighed. The participants in this study negotiate this paradox by expanding the

definition of grandmother beyond the biological to encompass "any loving and caring

person" while maintaining a focus on the well-being of themselves and their children.

The primary feature of motherhood drawn on in the construction of women as

activists and friends is the notion of women as nurturers and caregivers; in an extension

of women's mothering role in the family, women provide care to friends and others.

Yet, it is this same role as mother that traditionally requires women to focus their

energies first and foremost on their children and husbands rather than on themselves,

their women friends or outside activities. Similarly, the role of grandmother connotes a connection to family that often manifests itself in continued caregiving functions which in turn act to limit the time and energy available to interact with peers, maintain friendship relationships and engage in social change. Indeed, the role of grandmother has recently come into question as a further source of women's oppression prescribing a domestic role that limits alternative choices (Browne, 1998, p. 205). In spite of such contradictions, the participants in this study extend the notion of care to a consideration of future generations as rationale for engaging in social activism. Constructions of motherhood which place priority on a concern for children and the world in which they live provide a strong rationale for becoming involved in activist activities aimed at improving social conditions.

2.4   Social Activism

Historically, women have often drawn on their collective identities as women, mothers, and grandmothers to come together in order to create change through social activism. Many of the resulting organizations have provided women access to social institutions and processes from which they would otherwise be excluded (Scott, 1991, p. 2). Women's sense of responsibility for future generations has often been a mobilizing force in agitating for social change. In the late nineteenth century women came together as "mothers rather than wives" and "organized motherhood" to start the Women's Christian Temperance Union, which went on to fight for suffrage (Rothman, 1978, pp. 68-69). In more contemporary examples, activist groups such as ANC Mothers Anonymous (ANC is the acronym for a welfare program in the Chicago area called Aid to Needy Children), Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) and Mothers

Against Police Harassment (MAPH) draw explicit links between their identities as mothers and their activism by including the word "mother" in their titles.

Grandmothers have also alluded to their family ties in groups such as the Raging Grannies, self-described as "caring women of all ages" (VOW, n.d.) who "sing to empower and motivate others to also stand up and take a strong position...to help in the struggle to build a world which we will be happy and proud to pass on to our grandchildren" (Raging Grannies, n.d.). The Raging Grannies draw on stereotypes about grandmothers by dressing in "Granny" clothes in order to appear non-threatening while they raise awareness and engage in protesting about issues of peace, environment and social justice (VOW, n.d.). As in the case of building on socially accepted concepts of motherhood, the women in the Raging Grannies subvert the very institution with which they identify, grandmotherhood, by exaggerating commonly held stereotypes and expanding the boundaries of grandmothering to include social activism.

Extending the construction of motherhood beyond biological or legal kin forms the basis of the "activist mothering" concept (Naples, 1998). Activist mothering expands on the traditional definition of mothering to better reflect the way many "women challenged the false separation of productive work, socially reproductive work, and politics under changing historical contexts" (Naples, 1998, p. 4). Furthermore, definitions of activism are being expanded so that "women's social-reproduction labor in the community has recently been recognized as a type of resistance or political activity" (Feldman, Stall & Wright, 1998, p. 260). Likewise, older women's work in the home and community is being interpreted as a form of resistance (Browne, 1998, p. 207).

I would argue that this broadened definition of activism has previously been, and continues to be, "recognized" as resistance and politics by the women engaging in such activities as well as many academics whose views are often marginalized by androcentric and Eurocentric academic practices (Anderson, 2000; Collins, 1991; Fife, 1993; hooks, 1989). In fact, resistance is often identified as an integral part of mothering and grandmothering for women belonging to a culture being oppressed (Anderson, 2000; hooks, 1989). Resistance is not always equated with activism though. It is often argued that any action only becomes activism when it is accompanied by a realization of the structural and systemic forces that lead to the social injustice or inequity (Bear, 1991; hooks, 1989). However, while feminist activism encompasses the formal "organized activities designed to improve the conditions of women's varied existence" it can also be seen more generally as "the struggle for change in women's lives" (Griffin, 1995, p. 1). Engaging in the struggle for change could be considered activism whether recognized as such by the actors or not.

Many women form friendships when they come together to create social change. Indeed for some women, the friendships formed become more important than the work engaged in (Rothman, 1978; Scott, 1991). Yet, linking friendship and activism is of concern to some. Contemporary feminist critiques have drawn attention to the risk of universalizing caused by assuming a common bond of friendship or sisterhood, which is in reality built only on the dominant group's identity. A "utilitarian model of collective action" based on the individual and usually promoted by members of dominant groups (Howe, 1998, p. 239) treats relationships as extraneous at best or as a threat to achieving political goals at worst (Young cited in Razack, 1998, p. 51). People belonging to non-

dominant groups may place more emphasis on relationships and "maintaining viable networks of relationships" (Howe, 1998, p. 239). Of particular relevance to this investigation are the theories that women's socialization as nurturers and the related role of motherhood create a preference for and skills at developing relationships, as well the argument that many Aboriginal cultures emphasize the importance of relationships (Anderson, 2000; Ouellette, 1998). The participants in this study found that friendship and activism were linked in a synergistic and inseparable manner.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Overview

One of the goals of feminist research is to increase knowledge about women by working with women to illuminate the issues in their lives rather than simply ascribing to them findings of research about men. This goal served as a research framework for my study of friendship experiences and perceptions among the women involved in IGU. An open-ended interview based methodology allowed for a more participatory approach in that the direction, emphasis, and pace of the interview was guided by the women with whom I worked. Although all interviews are mediated through complex dynamics, fostering such a participatory approach did provide the opportunity for the women's voices to resonate.

Given the cross-cultural nature of this project, it was important that the participants were treated respectfully and in a culturally appropriate manner. Ethical issues received considerable attention especially due to the potential power imbalance between me as a young, white middle class researcher and the participants as elderly, some poor, some with disabilities and many Aboriginal women. I requested permission to conduct research with the group from the Council through the coordinator. I then attended a gathering of the Grandmothers to introduce my project and myself to the group and to consult with them regarding the most appropriate way to proceed. Volunteers for interviews were solicited and contacted at a later date for a mutually convenient meeting. Ten grandmothers participated in this study to generate

information about women's friendship, intercultural relations and social activism. Two group coordinators were also interviewed about their perspectives of the Grandmothers' friendships. Cultural protocol included the provision of culturally appropriate gifts before and after interviews. Grandmothers who were elders received a gift of tobacco and all participants, including the elders and the coordinators, received a gift of Saskatchewan Prairie Berry Jam to express my appreciation at the conclusion of interviews. The interviews were conducted within a feminist methodological framework which contributed to the insights gained and expanded the field of knowledge about intercultural friendships.

3.2   Methodological Framework

The concept of friendship is build upon androcentric notions that exclude women. Suzanne Stern-Gillet (1995), in a recent examination of Aristotle's philosophy of friendship, acknowledged that "Aristotle argued explicitly that women were incapable of the highest and best kind of friendship" (p. 9). Yet she concluded that an Aristotle of today would have included women as equals with the same qualities as men and wrote her book as if all conclusions are generalizable to both men and women. This approach does not inform our understanding of actual relationships among women. Yet friendship research continues to be influenced by underlying assumptions that women are either incapable of forming friendships or else have friendships with the same characteristics of men's friendships. The assumption is that women's friendships, therefore, do not require separate study.

While research on male friendships may indeed be relevant to the study of and knowledge about women's friendships, feminists have begun to draw attention to the

existing work that focuses specifically on women's experiences with friendship. Much of this literature (which will be reviewed later) relies on feminist research methodologies and this research was designed using a similar methodological framework. Central to this feminist framework is a commitment to seek the stories of women in their own words and in ways with which they are comfortable (Jayaratne & Stewart, 1995, p. 221). This is often done through the use of participatory methodologies and the commitment to reciprocity (Lather, 1991; Lawless, 1991). It is "through dialogue and reflexivity, design, data and theory emerge, with data being recognized as generated from people in a relationship" (Lather, 1991, p. 72). A reciprocal approach involves the participants throughout research, including the planning, selection of appropriate methods, and review of data and feedback on conclusions (Lawless, 1991). Lather (1991) outlines a continuum of reciprocity with "minimal" requiring discussion and input on direction and results, and "maximal" requiring negotiations of meanings and participation in theorizing (pp. 57-58). Reciprocity and participation allow us to "see how larger issues are embedded in the particulars of everyday life" and to capture the complexity of issues (Lather, 1991, pp. 61-62).

In keeping with ideas of reciprocity, the participation of the Grandmothers in theorizing was a critical element of the research process allowing rich data and theory to emerge. The primary research method used was open-ended interviews supplemented by document review, library research and a research journal. In this chapter I discuss the interview methodology used to elicit the Grandmothers' stories about friendship.

3.3. Research Participants: Intercultural Grandmothers Uniting

This research, as noted earlier, was conducted with twelve women affiliated with the group Intercultural Grandmothers Uniting (IGU). This is a network of Saskatchewan First Nations, Metis, and other Canadian older women whose purpose is to build bridges of understanding, respect and friendship across boundaries of race and generation ("Intercultural" n.d., p. 1). IGU is part of an outreach project of the University of Regina Extension branch and it has been operating since 1993. IGU addresses particular community needs including literacy development, youth and family violence, isolation of older women, racial tension and racism by developing implementing and evaluating programs ("Intercultural" n.d., p. 1). The group includes all older women in the term, "grandmother," and I have often been told that a grandmother is "anyone who is a loving and caring person." This is an interesting and encompassing construction that will be discussed later in the thesis. At this point, it will suffice to say that by using this definition the Grandmothers invited me into their circle.

The Grandmothers meet at gatherings typically held in the spring and fall and conduct approximately four other activities throughout the year. There is a Project Working Council (PWC), made up of volunteers, which meets on a more frequent basis and is responsible for organizational direction. The Council reflects the diverse demographic membership of IGU. Grandmothers can join the Council and remain on it as long as they are interested. Most of the original PWC members are still on the Council and new members have joined. Usually members are approached and asked if they would like to be involved. The Council provides direction, but the staff members carry out most of the administration.

When I first met the Grandmothers they had a project manager who worked five days a week through the University of Regina Senior's Education Centre arranging funding and organizing activities. When my field work began, the Grandmothers had one coordinator working five days per month on general administration and one part-time coordinator responsible for the "Grandmothers and Girls Violence Prevention Project" in Fort Qu'Appelle. The Violence Prevention Project seeks to increase awareness about violence toward girls and women, and trains and supports Grandmothers and girls to provide prevention education in schools and communities (Ellis, 1997, p. 12). Now, there is only one general coordinator as the Violence Prevention Project was taken over by the school district in Fort Qu'Appelle. Those responsible for the administration of the group come from groups not traditionally reaching administrative positions. All three coordinators were women; two were of European heritage and one was of First Nations ancestry. One coordinator also self-identifies as a woman with a disability who has been affected by personal poverty. The diversity of those performing the administrative tasks of the group reflects the Grandmothers' desire to work with people from all backgrounds.

An evaluation project has shown that through working together and meeting at gatherings, friendships develop and become an important aspect of the Grandmothers' group (Ellis, 1997, p. 17). Participants claim that they have made new friends, and bonded with others, and that this has helped them develop personal strength (Ellis, 1997, p. 17). This strength, in turn, results in action:

> Women participate in it [the group], women are affirmed, and as women are affirmed to share, to tell their stories, to identify their needs and strengths, good things happen. Good things happen in terms of relationships, in terms of

community building, in terms of self-esteem, in terms of health, particularly mental health (Ruth Blaser cited Ellis, 1997, p. 21).

The Grandmothers have held gatherings and participated in a number of workshops and community events. Issues addressed include racism, health, literacy and the needs of youth.

Part of the Grandmothers' self-definition as a group arises from, and is reaffirmed by, the use of guiding principles. The principles are as follows:

> We are committed to building relationships of respect and understanding in every aspect of this work, therefore:
> we meet and work in a circle,
> we begin our gatherings and meetings with prayer,
> we seek to make decisions by consensus,
> we seek to understand and appreciate each other and the differences we have,
> we seek to offer one another affirmation and appreciation as well as correction when appropriate,
> we try to have time for fun and laughter at all of our meetings and gatherings,
> we respect confidentiality. This means no one has the right to share another person's personal story unless permission is asked for and given (MacLauchlan, 1999, pp. 11-12).

At each meeting these guiding principles are reviewed and applied to create a safe, respectful environment for the Grandmothers' interactions.

An important tool in the application of these principles is the Talking Rock, a tradition drawn from a First Nations' culture. One of the First Nations' Grandmothers, an elder and interview participant in this project, introduced the Talking Rock to the group, and since its adoption particular customs mark its use:

> When using the 'talking rock', each person in turn is invited to hold the 'talking rock' and share with the group according to her own comfort level. The one who holds the rock, speaks until she is finished, the others in the circle listen. The rock is passed clockwise (the direction of the sun) from one woman to another in the circle, without interruption. After everyone has had a chance to speak once, there may be a time for conversation in the circle (MacLauchlan, 1999, p. 13).

With the Talking Rock, everyone knows that she will have an opportunity to speak without interruption. The inability to interrupt facilitates listening by the others in the circle. The Talking Rock is also used in PWC meetings and facilitates the consensus decision-making style used by the Council.

3.4. Research Setting

IGU operates primarily in the Treaty 4 area of Saskatchewan, encompassing much of modern day southern Saskatchewan and extending from just west of the Alberta border to just east of the Manitoba border. My research was conducted in a variety of locales including a Grandmothers' gathering, a Grandmother/youth retreat, a Grandmother's Council meeting, individual Grandmothers' homes, a First Nations' school, an office and a coffee shop. A variety of locations will be referred to throughout the body of this thesis and the spaces where the Grandmothers come together and return home often illuminate individual and group characteristics.

The Grandmothers' gatherings are primarily held at the Prairie Christian Training Centre (PCTC) just outside Fort Qu'Appelle, 75 km from Regina and 325 km from Saskatoon. It is nestled in a hill overlooking a lake. The Centre consists of a main building where the dining hall, a recreation room, a chapel and a variety of meeting areas are housed and two buildings with lodging facilities. Upon arrival and registration, the Grandmothers select lodging rooms and room partners and have time to get settled before lunch and an opening circle. Virtually all the Grandmothers stay on site for the gatherings. Council meetings are also held at PCTC. The location means that most of the women are travelling from elsewhere to attend both the gatherings and the Council meetings.

In addition to attending a gathering at PCTC, it was my privilege to be welcomed into the homes of the Grandmothers. Inviting someone into your home is an act of hospitality and trust, especially for senior women who are often alone and targeted for theft and fraud. There were differences among the Grandmothers' homes marked by urban, rural and reserve residences as well as class. These differences were not readily equated with race as one might assume given the dismal poverty statistics for Aboriginal people in Saskatchewan, but rather race and residence. All of the Euro-Canadian women's homes in Regina and all of the Aboriginal women's homes I visited on reserves were reasonably spacious, resident-owned (although reservation houses cannot be privately owned, they were considered as property), and in good repair. In contrast, the homes of Aboriginal women living in Regina were more illustrative of economic hardship, perhaps even a life of poverty with homes being rented, very small, in ill-repair, and in neighborhoods with high levels of poverty and crime (one requiring wire mesh for over windows for security purposes). This seemed to result from a combination of low income and full responsibility for several grandchildren.

I also had the fortune of being welcomed into a reserve school to meet with a Grandmother who is an elder there. The school was a predictable but striking mix of Euro-Canadian and First Nations' cultures. The culture and tradition of the local band was prominent with the school's exterior architecture being reminiscent of a teepee and the interior was decorated with locally crafted First Nations' artifacts. However, long cindercrete hallways of classrooms extended from the entrance and Western symbols of the winter season were displayed on bulletin boards. One bulletin board, however, was decorated with pictures of a Talking Stick and eagle feathers. The elder, with whom I

was meeting, pointed out to me that this board was the responsibility of the only First Nations' teacher in the school. In keeping with the vestiges of colonialism, the majority the school's teachers and administrators were Euro-Canadian. While the elder was quick to say that all the teachers were good and cared about the students, she also made it clear that Aboriginal teachers brought a different cultural perspective to the classroom and cultural differences between teachers and students remained evident. This woman's commitment to exploring these differences may have been what drew her to IGU and what interested her in this research project for she, like all of the participants, was indeed enthusiastic about participating in this study.

3.5   Sample

IGU has a mailing list of over a hundred women who have attended past gatherings. The group has no membership or attendance obligations and women can attend as many or as few gatherings as they wish. There were 35 Grandmothers at the autumn gathering I attended in October 1999. The theme for the gathering was "Renewal for the 21st Century." The gathering began with registration and lunch. All meals are held in the dining room and the Grandmothers sit at tables of six. Large bowls and platters of food for everyone at the table are set on the table and the Grandmothers serve themselves.

Following lunch there is the Opening Circle which begins with prayers, one prayer in Cree from an elder who is on the PWC and one in English from a Euro-Canadian PWC member. There is also a welcome, the presentation of the group guidelines and the passing of the Talking Rock with a focus on women's names, where they are from and how many children and grandchildren they have. After "Tea Time"

the large group reassembled to hear about the history of the Grandmothers, past activities, current status, and the funding situation. The group then separated into smaller groups. Since participants return to the same smaller groups throughout the gathering, Talking Rocks were passed in each group to help the Grandmothers get further acquainted.

Each group brainstormed about the phrase "I am here because..." Supper and an evening sing-along concluded the evening. The second day began with breakfast and the large group gathered for prayers and to learn a song. The group broke into the smaller groups once again to discuss "I want to change what? where? how?" Following a break, the small groups resumed to develop "Strategies for Change" and prepare a report for the larger group.

Results of the small group sessions were reported to the large group after lunch followed by the Closing Circle, prayers and a procession where the Grandmothers sang the song they had learned in the morning and marched past murals they had made about the past and future of the group. Over the two days of the gathering, I had the opportunity to meet and talk with many of the Grandmothers. My interview participants came from this group of women.

I mentioned my project in my introduction during the Circle and then had the opportunity to speak with women about it during meals and breaks. I let them know that I was a graduate student working on a study of women's intercultural friendship and that I was interested in learning from the Grandmothers. Some of the Grandmothers expressed concerns that they would not know the right things to say but I offered reassurances that there were no right or wrong answers, and since it was in their

experiences and ideas that I was interested, they were, in fact, experts. By the end of the gathering I had five volunteers and was given permission to contact members from the attendance list. The five volunteers from the gathering consisted of one Euro-Canadian woman living in Regina, two First Nations women living on different reserves, a First Nations woman living in Regina, and a Euro-Canadian woman living in a rural Saskatchewan town. Building from that base, I selected five women from the attendance list that would result in a representative sample and contacted them by telephone. Each of the five women I called agreed to participate in the study.

In total I interviewed ten Grandmothers and two coordinators, one past and one current. Of the ten Grandmothers, five were First Nations and five were Euro-Canadians. Two of the Euro-Canadian Grandmothers were immigrants to Canada, one arriving as a youth in the 1940's and the other as an adult in the 1960s. Three First Nations Grandmothers lived on reserves and two lived in Regina while four Euro-Canadian Grandmothers lived in Regina and one lived in a small rural town. The two First Nations women living in Regina moved there from reserves in order to look after their grandchildren. All of the Grandmothers I interviewed were biological grandmothers and ranged in age from 55 to 85 with an average age of 72. The number of children they had ranged from two to nine with the average number of children being five, and the number of grandchildren ranged from three to 29 for an average of 13 per Grandmother. My intention was to include a Metis woman in my sample as well but there were no Metis Grandmothers at the gathering I attended. I inquired about this apparent discrepancy between their self-description as a group of First Nations, Metis and other Canadian women and was told that "things had come up" for both the Metis

women who had pre-registered for the gathering. Other cultural issues that act to limit the involvement of Metis women in the group will be discussed later in this thesis.

3.6   Interviews and Issues

Interviews were scheduled at the participants' convenience, but around blocks of days I had set aside for travel. In order to protect confidentiality, each participant has a pseudonym that will be used throughout this thesis. In our discussions about confidentiality I asked the participants if they had a particular pseudonym they would like me to use; some did but most had me select for them. All but one of the participants agreed to having the interview tape-recorded. The participants chose the location for our interviews and all the Grandmothers but one were interviewed in their own homes. I thought the ability to meet in their home would be convenient and the familiarity of the surrounding would enhance their comfort level. However, issues of security, safety and power arose and had to be mediated.

In my proposal, I discussed the need to mediate a power differential between myself as young, white and middle-class and the Grandmothers, who are elderly, perhaps First Nations, and sometimes living in poverty. Based on feminist power conceptions, I would conceivably have more power, yet time and again in the interviews, I felt in awe of the Grandmothers' personal power and how many acted in the world to claim what they thought was rightfully theirs. Just when I was convinced that this power differential was overstated, I had a series of interviews with Grandmothers who were in difficult social situations and some with disabilities that were increasing in severity. The contrast between conceptual power differences and the variety of the Grandmothers' circumstances drew to my attention the importance of

considering power dynamics within the broader social context and categories but also as actualized in individual lived circumstances. This point was emphasized while I was trying to arrange an interview with a Grandmother named Lee. Lee presents an image of power as a dynamic and active older woman who is an avid outdoorswoman and a participant in many non-profit groups, including the Council of IGU. Because of the many people she meets in her busy life, Lee would forget who I was from one call to the next. We had arranged to meet at her house, but because she could not remember me she would become nervous about me coming over. It was clear that as an elderly woman living alone, she was susceptible to criminals seeking entrance to her home and took precautions to maintain her safety. Her apparent personal power caused me to forget that in many ways she had less social power than I did. Because I had gone through formal channels of the IGU Council, the coordinator was able to confirm my identity and reassure her of my legitimacy and her safety, enough so that my offer to meet elsewhere was deemed unnecessary and we met comfortably in her home.

I planned to obtain informed consent before each interview to further ensure the security of the participants and to be sure they understood the purpose of the study and their rights. This proved to be difficult and during some interviews, I actually did the consent form (see Appendix I) at the end. For many of the Grandmothers, especially the First Nations elders, it seemed that once they had assessed me as trustworthy and agreed to share their stories with me, they did not see a need for further assurances. All but one of the First Nations women found the formality of the consent form amusing; they would laugh or raise their eyebrows while I went through it, clearly humouring me. Humour may have masked a more serious concern as the Grandmothers had quipped at

the gathering about not wanting to sign forms. The theme of the quips was that treaties signed with the settlers were not honoured. Other Grandmothers had been thinking about my arrival and were very ready to talk. Once they started, they would not let me backtrack to the consent form. I experienced conflict with my feminist view that the participants have rights and should be aware of them, the institutional requirements for a long, formal consent and the desire to let the Grandmothers tell their story in their own way and at their own pace. Furthermore, it is not polite to interrupt your elders, even if they would have allowed it!

For those participants who did not launch immediately into their stories, the consent form was followed by an explanation of the interview format. I advised them that I was interested in mainly listening while they talked about their experiences with IGU, any friendships that may have developed there and any barriers they may have faced to the development of those friendships; they were encouraged to share any other thoughts, feelings or life experiences they felt were important. I sought permission to ask clarifying questions along the way and emphasized that they were also free to ask any questions they wished.

The interviews were open-ended; each interview, although thematically similar, differed from the others because each Grandmother approached the questions in unique ways. The First Nations elders began by telling me their ancestral background and life histories working forward to their experiences in the Grandmothers including legends and traditional teachings in their narratives. Many of the Euro-Canadian Grandmothers preferred to speak directly to the topic, answering specific and focussed questions. Most interviews, then, fell between two extremes: one that was a fluid combination of

stories, life experiences and interpretations and the other that was more dialogical, circumscribed and direct. Following each interview I made notes of my general impressions, reflections on the guiding questions and emerging patterns and connections.

For the most part, my interviews went well. The women were fascinating and eloquently revealed many aspects of friendship in the life histories they shared with me. However, I did have a particularly difficult time with one participant, Adele. Adele is an immigrant woman who came to Canada after World War II. She expressed ideas that I would characterize as racist, elitist and sexist, clearly mired in hierarchies of privilege as realized through colonialism, that made the interview painful and awkward for me. For example, she said: "I noticed that from the Indians, that those who are already mixed with white, that there is something in the DNA that is, that they are better than the other ones…They are more honest, more civilized." She then cited the example of a First Nations Grandmother she had met at gatherings who had a great-great-grandfather with the same ancestry as she did "And you know she was one of the more civilized ones?[sic]." In response to further questions about what she meant by "more civilized," Adele replied, "a little bit more like we…are you know." Adele's "we" apparently referred to those of her race, class and ethnic background. Futhermore, in discussing violence against women, Adele confessed that "sometimes when I look at the woman with the eyes of a man, I could become violent also…I would hit her in the face."

I was caught off guard by Adele's ideas and was unsure how to react, in part because of my preconception of grandmothers as caring and also because Adele had

chosen to become involved in an intercultural group that did violence prevention work. I certainly did not share her views and could not agree with them but, on the other hand, I was there to learn from her and it did not seem right to disagree. I used my full repertoire of "mmm" and "I see," asking how she was aware of her privilege or why she felt certain ways about others. I was unsure how to balance the feminist methodological concern for respect and voice with feminist principles of equality. I negotiated this tension by listening to Adele, but neither agreeing with nor encouraging her when she expressed ideas that seemed to be racist or sexist. I attempted to keep the interview more narrowly focused and brought it to an end more quickly than I would have otherwise. I remained respectful to Adele but felt I had to prioritize the principles of equality and respect for others.

The idea of confidentiality was also an issue that drew attention to inherent contradictions between methodological theory and practice. One of the elders at the gathering I attended told the group that the First Nations people build friendships through community. This was evident as I met with Grandmothers for interviews. All the First Nations Grandmothers wanted to know whom else I was seeing. They wanted to hear how the other Grandmothers were doing and wanted to send greetings through me to other members of the group. Because of the connections that have developed among the women, some of the Euro-Canadian women were also interested in who else was participating in the study. I had to tell them that I could not share this information because of the promise of confidentiality that I had made to the other participants.

Even in cases where Grandmothers did not want people to know what they said, they still did not mind people knowing that they had talked to me. In other words, for

some of the Grandmothers, confidentiality was very important; for others it was not important and what confidentiality meant to the women themselves differed for all. Again, then, tensions around the applicability of feminist methodological principles arose. These are tensions that many researchers must negotiate and the methodological literature does not adequately deal with them. Because many of the Grandmothers were proud and excited that I wanted to hear about their experiences, they told others of their involvement in the project. I therefore negotiated the tension around confidentiality by informing them that they were welcome to speak of their involvement if they wished, but I would not be letting anyone know who had participated.

Another issue that arose in the context of confidentiality related to one of the coordinator's belief that the women should have their own names attached to their stories and, in keeping with this, she asked to have her own name used rather than a pseudonym. The problem with this was that if her name was used, I could not maintain the confidentiality of the other coordinator, who, by default, would be identified. Competing interests and a wide range of participant values meant that institutionally developed methodological tools like consent forms and confidentiality ideals can have a stormy transition to the field. In spite of these methodological issues, I still learned much from the Grandmothers.

3.7   Data Analysis

Immediately upon completion of the fieldwork I began preparing for data analysis. All tape-recorded interviews were transcribed into word-processing software. This was a difficult and time consuming process, requiring eight to twenty hours to transcribe each interview. The length of the transcripts ranged from nine to thirty

single-spaced pages. The transcripts were useful in the identification of patterns and themes and supporting data; however, they were also a somewhat shallow translation of the interview experience. Much of the difficulty of transcription arose from the impossibility of capturing the full experience of each interview in written form. While I tried to include explanatory comments within the transcript to indicate things such as gestures, laughter and intonation, I found that the depth of the experience was not readily translated. Furthermore, some of the Grandmothers use sounds that have no comparable written word. One such sound was a combination of "eh?" and "uh" (ultimately included in the transcripts as *uh?*).

Another difficulty in transcription is the difference between the spoken and written word. Communicating orally involves many stops and starts, pauses for clarification, long, run-on sentences and sounds such as um, uh, and huh. Translating these oral exchanges into written texts can create the impression that both questions and responses are less intelligent and well thought out than they really are. Poland (1995) quotes Kvale describing how:

> inherent differences between the spoken tongue and the written word mean that transcripts of verbal conversations seem impoverished in comparison with the well-crafted written prose (or formal speeches) to which many of us are accustomed, portraying the participants as somewhat incoherent and inarticulate. Ironically, this impression may be reinforced by an insistence on verbatim transcription in which all pauses, broken sentences, interruptions, and other aspects of the 'messiness' of casual conversations are faithfully reproduced (p. 292).

This difference between the oral and the written did not go unnoticed by the Grandmothers who chose to the review their transcripts. In spite of my reassurances before transcript review that how we talk is different than how we write, the majority of changes or additions had to do with the removal of stuttering starts and interjections

such as "um" and "er" and finishing incomplete thoughts. Understandably, participants wanted to appear coherent and were concerned about how their words would sound if translated to the page verbatim from oral conversation. I had also hoped transcript quality would be enhanced by meeting with each participant a second time to go over the transcripts and preliminary conclusions, but most felt that this was an unnecessary step given that we had recorded our meeting.

Perhaps more significantly, working with an intercultural group of women raises the issue of language. Wolfart (1998) wrote of the difficulty of language in cross-cultural research:

> Even those of us who are fluent in a second language typically rely on our first to talk about our memories and about what is most important to us; when one tries to deal with such things in another language, it is easy for fine distinctions to be glossed over, nuances and emphases to be lost and the right word to remain elusive (p. 17).

I speak and understand only English. The women in IGU all speak English, however, it was not the first language for some of the participants. While the women were willing to communicate with me in English, I am aware of the potential for a loss of detail and richness in the accounts as a result. Some of the First Nations Grandmothers shared elements of their stories in Cree or Saulteaux and then translated for me. Because they translated the comments I indicated in the transcript that a comment was made and noted the language of the comment and then typed in full only the English translation. I am sure that the full power of the quote in the original language did not remain in translation. In spite of these difficulties, transcripts proved to be useful in the analysis of data.

The interview transcripts were reviewed and analyzed using a number of aids including theme and pattern identification as well as coding. I used codes as a form of

"indexing device" to identify "the presence of a variable" (Bernard, 1994, pp. 193-194). Once the existence of the variable was identified, the content of the selection was evaluated (Bernard, 1994, p. 193). Coding served as "an act of data reduction – thinking about it, extracting meaning from it, developing hypotheses about the people described in it" (Bernard, 1994, p. 394) and, also as "data complication...used to expand, transform, and reconceptualize data, opening up more diverse analytical possibilities" (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 29). Extensive review of the data and coding allowed for "noting patterns, [and] themes...which pull together many separate pieces of data" (Huberman & Miles, 1994, pp. 245-246). There was a constant interplay between existing literature, my preliminary ideas and the research data.

An expanded view as a result of coding and data analysis was further enhanced by the participative design of the research. As part of my data analysis and a reflection of my commitment to participatory research, I met with the PWC to discuss my findings and preliminary theories. The Council included interview participants as well as members who were not part of my sample, including a Metis woman. All the PWC members were very interested in the findings and contributed to my theorizing by providing their own interpretation of stories and incidents, further enhancing the quality of my data.

Once interview segments were identified with themes and patterns they were cut from transcript copies and filed in colour-coded file folders. While a helpful organizational tool, categorization was often a challenge with much data relevant to several sections. To ensure that data was available across categories, I coded each card

with multiple categories and filed them first in the earliest section and moved them to the next relevant section as work was being completed.

3.8   Summary

This chapter discussed the research methods employed to achieve the research goals of this project including a description of feminist and qualitative methodological issues such as participation and reciprocity. IGU and their practices were described, as were the research setting, the interviews and related issues. Contradictions between research ideals, such as consent and confidentiality, and their application in the field arose and had to be negotiated yet the methodological literature failed to address such complications. Working with IGU provided an opportunity to explore intercultural friendships among women in a unique way. Through their stories and narratives, the Grandmothers provided insights into their friendships, including social factors that facilitate and hinder their development and continuance. These insights will be further explored through a discussion of the dimensions of friendship and the interrelationship of friendships and identity. Dimensions of friendship are used to provide an organizational basis with which to analyze the Grandmothers' experiences of intercultural friendship and how such relationships interface with social activism. Furthermore, the diverse nature of the group allows for analysis of identity perspectives as influenced by and influencing friendships.

Chapter 4

Dimensions of Friendship

4.1   Overview

Following other researchers in the field, I initially intended to develop a definition of friendship that both reflected the issues raised by my research participants and extended beyond this sample to other women. In true postmodern form, I discovered that any definition necessarily left out important elements, obscured nuances and individual experiences; in sum, it lead to a description that seemed an inadequate reflection of friendship's complexity and diversity. As a result, I moved away from defining friendship and looked at a variety of friendship dimensions. While still requiring the use of arbitrary categories that cannot fully reflect the realities of something as intangible as friendship, employing the concept of "dimensions" did allow for a representation of friendships as fluid and multidimensional. The dimensions of friendship provided an organizational framework for the analysis of how the women in my study experience and talk about their friendships, how factors such as race, cultural heritage and age influence the friendships and related engagements in social action. This investigation into social factors that facilitate or limit women's ability to develop friendships with other women and perceived opportunities for social action are discussed in relation to the characteristics or dimensions of friendships among women.

The particular dimensions of friendship explored in this study are 1) choice, 2) humour, 3) support, 4) power and economics, equity and respect, 5) agency and activism, 6) conflict and jealousy, 7) love and affection. This list is not exhaustive and

as is the case with friendships, areas overlap and interplay in ways that cannot be fully translated to print. Furthermore, some areas discussed within a dimension, such as trust, could have been considered a dimension on its own. The concept of dimensions is merely to ease discussion and does not imply a strict, concrete form for friendships. Moreover, friendships are not homogeneous; they differ across time, space and place from friendship to friendship and within the same friendship over time. In this study, I critically examine the various dimensions of friendship that are operationalized in research and I juxtapose those against women's narratives of friendship that have been recorded through the course of my interview-based study with members of the IGU, thereby examining social factors that influence friendships among women. I begin, then, by examining the foundational literature in the field and then engage with this body of work as I explore the dimensions of the Grandmothers' friendships.

4.2   Literature Review of Friendship among Women

Literature on women's friendships is surprisingly limited in its availability. Friendship literature often excludes women from its analysis and focuses on friendship formation and processes rather than its effects. Some researchers have begun to conduct feminist analyses of female friendship relationships; although research in the area is not abundant, existing sources and research can serve as a valuable starting point for further study.

Friendships are complex interpersonal relationships. The term "friendship" is difficult to define as it is applied to a number of different relationships that vary in degree, intensity and longevity. The complexity of friendships is revealed in the use of descriptors such as "ambiguous," "fluid" (Hunt, 1991, p. 107) and "contradictory"

(Badhwar, 1993, p. 7). Any closed definition may oversimplify friendship relationships and result in the exclusion of important aspects. While a working definition of friendship was an important part of framing my research, the need to allow for the complexity and diversity of friendship as it varies from woman to woman over time resulted in the use of friendship dimensions.

Researchers use a variety of traits to characterize and describe friendships. There is a tendency for the research to either idealize or demonize women's friendships based on traditional stereotypes of women's friendships. I have noticed two prevailing and contradictory stereotypical images of women's friendships in Western culture. The first is that of women unable to get along, an image of catfights (Fillion, 1996). The second is of women sitting and talking over coffee or lunch, an image of girlfriends (Berry & Traeder, 1995). Perhaps this apparent contradiction arises because of the space in which the women's relationships occur. Women visiting together in private, domestic space can be represented as friends because their relationship maintains the public/private, masculine/feminine division of space. The protection of this division requires women in public, masculinized space to be portrayed as enemies, rather than allies, in order to eliminate the risk women acting together can pose to traditional patriarchal hierarchies (Block & Greenberg, 1985; Faderman, 1998; Raymond, 1986; Rothman, 1978).

An idealized version of women's friendship is often based on essentialist notions that common biological functions or experiences create a "natural" bond among women. The common experience of living in a woman's body "unites women in relationships free of the "legal and social barriers confronting them in almost all other

relationships" (Block & Greenberg 1985, p. 32). Such essentialist characterizations oversimplify women's friendship relationships by ignoring the influence and complex interplay of social factors such as class, race and age. Similarly, demonizing women's friendships obscures their complexity. In depicting women as villains who are unable to develop friendships, Fillion (1996), with her litany of women mistreating women, ignored societal factors that keep women apart and renders the positive side of women's friendships invisible. Recognition of the complexity of women's friendships is preferable to either of these reductionist conceptualizations.

Mary Hunt's (1991) book title, *Fierce Tenderness,* was a conscious attempt to recognize the contradictory nature of women's friendships (p. 25). Women's friendships are both fierce and tender with exquisite moments of pleasure, pain, caring and sharing. Janice Raymond (1986) used the word "passion" in her book title, *A Passion for Friends*, implying – as the word "fierce" does - intensity far beyond affection at the same time as implying disappointment and anger. One of the central methodological questions to be addressed, then, is how can this intensity be communicated in a balanced way that reflects women's lived experiences? And, taking it one step further, should this balance be reflected in a definition? There is a tendency to exclude the negative from the characteristics of friendship so that while "friendship has contradictory tendencies the psychological pitfalls of friendship cannot be read into its essential nature" (Badhwar, 1993, p. 7). Even researchers such as Hunt and Raymond, who take a balanced approach to friendship, do not include negative elements such as conflict or jealousy as part of the definition of friendship.

While I sought a reflection of friendship's fluidity rather than an "essential nature," in the early stages of this study I followed the approach of considering the positive elements as the definitional elements and the negative elements as an inevitable, but not defining, feature of friendship. It seemed it was the positive features that resulted in a relationship being defined as a friendship rather than the negative. On the other hand, I became concerned that this limited my ability to present a balanced and complete view of friendships. This furthered my resolve to explore the dimensions of friendship in ways that included the seemingly inevitable negative elements.

A number of positive friendship characteristics are cited in the literature. While some researchers include relationships without affection in the friendship category (Reisman, 1979; Todd, 1980), most include some level of love or affection as a descriptive or defining feature of friendship (Badhwar, 1993; Hunt, 1991; Roberto; 1996; Stern-Gillett, 1995). The existence of affection seems be an important part of a friendship relationship, without which a relationship can still exist, but not a relationship that I would classify as a friendship. Women's friendships are also characterized by the social support they offer (Bernikow, 1980; Roberto, 1996; Todd, 1980), by reciprocity (Badhwar, 1993; Duck, 1991; Hartup, 1993; Reisman, 1979; Stern-Gillet, 1995) and by choice.

While Hartup (1993) found that "friendships derive only partly from choice" (p. 14), researchers such as Badhwar (1993), Hunt (1991), and Raymond (1986) emphasize the importance of choosing to be friends. In fact, Duck (1991) believed that friendship is more than a feeling; it is a way of acting and behaving that requires continuing choice (p. 87). Agency is often considered either a precondition (Block & Greenberg, 1985;

Stern-Gillet, 1995) or a result of women's friendship (Bernikow, 1980; Hunt, 1991).

However, I agree with Raymond (1986) who considers agency to be both. Women come to friendships with different levels of agency and then friendship relationships enhance their ability to make choices and to take responsibility for their lives. Underpinning many of these elements is the idea of commitment. Friends must remain committed to continuing to act as a friend in order for the relationship to exist. In order to preserve the fluidity and complexity of women's friendship, this study considers friendship between women a relationship with many dimensions including, but not limited to, choice, humour, support, power, equity and respect, agency, activism, conflict, jealousy, love and affection, and which is influenced by societal, cultural and economic factors.

There is an established body of research that examines friendship formation and factors that facilitate friendship development. This study contributes to this literature by considering how social factors such as gender, race, age, culture, physical ability, class and sexual orientation act to limit friendship among women who do not share similar cultural backgrounds. Within the established literature, homophily or "the tendency of people to be friends with similar others" (Robinson, 1996, p. 98) is quite central to theories of friendship formation. Homophily is referred to in research in different ways: as "common ground" among women (Block & Greenberg, 1985), as "similar demographic backgrounds" among adolescents (Hartup, 1993), and "common bonds" among elderly women (Perkinson & Rockemann, 1996). Roberto (1996) found that homophily also applies to older women in that the women they name as close friends "are of approximately the same age and socioeconomic status, have the same

racial/ethnic background, and live within the same geographic location" (p. 56). There are conflicting theories about why homophily is so central and why people seem to be friends with similar others. One theory suggests that individuals seek friends who confirm their perceived identity (Robinson, 1996) while a second theory promotes the idea that "societal forces frequently restrict friendship opportunities to individuals who resemble one another" (Hartup, 1993, p. 14).

Once individuals meet, researchers list different factors beyond commonalties that facilitate friendship. Factors such as mutual respect, trust, self-disclosure and intimacy (Block & Greenberg 1985, pp. 63-77) are important, and these are often reflected in reciprocal exchanges and the sharing of thoughts and feelings (Hartup 1993). Shared experiences and confidences, requests for and exchanging favours, sharing meals, and similar marital status are major friendship criteria for elderly women (Perkinson & Rockemann, 1996). In addition, assistance, shared activities and self-disclosure play a major role in friendship formation for older women (Roberto, 1996).

To reflect the actions required to start and retain friendship, Steven Duck (1991) created a verb, "relationshipping," to refer to accomplishments including recognizing opportunities for friendship, having strategies for attracting friends, understanding how relationships grow and develop and knowing how to "maintain and repair relationships" (p. 27). Friendships are complex entities that require action on the part of the friends: "relationships do not just happen; they have to be made – made to start, made to work, made to develop, kept in good working order and preserved from going sour" (Duck, 1991, p. 3). This view implies that barriers to friendship exist and must be overcome in order for friendships to develop and continue, a concept usefully applied to the

consideration of the social factors that limit women's abilities to develop friendships. One such barrier is a historical conceptualization of friendship as a relationship among men.

Friendship has traditionally been constructed as a masculine domain, one reserved for men. In Western scholarship, the consideration of friendship as reserved for men can be traced back to Aristotelian philosophy, which stressed the biological and fixed nature of all species, including human females. In Aristotle's opinion, women's fixed and inferior nature made them unable to achieve full humanity and, therefore, full friendships. Aristotle (1975) held friendship in high esteem and believed "friendship is a virtue or something with virtue, and besides, it is most necessary to life" (p. 140). However, this friendship was only open to two good men of equal standing. Women were deemed unable to form virtuous friendships, and friendships among women were not considered.

The negation and devaluation of women's friendships continues to impact the ability of women to form friendships today. It is difficult to prioritize and create time to nurture a relationship that is seen as unimportant. The valued relationship for women becomes their relationship with men, and women's affections and energies are redirected. Thus, friendship among women has been socially devalued; the "tradition of female friendship…has been distorted, dismantled, destroyed" (Raymond, 1986, p. 4). Furthermore, Western culture expects women's primary relationship to focus on and be structured around men. This "hetero-reality" creates a primary obstacle to the development of women's friendships (Raymond, 1986, pp. 3-4), and in combination with a lost tradition of female friendship, hetero-reality results in the stunting of

women's potential to achieve friendship (Raymond, 1986, p. 6). Women seeking

friendship with other women can, therefore, meet with "unfulfilled expectations,

betrayal, lack of real caring and a wall of insurmountable difference" (Raymond, 1986,

p.7). Constructions of friendship as masculine, of women as focused on their male

partners and other stereotypical of sex differences lead to perceived differences in the

friendship relationships of men and women.

Possible differences between the friendships of women and men are explored by

Fehr (1996) who concluded, "women and men appear to experience friendship

differently. From childhood on, women like talking with friends, particularly about

feelings and relationships, whereas men like to do things together" (p. 153). However,

she also concluded that there are many contradictions in the existing literature that point

to alternative interpretations of how much talking and activity both sexes actually

engage in versus what is perceived. For example, women's friendships are often

characterized by researchers as more intimate than men's are because women are found

to spend more time talking. However, a study by Davidson and Duberman (1982)

however found that women and men did not differ in the amount of talk that was

nonintimate (cited in Fehr, 1986, p. 123). Other researchers have found that "men talk

more than we give them credit for" and women engage in more activities than first

thought (Walker, 1994, cited in Fehr, 1986, p. 116). Fehr identifies these contradictions

without addressing the gendered notions within which they were constituted.

Age is another factor that can facilitate or potentially detract from the

development and maintenance of friendships. Elderly women were often supported by

their friendships, particularly as they reviewed their lives in preparation for death (Fehr,

1996, p. 121). This statement supports the findings of Pat O'Connor (1992) who saw friendship as particularly important to elderly women given "their marginal status within society and their closeness to sickness and death" (p. 137). Roberto (1996) also found that "for older women, friendships provide the opportunity for the exchange of intimacy, emotional support and assistance" (p. 56). It appears elderly women may be assisted through life transition by their friendships. However, their age may also result in differing influences from social factors. Roberto and Scott found that distance and a lack of programming in rural areas might negatively influence social interaction among older women (in Roberto, 1996, p. 57). This study examines how age interacts with other social factors to influence the friendships of older women. If friendships help older women navigate their individual life transitions; does this then carry over into a perceived ability to engage in social action? The notion of personal change leading to social action appears in examples of feminist research on women's friendships.

Janice Raymond (1986) explored the potential for social action resulting from women's friendships by defining friends as women who affect women by bringing about changes in the way women live. She defined the ability to influence women's lives through friendship as "Gyn/affection," which occurs when women affect, move stir and arouse each other to full power" (Raymond, 1986, p. 9). Women who can move beyond societal factors to develop friendships open themselves up to acting in the world as their own persons. The creation of power in friendship was also an important part of a model of female friendship developed by Mary Hunt. One of the main elements in Hunt's (1991) friendship model was power, which she defined as "the ability to make choices for ourselves, for our dependent children, and with our

community" (p. 101). The ability to make choices and act on those choices is at the heart of social activism.

While considering only men in his philosophies, Aristotle (1975) believed that "friendship seems to hold a state together," (p. 140) albeit a state controlled by members of only one race, class and gender. The power of friendship to maintain or intervene in state and social structures exists but is not always acknowledged where women are concerned. Nonetheless, many patriarchal norms that limit women's access to each other and encourage primary attentions to male partners and families are based on the understanding that women coming together can destabilize the status quo (Block & Greenberg, 1985; Faderman, 1998; Raymond, 1986).

Historically, women have come together to develop friendships and engage in social change. The North American Club movements of the late nineteenth century are examples of women developing friendships as they work together to address issues of inequality. White middle-class women gathered to "teach and be taught, a mutual improvement society, which should educate them and lead them out into better hopes, nobler aspirations and larger life" (Rothman, 1979, p. 65). The white Club movement at this time, unfortunately, excluded women of colour and carried out an elitist program attempting to force their own white middle-class values upon other women. During the same period women of colour were also engaged in a Club movement; this movement arose in response to lynchings and other forms of racism and resulted in both social activism and the development of long-lasting friendships among women (Davis, 1981). Yet, with the exemption of a few examples noted for their rarity, in both these examples, the primary friendships were among women of the same race and class.

Therefore, while the potential for friendships among women to facilitate overcoming

societal hierarchies exists, there is little evidence to indicate that it actually does.

A number of researchers comment on the lack of research related to women's

friendship relationships and call for further study (Hunt, 1991; O'Connor, 1992;

Raymond, 1986; Roberto, 1996). Researchers also comment on the recent development

of research into friendships in general and the need for further study of friendship's

interactions with various elements in our lives (Fehr, 1996; Duck, 1991). This research

expands the field of study to include a consideration of the social factors that hinder or

facilitate the development of inter-cultural friendships among aging women, particularly

exploring how barriers to inter-cultural friendships are first created and then overcome

in ways that allow for increased opportunities for social action.

4.3   Choice

To what extent are friendships chosen? Echoing other researchers, Willard

Hartup (1993) found that "societal forces frequently restrict friendship opportunities to

individuals who resemble one another...friendships derive only partly from choice" (p.

14). Other researchers, however, place a greater emphasis on choice. For example,

returning to Mary Hunt (1991), friendship was described as a way for "good people to

choose to live in right relation" (p. 4). Similarly, Neera Badhwar (1993) claimed that

friendship goes beyond attraction or proximity, it "is a practical and emotional

relationship that arises from and is sustained by, choice" (p. 5). Friendships can seem to

arise by chance rather than choice but what begins as a chance meeting will only

become friendship through choice. One of the participants, Beatrice, describes her

joining IGU as "accidental." "I was in PCTC for something else and there was an

evening you know when…she [Lee] said, 'Why don't you come with me?' And that's how I got into the Grandmothers and since then I've always gone." Beatrice had to choose to accept Lee's invitation and then had to choose to continue attending gatherings. A combination of chance and choice lead to Beatrice starting with IGU, but only through choice could friendships be developed and maintained.

Friendships begin in a variety of ways and the Grandmothers had different ideas about how friendships start. Veronica, an urban First Nations woman, had well defined steps that she relayed to me about starting a new friendship, in this case, with a man. First, they met and then "you know their face." Names may or may not have been exchanged. At the second meeting, they exchanged names and numbers. At the third meeting they danced twice and by the fourth meeting, they spent more time alone and she met some of his family. Although, this is in the context of male/female friendship, the idea of knowing faces was a recurring comment among the First Nations women with regards to how they began to develop friendships.

Grandmothers also had different levels of proactivity with regards to beginning friendships. Ursula, a First Nations woman living in Regina, commented on how much she appreciated others choosing to come forward and speaking to her.

> Well, as soon as you step into a strange place like that, they say hello to you, shake hands with you and one day they just start talking to you; 'It's nice to meet you,' and all that. From there we start talking. We sit down and talk. Talk about where we come from.

She agreed it was important that someone take the first step to say hello and then emphasized that the friendship begins because "we listen to one another. What we want to say, like." Another First Nations Grandmother, Wilma, describes herself as friendly with all kinds of people, but this was not always the case. She told me about moving to

49

the reserve after her marriage and knowing no one. She chose to go out and make friends.

> I know some other people here that can just, you know, they're friendly. But when I first came here I had to go out and make friends. Because I didn't know no one here. And that was hard. Like coming from a different reserve ...So I had to do that and I thought to myself, 'If they're not going to come to me then I'll have to go to them.' So that's what I done. And after they found out who I was, well, it was different, you know.

While motivating forces vary, in Wilma's case, friendships start because she chooses to take the initiative and speak with people, letting them know who she is. Neither Wilma nor Ursula claim it is better to be the instigator or the recipient of the friendship overtures. However, the comments of both indicate that the choice to interact and develop a friendship is an important one. Even though Ursula is not comfortable taking the lead as Wilma does, she chooses to speak when approached. Therefore, while Wilma characterizes her approach as friendly, Ursula, as well, is friendly when she chooses to share and listen when someone new has taken the first step to approach her.

It is only once a friendship has been chosen that the obligations and benefits of friendship arise. Moreover, the power to choose a friend is often included as one of friendship's strengths, especially for women who may have been denied the power of choice living under patriarchy.

> In a society where women are routinely restricted in so many ways, friendship among women is one of the few 'equal opportunities.' It is a relationship women choose, with people they choose, and within the boundaries they choose" (Block & Greenberg, 1985, p. 32).

At the same time, in a contradictory fashion, Block and Greenberg (1985) emphasized that women's nature and shared physical experiences, such as "menstruation, fertility and birth," create a natural bond and commonality (pp. 14,32). This essentialist view

negates choice while at the same time exalting it. Block and Greenberg (1985) continued to overestimate women's ability to choose when they went onto say that there are virtually no social barriers to women's friendships (p. 32). Clearly, more than a biological connection is required to create friendships and social and other factors can intervene to limit women's choice of friends.

Several of the Grandmothers spoke of how personal responsibilities and a lack of time and transportation acted to limited their friendship choices. Ursula told me that she could only attend gatherings on weekends: "But during the week, from Mondays to Fridays, well I got school kids so I can't go." Jean, a Euro-Canadian woman living in Regina, has a physical disability that precludes her from driving and she fears travelling the icy sidewalks during winter. Unless someone else offers Jean a ride, these factors keep her close to home and limit her opportunities to interact with other women, hindering the development of friendships. Grandmothers often expressed regret that they had been unable to act on ideas and hopes they had for furthering friendships or developing new relationships as a result of a lack of time. Granted, everyone has twenty-four hours a day that we choose to allocate as we see fit, but choices can feel restricted when we have competing demands for that time.

That said, Janice Raymond (1986) believed friendship is a "freely chosen bond" and women, in choosing friendships, "claim social and political status for their Selves and others like their Selves" (p. 9). Declaring another woman as friend or being seen with her in public is likened to a political act. Eleanor, a Euro-Canadian woman living in a rural community, is relatively new to the community but has noticed that groups of white people travel together and groups of Aboriginal people travel together without

acknowledging one another. She emphasized to me the importance of choosing to

acknowledge Aboriginal women she knew from IGU when she met them downtown.

> When I'd see them on the street, you know, I'd always make
> acknowledgement and they would all look a little embarrassed but they don't
> anymore, they look friendly…They seem to feel freer to say hello. And I even
> had one come in here [her home] and spend a morning with me, had tea and
> gabbed and, yeah.

She feels that there is special meaning attached to her choice to acknowledge across

community boundaries of race that is not there when she says hello to another white

person. She has also chosen to attend First Nations events and to invite First Nations

women to her home. She describes her community as segregated and believes her

choice to reach across racial boundaries demonstrates her friendship with the First

Nations women.

The power of choosing friendship, especially in a public arena, was further

illustrated to me in a story told by one of the coordinators.

> This is a story, this is a, an incredible story that should be told as much as
> possible. Um, I don't know that this would be in the context of friendship, but
> certainly in the context of courage and commitment and uh! I don't know what
> to say about it. I'll tell you the story. [pause] …

> Pamela George, was murdered…Eventually the two men who killed her went
> on trial, and when her trial, when Pamela George's trial came up which was
> two years after the incident, uh, three or four of the Regina Grandmothers, and
> that would mean at least three of them would be white, went to the courthouse
> and sat with Anna George…to demonstrate their support to a mother who had
> lost her daughter.

> They didn't know this woman, but they did that out of many motivations, but
> certainly one of the motivations was because the media kept flaunting, naming
> this woman as a prostitute. And they said, "This woman who was killed was
> a daughter and a mother. And she has a mother who is in court, you know,
> grieving and calling for justice for this daughter. So they went there to stay
> with her! To demonstrate their commitment to human life and one of the most
> amazing things about it was that one of the Grandmothers who went to sit was
> a good friend of one of the grandfathers of one of the young men who was

alleged to be, and then convicted, so <u>those</u>, uh, powerful acts, I call them "Bearing Witness Acts" you know, they are certainly powerful acts of human solidarity…

Crossing boundaries, <u>Crossing boundaries</u>, [then very quickly] crossing boundaries, crossing boundaries, crossing boundaries!

This story gave me goose bumps and moved me almost to tears. The coordinator thought this story might be more about courage, commitment and solidarity rather than friendship but to me it seems a graphic illustration of the power of friendship and what can be done when friendship provides the courage to cross boundaries. Perhaps "courage, commitment and solidarity" is what friendship is, in fact, about. The Grandmothers drew on their collective identity as grandmothers and their friendship to choose to offer friendship and support to a woman who was, at that point, a stranger. Yet strength drawn from their intercultural friendships at IGU provided courage and a bridge over traditional separations. There is no way to tell the impact of the Grandmothers' support on the outcome of the trial, but the choice to act and to demonstrate friendship across hierarchical social divisions is significant.

It is important to note that the dimension of choice is extended beyond the initial decision to make friends. Friendship must be maintained by a choice to continue to act as a friend. One of the coordinators, Sue, believes that "commitment, telling the truth as much as possible, and respect" are the important elements of friendship. She summarizes these as a "commitment to…well-being. So that you hang-in with one another, you don't gossip or talk around the edges." I would argue that this is another way of emphasizing and describing choice. Friends must demonstrate commitment by continuing to choose to act as a friend. They can do this by choosing actions like telling

the truth and "hanging in." Sentiments like this coordinator's speak to the agency of

women who choose, act and commit to themselves, to each other and to their friendship.

Choices, and one's ability to choose certain options, are always circumscribed

by individual situations such as Jean's disability and by societal factors that make it

difficult for aging women to find a place for friendship in an ageist culture. Some Euro-

Canadian Grandmothers in a small group session I attended at the gathering complained

that they wanted to do something active for their communities but seniors' centres often

organized activities stereotypically associated with the elderly such as playing cards or

bingo. While acknowledging that some of their contemporaries enjoy these activities,

the Grandmothers felt that their preference for action kept them from choosing friends

at seniors' centres and kept members of seniors' centres from joining IGU, thus limiting

the possibility of friendship. This discussion took place in a group in which most of the

Aboriginal Grandmothers had gone to play bingo the previous evening rather than stay

for the sing-along. The Euro-Canadian Grandmothers, particularly Lee, emphasized

that there was nothing wrong with bingo or cards per se but that it should not be such a

preoccupation that other activities, like being involved in organizations trying to make a

difference, should suffer. In sum, limited activity offerings and resources based on

stereotypical ideas of older women can limit their ability to come together and choose

friendship in ways that are meaningful to them.

4.4   Humour

Humour is one of many elements of communication among people. I knew all

of my interviews included laughter, but it wasn't until I transcribed them that I realized

how much and how often participants referred to humour and fun as reasons for

friendship and involvement in IGU. There are several theoretical views on humour, most masculine in focus. Given the focus of this study, I will briefly discuss theoretical considerations regarding humour as a means of moving beyond boundaries and enhancing relationships among women.

It has been theorized that ethnic jokes reveal areas of moral ambiguity and ambivalence that provide valuable information about social changes (Davies, 1990, p. 322). There is a strong connection between jokes and ideologies about how the world is and ought to be (Davies, 1990, p. 319). Shared ideological beliefs and areas of change and ambiguity combine to help the joke-teller confirm his or her values through humour. Changing social structures can be negotiated and explored within the safety of humour. An emphasis on social structures also characterizes the humour theories of Marx who believed that comedy was the final stage of "a world-historical form...so that mankind will separate itself happily from its past" (cited in Petr, 1985, p. 57). Petr worked from the assumptions that humour is based in a historical context and is connected to class and socio-economic factors. The ability to see humour in past events allows us to move beyond a historical timeframe or ideology. Clearly, humour would be a useful tool in an intercultural group such as the Grandmothers, which is attempting to build relationships across societal categories between groups that have historically been seen as in opposition.

The Grandmothers used fun and humour to challenge existing conceptions about racial segregation in a non-threatening way when they participated in the annual Treaty 4 celebrations in Fort Qu'Appelle. "We placed ourselves as women who had a good time together." One year they rode in the parade in a red 1969 Cutlass convertible.

And we had a blast! We absolutely had a blast! I mean here these women with bad knees and bad hips, crawling on the back of the, you know, they wanted to sit on the back seats so that they could really be seen! (laughter) And then when it was all over, like we had them just stuffed in there! Uh, when it was all over they said, 'Well, the parade might be over but we're not finished yet! Drive us around town!'

So, you know, I think those kind of things were like, <u>absolutely</u> brilliant! Wonderful! Such fun. And to, uh, to be seen, you know, to place ourselves, to be seen to be having fun together [emphasis in original].

The Grandmothers used play and humour to demonstrate to the broader community that women from different cultures can not only work together, but have a lot of fun together. Furthermore, the women demonstrated that older women also have fun and might even be perceived as a "bit wild," riding on the back seat of an open convertible. Waving from a convertible is also reminiscent of beauty queens who often participated in parades and works to subvert the youth oriented beauty culture. Their actions and the humour they see in them call into question the structures in the community that keep people separated and perhaps limited by stereotypes about age.

Lee and Katie used humour to recognize and move beyond an issue of cultural stereotypes. Early in the life of the group, the PWC was invited to the cabin of one of the members to work on the group logo. While there, Lee and another Grandmother (who was not an interview participant) took Katie, a Plains Cree woman, canoeing. Lee is a Euro-Canadian woman who lives in Regina and is an avid outdoorswoman with a lot of experience around water. Both Lee and Katie recount the story with fondness and with a sense of humour that reflects how they were and are able to communicate how they felt about the adventure:

Katie: I did go in the canoe. They took me for…a canoe ride. It was good. I was scared. I was frightened about the water because I've never been in water

like that. But, uh, when she was on the shore, when she went deeper that canoe just went fast and it was very, I enjoyed it very much.

Lee: I, I, I received quite a shock, and its my own fault. But we took them out canoeing. And, some of the Abs [sic] were just hanging on like this [clenches her hands to the side] and I presumed that everyone who's, ah, had that background [Aboriginal] could paddle and they turned to me and said, 'Look, we live on the prairies! There's no water around here!'...Well sure! I had the stereotype right there!

Lee, actively working in a group to end stereotypes, brought into the group a Western cultural stereotype of all Natives as canoeists and never bothered to ask the Aboriginal women if they even liked canoeing; in other words, she assumed that they were all experienced paddlers! Katie, after over 80 years living in the land-locked prairies, was too polite to decline the offer of a canoe ride and enjoyed herself in spite of her very real fears. Humour provided a mechanism for Katie to draw Lee's attention to her stereotype. Framing this as a humorous anecdote allows the group to keep it in their collective memory where it acts as a reminder of the need to be diligent about stereotypical views.

Such a use of humour is supported by Linda Walsh Jenkins who describes comedy as a female form: "ancient, tribal, used to celebrate family bondings like marriage...always moving dramatically towards relational conclusions in which people are united and conflict is dissipated" (cited in Merrill: 1988, p. 272). Naranjo-Huebl (1995) found women use humour as a "nonalienating, nonviolent, strategic means of expressing anger and frustration over societal injustice and oppression" while maintaining connections (n.p.). Clearly, Katie and Lee used humour both to draw attention to the situation they found themselves in and to deepen their relationship. Unlike types of humour that disparage, women's humour tries to balance maintaining

relationships with changing the status quo. While there is no more a universal women's humour than a universal woman, many women prefer humour that pokes fun at themselves or their situations and prefer stories to jokes. Often, researchers characterize such humour as self-deprecating, but it can actually be affirming by reclaiming negative connotations from dominant culture and turning them into strengths. I always feel that laughing at myself acts to reclaim my agency in a situation where I might otherwise feel embarrassed. Lee used this approach to move beyond her chagrin about the canoe incident while acknowledging that she had made an error.

Humour is important to Lee. She told me that it was an important part of her family life and is now an important part of her friendships, including those with the Grandmothers. However, she emphasizes the importance of directing that humour at yourself and not others: "As long as you're laughing at yourself. To laugh at somebody else, especially somebody who's sort of fumbled, whether it's been in speech or step or something. No, I don't think we laugh at, we laugh with [emphasis in original]." Lee goes even further, claiming that liking to laugh is a commonality that bonds her to her First Nations friends since she sees a "fantastic sense of humour" in many of the Aboriginal women she meets. Wilma, a First Nations woman, also claimed that humour was important to many First Nations people: "Tease, yeah. 'Cause you'll find that, uh? Lots of them here [on the reserve] tease. They still have that too. Lots of them, and you'll see men like, teasing one another. It's always been like that, you know." The use of humour, especially teasing, can act as a means of communicating advice about what constitutes acceptable behaviour or group norms. Sharing laughter and understanding the underlying basis of a joke or humour "creates in-groups and out-

groups" (Finney cited in Downe, 1999, p. 72). Many of the Grandmothers spoke of how much they enjoyed sharing, both telling and hearing, humorous stories about grandchildren and the closeness that developed from identifying with and laughing about experiences.

The Grandmothers used humour to help me feel at ease with and part of the group during my fieldwork at the gathering. At the final meal together, the coordinator asked me if I would draw a name for the final door prize. To my chagrin, I drew my own name, and in my embarrassment, blushed. I said to my dining companions, "Oh, I'm turning all red!" to which one of the Aboriginal Grandmothers replied, "Great, now you can apply for a treaty card and be one of us!" Everyone laughed and nodded and word of the exchange spread from table to table with everyone laughing and nodding their head. The witticism and accompanying laughter brought me into the group at the same time as it drew attention to constructions of race, legal symbols of identity, a recent surge of people claiming treaty status to secure treaty rights as well as white appropriation of elements of Aboriginal identity. Nuances in comments made laughingly following the exchange pointed indirectly to these issues and could only be recognized by those familiar with them. Humour helps to build and even change the Grandmothers' ideas about the world and their place in it while deepening their friendship bonds.

4.5. Support

"Throughout adulthood, women turn to their close friends for personal, emotional, and affective support" (Roberto, 1996, p. 55). Use of the word "support" attempts to distill many friendship functions into one category. Clearly, the friendship

characteristics detailed in providing "personal, emotional, and affective support" are vast and as a result, this discussion of support will encompass a number of areas of friendship that very well could have been considered dimensions in their own right. Researchers tend to agree that women appreciate support from their friends and provide support to their friends. The explanations for this vary. In one of the many incarnations of the nature versus nurture debate, many equate support with nurturing and attribute its importance in women's friendships to either an essential nature of women (Block & Greenberg, 1985) or the socialization process (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1988). The interplay of biology and socialization is complex and beyond the scope of this project. Without entering into the debate about causation, the focus of this section is the manifestation of support in the friendship relationships of the Grandmothers.

Related to support is the issue of reciprocity. In friendship literature, reciprocity indicates an equal exchange of benefits between friends. Many definitions of friendships refer to the importance of a reciprocal arrangement (Duck, 1991; Reisman, 1979; Roberto, 1996; Stern-Gillet, 1995). Neera Badhwar (1993), for example, stated that friendships are relationships of "mutual and reciprocal goodwill, trust, respect, and love or affection" (p. 3) and Janice Raymond (1986) similarly noted that friendship "involves certain reciprocal assurances based on honor, loyalty and affection" that results in the individuals expecting mutuality or reciprocity (p. 9). Underlying the emphasis on reciprocity is the belief that, without it, one party in the relationship is taking advantage of the other and a true friendship does not exist.

When I was in high school we used to joke about relationships like this by saying "I give, give, give, and they take, take, take" while slapping the back of our

hand into the other palm for emphasis. Without mutuality of exchange or support, one

person could be considered to be using the other only for individual gain. Indeed, Eva

Margolies (1975) described many women's friendships as "exploitative" because the

women are focusing their energy on relationships with men instead of their women

friends (p. 64). Neera Badhwar (1993) addressed this concern by excluding from

friendship those relationships where the person is viewed as a means to an end rather

than being loved for who the person is. Support, if not exchanged in a reciprocal

manner, can have a negative effect on friendships.

While such cases could be viewed as having only the appearance of friendship, a

form of reciprocity may exist and not be readily identified. For example, some women

provide more support than they receive in an attempt to be a "motherer" by providing

support and maintaining a power position so the other can pose no threat, but the other

"woman being 'used' has her own demons at work. Looking for more closeness and

unconsciously expecting all women will be devoted and loyal, she chooses not to read

the handwriting on the wall, to see only what she wants to see" (Margolies, 1975, pp.2,

62). Friendships that appear unbalanced may be the result of different needs, either

conscious or unconscious, being met.

The Grandmothers valued reciprocal support and did not exhibit signs of

relationships such as those described by Margolies. One of the main ways the

Grandmothers demonstrate both support and reciprocity is through sharing and

listening. Interestingly, often listeners see sharing as the gift and sharers see listening as

the gift! The mutual benefits and appreciation make sharing and listening a perfect

example of reciprocity and is identified by many of the Grandmothers as a critical

component of their friendship. "We do a lot of sharing. Sharing's a very big part of our getting together," says Lee, a Euro-Canadian woman. Mary, a First Nations Grandmother, describes a different circle that is composed of First Nations women but that she feels is very similar to IGU.

> Anyway, we go these gatherings every once a month and I like doing that because we share. We share the good things and we share the bad things...And the Grandmothers, too, it's very open, you feel very much at ease. Although they're [pause] I'll call them whites, uh? Yeah, whites. Yeah, we all, its, I learn we all have the same [pause] same feelings no matter what nationality you are the Grandmothers go through the same things, exactly the same things. We go through the hardships. We go through, we're stronger for it.[2]

Jean, a Euro-Canadian woman, echoes Mary's sentiments. Jean has been part of IGU since it began and was part of the older women's network that preceded it. For Jean, each gathering has a mixture of old friends from the previous network, what she describes as her "anti-nuke" days, new friends she has met at previous gatherings and strangers who are attending their first gathering. She marvels at the fact that, in spite of this mixture, women, including her, feel free to share with the group and receive their support:

> There is something about how we can sit with complete and total strangers, both um, um, First Nations people and, and those who are not. And we share things that we maybe haven't even told our children and our grandchildren! And its just, we like to talk. And because there's, um, kinds of revelations that we hold forth are confidential, but it's just incredible to me that you leave there feeling that these people have just, have <u>been</u> your friends longer than that couple of days you're with them and that they will be always [emphasis in original].

Lee attributes this comfort to the safe and secure environment created by the group.

---

[2] Note the pause before use of the term "white" and later the "um, um" when Jean, a white woman, uses the term "First Nations" people. There is considerable caution and even confusion about which terms are appropriate and non-offensive. This is discussed in the Perspectives on Identity section.

> Yeah, they're [the Grandmothers] safe and secure...and some of them got in there and really shared some of their innermost concerns. Because we always went around the circle, like the first day with the rock. And some of them had a lot of problems, but they were willing to share and they knew that this sharing wasn't going any further. That was one of the things we did. <u>Confidential</u>. Everything was confidential [emphasis in original].

The environment that allows for the exchange of sharing and support is created and supported in part by IGU's guidelines and the ritual of the Talking Rock and is maintained by the efforts of the women. Having guidelines in place, such as those pertaining to affirmation and confidentiality, creates a climate suitable for sharing, and the Grandmothers' interest in following the guidelines helps the women know that their disclosures are safe, both from ridicule and from gossip.

The importance of the opportunity to share life stories must be emphasized. As Eleanor said, "So you learn your life story, a lot of them, I think it's the only time they've ever had the opportunity to, to cry out their story. And that comes with a lot of tears lots of times. That's a release; it's important." Sharing is not only an opportunity for others to learn about your life; rather, people discover their own life story in telling it to others. It is almost as if the sharing and being heard makes it possible to make sense of a life experience that until then had been a source of anxiety and guilt. The Grandmothers shared several such examples with me. For the first time, Jean was able to share her guilt about having to institutionalize her mother and through that sharing the Grandmothers taught her "that it isn't all that bad to cry." The most dramatic of such incidents occurred when the PWC watched a video about residential school abuse in preparation for their literacy workshop. All of the First Nations women at the PWC meeting had attended residential school and several found the video very disturbing. One of the coordinators explained:

And it was in their generation that, you know, you did not talk about those experiences. That was not, that was considered unseemly in, you know? Well the pain that came out of that was just enormous and then we...Well what do you do? When that kind of pain and grief...What do you do when that arises? And the Talking Rock helped us every time [emphasis in original].

The Talking Rock and the willingness to support those in need allowed women who had experienced and witnessed abuse in the residential school setting to finally speak of that time in their lives. The residential school experience dramatically altered life for these women. Even those Grandmothers who told me that they did not experience physical or sexual abuse spoke of loneliness, hunger and harsh treatment that I would characterize as colonial or social abuse nonetheless. The pain and confusion of that time was kept mostly hidden for many years until finally the Grandmothers felt it was safe and allowable to tell of their experiences and express their related feelings.

Learning is a result of the sharing that occurs in the Circles and is reinforced at a variety of workshops. Ursula, a First Nations woman living in Regina and raising all seven of her grandchildren, learns a lot from IGU. "It's really helped me quite a bit, too." She is more willing to speak in the group now and appreciates the opportunity to:

Understand people, understand how to handle the kids, your children, your grandchildren. And you get to understand how to, uh, how to cooperate with different people, I guess...Well mostly with white people, you know...We learn a lot from there too, you know. They help us all out, one another...When you want different answers, like you know, you're stuck on something like that, well they're there to help. To help you with whatever you need and that.

When I asked Ursula if she had a chance at the meetings to share some of what she learned with other people, she replied, "Mmm, mhm, yeah. That's what, that's what they tell us to do, like you know, share what you need and what you learned from them and all of the different people. So I think we have to do it, like." Ursula has recently moved into Regina from the reserve she refers to as "my good home." She is working

hard to raise her grandchildren and also takes time to visit her institutionalized adult son with physical disabilities. IGU gatherings provide a respite for Ursula where she can rest away from her daily duties, and share concerns and knowledge with the other Grandmothers.

> There's a lot of, lot of experiences, like you know. Yeah. I sure got a lot of help anyway. I don't feel so down, like. They always talk to me every time I go to these meetings. If I didn't have that, those meetings and to go along, like, I don't know what I would have been doing now (cough). Like that's helped me quite a bit. Grandmothers, the elders.

The move to the city has been difficult for Ursula but she finds solace in her friendships at the Grandmothers' gatherings. She takes her turn with the Talking Rock to "give words to the people." I appreciate her use of the word "give." The sharing is a gift, a gift of "words to the people." The reciprocity of friendships in IGU is demonstrated by Ursula's ability to both receive and offer support. She is supported in her quest to understand and cooperate with others, deal with her children and grandchildren, meet with elders, enjoy friendship with other women and gain a much-needed respite from her everyday responsibilities. In return she offers support by listening to others' concerns, sharing what she has learned through her experiences and "giving words to the people." These exchanges may occur simultaneously as in the example of learning and listening. Ursula receives the benefit of learning from the other Grandmothers when she listens to their stories while at the same time she is offering them the gift of her attention enabling their stories to be told.

To Wilma, sharing is an integral part of First Nations culture. As the linguistic plurality of "First Nations" implies, there is cultural plurality, many nations each with different cultural norms and expectations. However, many First Nations people identify

common themes, cultural modalities that represent some international consistency.

Sharing is such a theme. As Wilma explains, "We as native people share a lot. And that's what helped us...Of course we, everybody has their problems. But. We work them out. Yeah. Yeah. We find ways and means of workin' it out. Yeah." This sharing is both verbal and material. Wilma told me that when people on her reserve came to her and her husband for help during difficult times they would give them "straight half of what we had." The Grandmothers maintain this spirit of sharing.

One of the First Nations Grandmothers on the PWC, Joyce, was going through a family crisis during the time I was conducting interviews and had to miss the gathering I attended because one of her adult sons was missing. The other Grandmothers were very concerned for her, calling to check in on how she was and whether she had any news. Apparently this support continued through the entire ordeal, as one of the coordinators explained:

> Joyce was going through a very difficult time and she's been with the Project Working Council since the beginning. Uh, her son was missing for three months and those women just kept faithful to her. Ah! I mean, I just, I just think that is, such a testimony to their, well faithfulness! You know, they just kept faith with this woman. They'd drive out [from Regina to the reserve], take lunch, go and sit, go and visit [emphasis in original].

Joyce was visited and supported through her ordeal by Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian women. In addition to being supported through a difficult time, Joyce remained connected to IGU through her friends and their support. The Grandmothers' ability to provide and receive support is a critical component of their friendship. The Grandmothers perceive that they are both benefiting and providing benefits within the

group, and therefore, feel secure that their relationships are based on who they are not just what they give; this sharing is the essence of reciprocity.

The balance between giving and sharing demonstrates that the Grandmothers value each other as friends and trust each other to be gracious in receiving and generous in giving. Both of the key features identified by many of the Grandmothers as the definition of a friend, "someone who is there when you need them" and "someone you can trust," are exemplified in the reciprocal exchange of giving and receiving. Friendship encompasses the provision and receipt of assistance and this balance reinforces the women's self-definition of grandmothers as "loving and caring people." Providing and receiving support demonstrated the treatment of each other with love and care. The balanced exchange also supports the perception that all are equal within the circle.

4.6   Power, Economics, Respect and Equality

The concepts of power, economics, respect and equality are interconnected in inextricable ways in the context of friendship and will therefore be considered together. Definitions of power such as "a social relationship between groups that determines access to, use of, and control over basic material and ideological resources in society" (Morgen & Bookman, 1988, p. 4) demonstrate how power permeates several aspects of our lives. Connections among power, relationships and resources necessarily impact women's economic situations and their conception and reception in society; they may or may not be conceived and received with respect and equality. Power, economics, respect and equality are each important and complex and I venture into the discussion fully aware of the theoretical intricacies associated with them. However, I agree with

Sherene Razack's (1998) statement that "It is vitally important to explore in a historical and site-specific way the meaning of race, economic status, class, disability, sexuality and gender as they come together to structure women in different and shifting positions of power and privilege" (p. 12). A focus on power relations was identified as a critical component of Geraldine Dickson's (2000) recent work with Aboriginal grandmothers. Individuals come to friendships with specific levels of power that represent a compilation of social status, cultural standing and personal attributes (among other things). The most common way in which researchers have handled the issue of power in studies of friendships is to focus on equality.

The term equality is often taken to mean that the parties to a friendship are of equal status. Aristotle (1975), who wrote what is considered to be some of the first and groundbreaking work in friendship, believed that only two good men of equal standing could succeed in creating the best of friendships. Aristotle's use of the term "men" referred to those of the male sex only and he did not consider the possibility of woman to woman friendships. He claimed that a friendship of equality was possible between those he considered of unequal status, such as a man and a woman or a master and a slave, as long as the level of affection was proportional to the status of the individual. Therefore, as long as the man or the master received more affection and received more benefits, the friendship could be considered equal (Aristotle, 1975, pp. 140-148). The belief that friendship cannot occur between those with unequal status persists in many modern definitions of friendship. Like Aristotle, Reisman (1979) described the ideal friendship as a friendship between equals and Roger Hewitt (1986) applied this specifically to race arguing that structural racism prevented interracial friendship and

even intervened to end long established friendships between adolescents in interracial

London neighbourhoods. Power imbalances rooted in society limited the ability to

create and maintain friendships making friendships between unequal parties unlikely.

As Eleanor says:

> Well, uh, we carry with us a lot of baggage that we're fed through propaganda
> and through the media and uh, uh, they colour, unless you're really a stubborn
> head and stick to your own ideas, they colour your perceptions so easily and
> persuade [white] people that these [Aboriginal] people are less than we are.

Eleanor sees how structural racism is constructed and supported by our institutions and

media and how this can interfere in creating intercultural friendships; yet, she believes

that it is possible to retain antiracist views with a concerted effort. Her perspective

seems to be that people are represented as unequal but are, in reality, equal.

Both Todd and Reisman studied friendships between those that are considered

unequal. Todd (1980) included "manipulative friendship" as a category of women's

friendships in literature. A manipulative friendship arises where "one woman uses

another, controls her and joys in the control" (Todd, 1980, p. 4). Reisman (1979) also

categorized a type of "receptivity" friendship in which the parties are unequal, differing

in standing (superior or inferior), and they are aware of this difference (Reisman, 1979,

pp. 2-24). One might ask if relationships such as these are friendships, but, while they

may not be ideal, the people involved often use the term "friendship" to describe such

relationships and as such, there is reason to include them within the purview of

friendship. Indeed, as discussed in the consideration of support, both parties may in fact

be gaining from the relationship. Nonetheless, I have difficulty including Todd's

manipulative friendship as a friendship given that it appears to be based on

manipulation and control. Perhaps this merely makes it a poor friendship and my urge

to remove it from the category friendship reveals my idealism. However, in a manipulative friendship, the manipulated party is being deceived into believing positive elements of friendship exist where they do not while the manipulator is fully aware that the positive elements projected by her are a façade meant to procure the benefits of friendship without having to engage in an actual friendship.

For Tracy (1991), it is the act of manipulation that creates the problem: "Only when friends or sisters secretly want to dominate each other, when we secretly base our individual identities on feeling superior to each other, that competition is immoral and breeds unethical behavior" (p. 239). In Tracy's view, it is the secrecy or manipulation that creates an illusion of friendship rather than an actual friendship. Without the secrecy, if both parties acknowledge the existence of power differences and are aware of the difference in standing accorded them by social hierarchies, a friendship is possible (Reisman, 1979). Of course, this is based on the simplistic assumption that power differentials are obvious and readily identified. Some examples could include a boss and an employee; an elderly person and someone who drops by to deliver meals, help around the house or visit; or a wealthy person and a poor person. For Reisman, though, it is not the inequality itself that makes the friendship less than ideal, rather it is the issue of a lack of reciprocity; a friendship falls into the receptivity category if one of the unequal parties primarily gives to the other. The issue of equality is interwoven with the idea of reciprocity, which was discussed with reference to support.

Social inequalities need not necessarily result in a friendship that lacks reciprocity. In an example from IGU, the Grandmothers and group coordinators describe their relationships as friendships. Their relationships are complicated by

dynamics of age, race and employment. The group coordinators belong to socially dominant groups as Euro-Canadian women who are relatively young compared to the majority of the Grandmothers but are in a position of less power as they take their direction from the Grandmothers. The power differential is mediated through respectful treatment of each other, thereby permitting friendships to develop; the Grandmothers include the coordinators in their Circle as full participants while the coordinators treat the Grandmothers with respect and consideration. The most prevalent differences in social power, which must be negotiated within IGU, are based in economic and class divisions.

Elderly women and First Nations women belong to groups that are economically marginalized. Complicating discussions of class and economics within the context of the Grandmothers is the inability to include questions about income in my interviews as this is considered inappropriate in some of the Aboriginal and European cultures represented by the Grandmothers. Class is also complicated by factors often related to age such as widowhood and retirement. For example, Eleanor, now on her own, lived on a fixed income, limited her activities due to financial restrictions, strictly budgeted her money and rented a small suite of rooms while at the same time owning lake property she was trying to sell in order to secure retirement funding. Given the fluidity of class and social taboos related to income, no attempt has been made to place the participants in arbitrary class groupings. Nonetheless, many of the Grandmothers volunteered information about their economic and class standing, leading me to believe that the Grandmothers come from a range of socio-economic backgrounds.

Economic and class differences have been identified by some as the greatest

barriers to friendship (Rothman, 1978; Yager, 1997). In spite of recurring efforts "the

bonds of sex have not been able to overcome the differences between the classes"

(Rothman, 1978, p. 8). The impact of economics and class arose throughout the course

of my interviews. Lee was particularly vocal about economics and differences among

the women in IGU. She emphasized that "we have to remember, I have to remember,

I'm, I'm able to finance myself, but some of them aren't." Living in different economic

circumstances creates different perspectives on the world and impacts relationships,

even creates barriers.

> I think the expectations that we have by living in a community like this [city]
> and the expectations they [First Nations women living on the reserve] have to
> live with and not to say the expectations but the financial limitations, uh. Well,
> a friend just phoned me yesterday and I've always phoned her because she had
> a one way telephone, she couldn't phone out...Well that's another thing, when
> they're on a fixed income and they're on a fixed income with very little
> foundation that they can fall back on.

Here, Lee alludes to the issues raised by Eleanor's situation; while Eleanor lives on a

fixed income, she has savings and property to draw on while many of the First Nations

women, even those currently living comfortably, do not. Furthermore, services often

taken for granted by some of the Euro-Canadian Grandmothers, such as full access to a

telephone, are not available to many of the First Nations Grandmothers.

Another issue that arose as a result of different levels of social power is the

conceptualization of and proximity to crime. The legacy of residential schools and

continued poverty has led to increased involvement in crime for some members of the

Aboriginal community. According to a recent report, three-quarters of the people

admitted to Saskatchewan's prisons in 1998-99 were of Aboriginal background

("Three-quarters," 2000). One of the First Nations Grandmothers, Veronica, had experienced the impact of crime on the Aboriginal community in her family. Veronica lived in Regina and had a son who was in jail for life and a daughter who had also been incarcerated. Lee thought that these occurrences were hard for many of the Euro-Canadian Grandmothers to understand, which was confirmed in my interview with Adele.

Adele, the Euro-Canadian participant who expressed a number of seemingly racist and elitist ideas, was alarmed that she had shared her name and address with the Grandmothers and then found out that "one lady in our group...had many of her children in jail and had problems with her children and it was that one who says, 'Oh, I can come and see you!" Adele refused to have this woman in her home, and told me "I hope she doesn't come." While Adele harbours many prejudices against the First Nations women, she thought "most of the Indian Grandmothers that I met were not like this, they were very, very nice, you know." Adele viewed a family member in conflict with the law as a sign of the other woman's inferiority and feared that engaging in friendship with this woman would expose her to "lower elements." Her fears escalated when she noticed that many of the First Nations women had not included addresses or phone numbers on the list. She assumed they did this to protect themselves from each other and did not realize that many of the women live in areas that have no formal house address and several do not have phones. She projected her living conditions onto the others and could not fathom their differing realities. Her perceptions of inequality fed her fears and caused her to choose avoidance over friendship.

The perception of equality in adolescent friendship led adolescents to see friendship as "delicate balances of exchange in which self-interest must be weighed against consideration for the other, and conflict weighed against cooperation" (Hartup, 1993, p. 9). Feeling equal also facilitated the sharing of thoughts and feelings (Hartup, 1993, p. 7). In his work on adolescent friendship, Hartup (1993) argued that "egalitarianism," having equal power in a friendship relationship, was a critical friendship condition (p. 6). While the terminology is different, the application and definition of egalitarianism is similar to that of equality. Furthermore, the characterization of adolescent friendships as a "delicate balance" leads me to question whether the individuals are attempting to maintain the balance of equality within their relationships or managing power differences so they appear as equality. Perhaps, as part of friendship, the individuals strive to create equality and power balance within the relationship. The end result is the same. If the friendship is functioning well, one friend is not exercising power over another. It appears that as part of friendship, individuals use respect for each other as individuals of equal human value, regardless of their societal power, to create equality and to balance power within the relationship. More important than equality of status is how the differences in status manifest themselves within the relationship.

Holding onto a difference of power can prevent the formation of friendship. I return to Adele, who throughout my research provided examples of the effect of replicating power hierarchies in relationships, as she was the only interview participant to declare that she has not made any friends in the IGU and, in fact, has not made any friends since her arrival in Canada after WWII. She faults Canada's mix of races and

uses words like "savages," "uncivilized," "uncultured," and "stupid" to describe women

of all races she has met in Canada.

> Because you see...they have a low class of people come up to the higher level
> who have not been, well say, well a low class of people have come up who do
> not, they will only have a materialistic outlook. Well you can be materialistic
> at the same time you have to be cultured. You know, but these people, they...
> come from the stable and go to the University. How can you go from the
> stable, roughly said, filled with, pardon me the expression, cowshit between
> the toes, and then go to the University?...You are schooled, but they are not
> educated. That is the case with most people here.

Her belief that she is of higher status than the other women she meets has prevented her

from forming any friendships.

Adele sees virtually every woman she meets in Canada as somehow inferior to

her genetically, culturally or educationally and therefore, not suitable for friendship.

Expressing the same point but from a vastly different perspective, Mary, a First Nations

woman, claimed that an attitude of superiority was a barrier to interracial friendships.

"What prejudice means to me is thinking that you're better than the other, *uh?* That's

one [barrier to developing friendship], thinking that we are better than them, *uh?* and

these ones thinking they're better than us. So we build that wall, *uh?*" She thinks that

the friendships in the IGU work because everyone is treated as an equal. In contrast to

Adele, Mary sees herself as having formed several friendships in IGU. Similarly, Katie,

a First Nations elder, characterizes respect as a First Nations' tradition and uses it to

keep from generalizing the behaviour of white women who mistreated her in residential

school to other white people. During the course of our interview I asked her if being

mistreated by white women affected how she felt about other white people. She replied,

"No, not at the time, no it didn't enter our minds. 'Cause we were always told to be

positive with people. Respect other people. We didn't think that." Respecting each

individual as equal simply by virtue of their humanity supports the development of friendship. While equality can ease the development and maintenance of friendship relationships and unequal status raises issues of motive and the ability to overcome segregation within society, it is the respect for each individual as equally valuable that I include in this dimension of friendship.

Respect is an important part of the Grandmothers' friendships and their interactions with others. Wilma felt respected because "they treat us real good and our meals and everything and people, they're really friendly, you know." Lee echoed Wilma's sentiments and described how each person's abilities are honoured:

> In the spring or fall when there's less snow on the ground we would go out and say, walk the hill. As a break. And if you could only go half way, that's fine. No one was trying to push you and say, 'Come on!'...No, I, your own physical abilities were respected and some of them were limited because of illness, accident. But they're always welcome.

Use of the phrase "But they're always welcome" could be misconstrued as a situation where ableist norms and barriers to participation are ignored under the pretence that the activity is theoretically open to all, but my observation of just such an outing revealed a different connotation to what Lee is saying. Grandmothers of all abilities headed outside to "walk the hill." Some were assisted to the bottom or a little ways up until they felt they had had enough and others went right to the top. All were encouraged to do what they could and enjoy the outdoors. No one was considered the winner or the champion and no one was cajoled into going farther. All had "walked the hill" even those with canes who had rested at the base and shared laughter with those continuing on. Each was respected for who they were and what they could do.

This same respect for individual differences in participation applies in the Talking Circle, as Lee describes: "They're safe and secure. They're respected and if they didn't want to speak they didn't have to." Grandmothers often linked respect with trust and confidentiality. For example, Mary said, "Respect is [pause] when she tells me something too, I respect what she tells me. I won't, I won't uh, spread it around." The discussion of respect echoes ideas about support in friendship and respect for others is linked to the ability to be both supportive and supported. Lee also felt that respect could overcome barriers. When I mentioned some of the Euro-Canadian Grandmothers' concerns about befriending First Nations women because of concerns about cultural differences resulting in unannounced visits accompanied by family members she said:

> Well, the point is that you do it with your friend. If you had a friend who kept coming you'd probably say to them, 'give me a call before you come.' And not make a big issue of it. But that is, that, happens, I don't think it makes any difference what culture it is, it can happen. If you come from a culture where you never even knock the door, you just walked in, you take that with you. And then you learn other people's culture and the people, and I can learn theirs too...But I think it'd be unfortunate to back away because you were not willing to face the situation.

Lee emphasizes the importance of respecting friends enough to be honest and explain personal boundaries while at the same time making an effort to understand the cultural beliefs that may underlie others' behaviour.

Sue, one of the coordinators, felt that "there is a respect that serves the network very well." She claimed that even those Grandmothers who might not consider each other friends still respected each other, enabling the group to work together to achieve their goals. Lee described how respect allows the Grandmothers to work in the community:

77

And we're accepted in the community and I think probably because of the type of work we were doing. We were just working with people and we, and we respected people. People were people no matter what their face colours were or their eye colours were or their hair colour.

This kind of "people were people" philosophy must be viewed with caution as it risks homogenizing the group in favour of the traits of the dominant and erasing difference. Nonetheless, similar sentiments were expressed by First Nations elders, Katie and Wilma. Wilma said,

> I think that there's no difference really. You know. We're all the same only we're, you know, different. Like they're white and we're natives and they're all different nationality themselves, you know? There, I think it's the friendliness, you know. And willing to share, you know...And nobody is forced, if you don't want to, you know. And I think this is what it is, like really.

Characterizing everyone as the same yet different affirms the respect for each individual's basic value as a human being. The differences that come from culture or make people individuals do not negate their basic humanity that must be respected and valued. Yet, the line between respect and power can blur, especially in intercultural relationships.

In an interesting juxtaposition, Katie recounted to me that "if a [white] person came we would go to them. Cater to them." She describes her mother-in-law catering to white visitors as "doing everything for them." Her protestations were met with the explanation that everyone must be respected and treated positively. But, Lee recounted a conversation with a friend who is a First Nations Grandmother that reflected the power dynamics inherent in such an intercultural situation.

> Well, I could go into her home and she could come in mine. We've gone out to eat together; she's slept here. I've been, in fact it was interesting, one day I drove her back home...to the reserve. And she says, 'Come on in' and I went in and I sat down and she says, 'You know, I always feel uncomfortable in my

own home when a white person comes in.' And I said, 'Why?' She said, 'Well I always feel they're criticizing.' So I, you break down that to make sure that, that's not your role, at all. You consider, consider you as a friend.

Even after Lee and this other Grandmother had an established friendship, the power dynamic of a white authority figure intervened to influence their interaction. First Nations people have long been forced to report and justify to the dominant Euro-Canadian community both formally in their interactions with Indian agents and social workers, and informally when many try to mitigate the effects of individual and systematic racism. In the same way that middle-class women who, through ideas of "virtuous womanhood," worked to impose middle-class values upon lower class homes in the name of charity (Rothman, 1978, p. 5), some Euro-Canadian women have attempted to impose European cultural values on First Nations women in Canada. It is difficult to know whether a Euro-Canadian woman entering a First Nations woman's home is being treated as a friend or as someone occupying a position of colonial power and the impact of friendship and hierarchical social status cannot be clearly delineated. It probably varies considerably, but, a commitment to respect allows the women to acknowledge this historical influence on today's friendships and work to mediate it in their own relationships. As in the discussion of choice, the consideration of power and economics requires that we acknowledge the agency of women to forge equitable and respectful relationships.

4.7   Agency and Activism

The terms "agency" and "activism" facilitate my discussion of power as related to individuals and their capacity for action because they are closely related through their connection to action and in some instances, could be considered one and the same. The

consideration of social-reproduction work and the maintenance of culture in the face of oppression in Chapter 2 demonstrates how exercising agency in making life choices is in itself a form of activism. Often the term "empowerment" is used interchangeably with "agency" to refer to an individual's ability to act and to engage in a choice of actions; both are considered processes. Anthony Giddens (1979) equates agency with action and emphasizes that it "does not refer to a series of discrete acts combined together, but to a continuous flow of conduct…involving 'intervention' in a potentially malleable objectworld [emphasis in original]" (pp. 55-56). Empowerment has been defined as "a process aimed at consolidating, maintaining, or changing the nature, distribution of power in a particular cultural context" which starts with an understanding of systemic oppression and engaging in life-changing actions (Morgen & Bookman, 1988, p. 4). These definitions attempt to encapsulate notions of action and an individual's power to exercise a choice of action within the constraints imposed by societal structures. Giddens conceives of agency in degrees with intention influencing the level of agency while Morgen and Bookman place an emphasis on having an intended outcome.

Agency, then, can be conceptualized as a matrix combining levels of constraint with levels of consciousness about ability to choose and potential impacts of choices as well as intention. For the purposes of this research, agency is the degree of power to act and make decisions about your own life and activism is acting to create social change. The intention to create change is not required but, in the case of IGU, an explicitly stated intention to engage in social change exists. In the preliminary stages of this research I conceptualized activism as an outgrowth of the agency that had resulted from

women's friendship relationships; a linear sequence of friendship which created agency and led to activism. As my fieldwork progressed I became aware of the synergy created between friendship and activism. While friendships did facilitate working together, the working together also facilitated friendship. The mutual reinforcement created a synergistic effect that worked to amplify both the growth in friendship and the effectiveness of the group's activism. I raised this perspective with the PWC when we met to discuss my findings and they agreed that friendship and activism would be better considered as part of the dimensions of friendship rather than on its own. The dilemma I faced is reflected in friendship research resulting in differing views about the roles of agency and activism in friendship.

Modern researchers often echo Aristotle's belief that one must know oneself before you can be a friend to others and expand the view to argue that a woman can only share intimacy with another woman if she first has a strong sense of self (Block & Greenberg,1985; Margolies, 1975). If, like Aristotle, we consider a friend another self, then, "the formation of *other* selves presupposes that selfhood has been achieved [ital. in original]" (Stern-Gillet, 1995, p. 35). Such a view implies agency is a prerequisite for friendship requiring people to be self-aware and comfortable with their identity before forming friendships.

An alternate view portrays agency as created by women's friendships rather than as a precondition (Bernikow, 1980). Women engaged in friendships help each other to "remain perpendicular. To act. To be" (Bernikow, 1980, p. 144). In Bernikow's view, then, the development of friendships encourages women to act and creates opportunities for agency. This implies that women may enter friendships lacking personal power or

not having realized their potential for action, and the friendship becomes the catalyst that results in agency. Some of the women interviewed found that friendships allowed them to develop respect for themselves and to empower themselves, supporting the view that agency is created through friendship. Veronica, for example, found that IGU helped her visualize herself in other ways, "finding myself." For Veronica, friendships with the Grandmothers are helping her explore new ways of being in order to develop a strong self-identity, thus contributing to her agency. As a newly widowed woman she found the Grandmothers provided her with options, opportunities and ideas. She had been involved in an abusive marriage and when she joined IGU she had "low self-esteem and couldn't mix with anybody," but because of her friendships with the Grandmothers, she is "now coming out, finding myself and getting more open." Veronica's ability to develop an identity of self under the safe, respectful and purportedly equal purview of friendship is significant, especially given the history of cultural and colonial marginalization of Aboriginal women.

Agency does not have to be categorized as either a prerequisite or a result of friendship; these two concepts can be seen to coexist. Like Stern-Gillet, Raymond (1986) believed that a woman must first know herself and belong to herself before she can befriend another: "A woman's Self is her original and most enduring friend" (Raymond, 1986, p. 5). Raymond posited that self-knowledge and the ability to be a friend to oneself makes one suitable to be a friend to others. However, she also believed that befriending oneself was only the first step. She used the term "gyn/affection" to describe friendships between women. "Gyn/affection is that women affect, move, stir and arouse each other to full power" (Raymond, 1986, p. 8).

Producing agency is one of the recurring factors in Raymond's (1986) "conditions of female friendship" (p. 219). Women must go beyond the self. Raymond (1986) included "passion," "worldliness" and "happiness" as conditions of friendship where passion included helping women become their own person (p. 229); worldliness was defined as staying connected to the world and being active within it (p. 230); and happiness was described as "the feeling that accompanies the activity of the whole self, or the feeling of self-realization" (p. 237). Friendships can help women extend beyond the self and the other self to create movement and action within the world. This action helps women grow into their own person and experience the happiness that comes from living as a self-actualized person. So, while agency is a prerequisite for the development of women's friendship, it is also a product.

In Hunt's (1991) model of friendship, power was found to be present in varying degrees and was defined as "the ability to make choices for ourselves, for our dependent children, and with our community (pp. 99-101). It is this form of power, which could also be described as empowerment, that I am characterizing as agency. By describing the level of power as varying from friendship to friendship, Hunt did not prescribe it as a precondition for friendship, but rather as a product of, or development within, friendship. She acknowledged that individuals enter friendships with varying levels of power. An individual need not already possess a high level of personal power prior to entering the friendship. The level of personal power or agency of the individuals as well as how they use them influences the character or quality of the friendship. While acknowledging that each person enters a friendship with some level of agency that

existed prior to friendship a high level of agency is not prescribed as a precursor to friendship.

I agree that agency is both a precondition and result of women's friendships. While agency influences the development of women's friendship, it is also a product found and created in varying degrees. Women need not have achieved their full power of agency before their relationships can be considered friendships. Friendships can develop when women's agency is limited but the quality of the resulting friendship will be affected. A friendship should help women develop the ability to make their own choices and take responsibility for their lives. Western culture's patriarchal focus has required women to focus much of their energy on men and children, living vicariously through what their support has helped others achieve. Wilma spoke to me about "shy kokums."[3] She ascribes the shyness to traditions of domesticity and to the women not being "allowed to express themselves." IGU helps because "when they open up, once they get out of their shell, they're okay, you know? This what I mean. We need them to get out more. You know. Because a lot of our grandmothers are shy, you know." The valuation of women as individuals of worth unto themselves with valuable gifts to share creates agency and improves each Grandmother's ability to act and interact with others.

Action is indeed part of the Grandmothers' interactions and this reinforces their friendship relationships. Cox and Parsons found that group activities had a "positive influence on the establishment and maintenance of the women's relationships, both within and outside the group" they studied (Roberto, 1996, p. 3). Going beyond

---

[3] "Kokum" is a Cree word for "Grandmother."

activities, the Grandmothers engage in activism, working to create a better world for the generations that follow. According to Aristotelian theory, combining friendship with such altruism is an achievement of the highest order and "contributes to the cognitive self-actualization of virtuous persons" (Stern-Gillet, 1995, p. 4). The complex relationship between friendship and activism is revealed in the variety of views expressed by the Grandmothers. Sue, a coordinator, felt that friendship was important but not necessary for activism to occur: "But working together as human beings or doing something as a body of women, ah, placing ourselves for a greater cause. You don't have to necessarily be friends there." Yet, many of the qualities she ascribes to such working relationships, for example, commitment to well-being, telling the truth and respect, are the qualities of friendship. Aristotle's desire to elevate friendships that create change above those that do not was expressed by Jean. "Where have we come with the Grandmothers, where should we be going and so on? And just to have established some friendships, to me, isn't enough. We have to go, if we're going to continue the group, we have to go beyond that." For Jean, the personal relationships are important but insufficient justification for the group if activism does not result.

The views of Sue and Jean seem to separate activism and friendship. Lee, another Euro-Canadian woman read to me from a speech she had given about IGU: "In the beginning there was some concern that we were not moving fast enough but time, being a healer, helped us to see and realize that speed was not the answer but rather relationships." This eloquent description exposes the European cultural bias within Jean's concerns that value action over relationship. This separation was not part of the First Nations perspective as expressed by Mary, a First Nations elder, when she told me

that I must first know her and her story before we could begin to discuss specific research questions. Lee spoke of the impatience of some of the Euro-Canadian Grandmothers when First Nations Grandmothers would tell the same stories over; they did not understand that before work could begin, relationships had to be established. These cultural contradictions will be explored further in the next chapter. I raise them here to emphasize that the conditions under which action takes place and out of which friendships emerge are decidedly and undeniably cultural. Yet, much of the discussion of agency in existing friendship literature neither acknowledges nor recognizes this cultural grounding.

From whichever perspectives the Grandmothers approach activism, the group had engaged in a number of activities by 1996 when a project evaluation was conducted. Several gatherings were held including those with themes of antiracism, health and safety and literacy (Ellis, 1997, pp. 7-9). IGU also engaged in storytelling and conducting workshops in communities throughout the Treaty 4 area. This included offering Saulteaux and Cree culture and language classes in Fort Qu'Appelle, presenting at a number of schools, participating in Treaty 4 celebrations and "networking and telling the story of what the Grandmothers are about" at conferences and to race relations committees (Ellis, 1997, pp. 10-12). Their activism has continued since then and has included workshops on living with disabilities and examining their roles in family and community. This activism, or making a difference, was important to many of the Grandmothers. Lee, for example, listed a number of activities, including the "Grandmothers and Girls Violence Prevention" program, which seeks to increase awareness about violence toward girls and women, and trains and supports

Grandmothers and girls to provide prevention education in schools and communities (Ellis, 1997, p. 12). Lee was particularly proud of the fact that the schools have taken the program over because "they were so pleased with it." When I asked her "To what would you attribute the success of that program?" She replied, "I think, something about grandmothers. Nobody seemed to be afraid of them." Although some of the Grandmothers I interviewed spoke of negative experiences either with their own grandmothers or as a grandmother, the social idea of grandmothers as nurturing and safe allows the Grandmothers to create change without appearing threatening.

Fear of the power generated when women come together to act and make changes is often cited as an underlying motive for the subordination of women and the structuring of society to orient women towards men and away from each other (Block & Greenberg, 1985; Faderman, 1998). The power and agency of Aboriginal women to resist colonization are cited as motivations for colonial governments' particular focus on women in the construction of negative imagery and regulation of movement of Aboriginal peoples (Anderson, 2000; Carter, 1996). In constructing women as weak and in need of protection there is, at the same time, an underlying acknowledgement of women's power to upset the status quo if their potential for action was fully realized. As with any consideration of women, there are a wide variety of experiences, histories and constructions of women and their personal power. The power of grandmothers is no exception. In Western youth-oriented culture, grandmothers and other older women are often ignored or viewed with patronizing humour (Furman, 1997). In contrast, many First Nations cultures regard grandmothers as sources of wisdom. Apparently common to both is a conception of grandmothers as providing care for others. In an

American study, grandmothers self-defined their role as providing love and affection, being there for their grandchild and providing help and advice (Kivett, 1996, p. 31) and a Canadian study found First Nations grandmothers "counsel" their grandchildren and "stress personal competence, self-reliance and hardwork" (Wolfart, 1998, p. 26).

In reflecting on these two descriptions of grandmothers, I considered the importance of economics and the message of academics who bring to our attention the differences resulting from the privilege of assuming adequate resources versus the consciousness of the necessity to struggle for sustenance (Collins, 1991; Glenn, 1994). The role of the First Nations grandmothers reflects the importance of skills for survival in a colonized land with counsel on how to survive being the utmost importance. The grandmothers in the other study, while not identified by culture, had average incomes of between $35,000 and $40,000 U.S. and had moved, many to access a warmer climate, perhaps allowing them the privilege of considering emotional needs before others. In both descriptions, the role of caretaker is included, even if how this role manifests itself in the lives of the women differs by location and culture. While creating a risk of defining the women by their relationships with others and linking their identity to domestic roles, coming together under the umbrella of "grandmother" allows the women of IGU to emphasize their desire to care for others and to downplay their intention to change the status quo and existing power relations.

In keeping with traditional ideas of grandmotherhood, the Grandmothers engaged in their own brand of quiet activism at a weekend retreat with at-risk youth from Regina, the Street Culture Kidz, held during the course of my research. I was invited to attend as part of my research. This afforded me the opportunity to observe

the Grandmothers' activism first hand. At the end of the weekend one of the youths told the group that she had learned a lot from the Grandmothers even if only through small talk. For most of the weekend, the Grandmothers engaged in making changes in these adolescents' lives simply by being there. For many of the children who were in institutional or foster care, even being there was an important sign of support.

The Grandmothers also shared their wisdom more directly, but only after seeking permission first. The most powerful example of this occurred at the first evening meal. The youth were beginning to bicker and heckle back and forth at each other. Intervening, Laverne, a Metis elder, told the group that the Grandmothers use a Talking Circle and a Talking Rock and asked if they would like to hear about it. The group fell silent and Laverne explained about the circle and how the rock "goes with the sun, not against;" to "seek first to understand, not for understanding;" she encouraged the youth to really listen to each other.

The group was keen to try the Talking Circle and the Talking Rock and one of the youth group staff shared a personal rock with the group to use. The rock went around the group and each person, Grandmothers, youth, staff, volunteer and researcher each took a turn. At one point a volunteer wanted the rock back to respond to something someone said but Laverne said, "you can't go against the sun." It was difficult for the youth, many visibly struggled to listen and not answer back, but when it was finished the youth and their leader commented on how they had never had a session that was so open. Laverne said they had experienced the "Miracle of the Talking Rock." The use of the Talking Rock so impressed the youth that the next evening they used it to discuss a conflict within the group.

Usually, when there is a conflict, the group conducts what could be termed an intervention. It appeared quite confrontational to me with group members telling the target why they are upset or how they are being affected by the individual's actions. When the exchange began the youth were yelling and swearing and the person targeted was answering back angrily. One of the complainants suggested the use of the Talking Rock seemingly so he could ensure a chance to speak to the others. The Talking Rock changed the dynamics of this exchange. All were eager to share their views but did so more calmly. The youth at the center of the intervention had to listen quietly and seemed to actually start hearing what was being said. The lack of his angry responses, denials and defenses defused the situation and all the speakers visibly relaxed.

While a powerful demonstration of the power of the Talking Rock, a more poignant illustration followed when the boy who was the target of the intervention was passed the Talking Rock. The other youths were momentarily surprised, not realizing until then that the invitation to speak in a circle included the one to whom they were speaking. A dialogue was created. The young boy, only twelve years old, to that point had played "the street tough guy" but with the Talking Rock he began to cry and speak of his loneliness, his fears and his sorrow at disappointing the group. The youths' silence, as they listened and began to understand and care, was a clear demonstration of the power of change and agency offered by the Grandmothers. The Grandmothers brought the youths the gifts of communication and mutual respect, teaching them a new way to interact. The Grandmothers knew from experience that the Talking Rock could help overcome conflict and pave the way for smoother relationships.

4.8 Conflict and Jealousy

The existence of conflict or disappointment does not preclude the possibility of friendship. Friendships are complex relationships between and among individuals with each individual bringing strengths as well as weaknesses into the relationship; it would therefore, be naïve to expect friendships to exist in a perpetual state of harmony. Yet, women's friendships are often dichotomized as either harmonious or acrimonious. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn (1963), for example, found that "it was hard for them [other women] to realize we could have differences of opinion, discuss at length, yet remain the best of friends" (p. 116). Indeed, Raymond (1986) concluded that "the most blatant obstacle to female friendship is the prevailing patriarchal adage that 'women are each other's worst enemies" (p. 151). The theme of girls' and womens' supposed inability to get along is identified as a significant element in the fiction of Margaret Atwood where "the social sphere of girlhood friendships is cast as a dangerous, threatening world where the female self is shaped and irrevocably damaged in the process" (Bouson, 1993, p. 164). The "damaged" girls carry this suspicion of relationships with other women into adulthood, preventing the formation of meaningful friendships.

As is the case with most patriarchal binaries, the categorization of female friendships as inherently dangerous relies on its opposition to the idealized female friendship. In contrast to the notion of women's friendships as dangerous, an idealized friendship is free of conflicts. Such an ideal is unattainable given the inevitability of conflict. Hence, when conflict arises it is viewed as confirmation that friendship among women is dangerous, rather than as an ordinary part of friendship.

Conflict in women's friendships is inevitable because one woman's wants never match another's exactly (Block & Greenberg, 1985, p. 227). Individuals bring different desires into the friendship that result in unmet expectations and disappointment. Perpetuating the belief that a true friendship is free of difficulty can mean the end of a friendship once the inevitable conflict arises. Women are urged to take into account "ruptures, betrayals and dishonor that have existed in the midst of the world of female friendships" (Raymond, 1986, p. 27). "As women of reality, we must know all of the forces that are ranged against us, including the awful force of women-betraying-women. We must grasp this knowledge, feel it, and then move on – to other women. This requires persistence and stamina – the power to stay with women (Raymond, 1986, p. 198). Recognizing the root of historical betrayals among women can result in the realization that women are not enemies by nature and women can begin a "process of solidarity" fully expecting conflict to arise (Browne, 1998, p. 209). A negative friendship experience, then, is accepted as part of friendship rather than as a confirmation of friendship's dangers.

In contrast to the myth of women as enemies is the false belief that a "true" friendship is one that is eternal and unwavering. This myth does not hold true under scrutiny: "a good friend is supposed to be forever; but in real life, friendships fade, or end abruptly, probably as often as they are formed (Block & Greenberg, 1985, p. 267). While some friendships may last for ever, most will not and eliminating this unspoken belief would allow for the reconceptualization of friendships ending as a characteristic of that particular relationship rather than an indictment against friendship in general. Conflicts, even those that end friendships, are one of many dimensions of friendship.

While not prevalent, conflict did exist within the IGU. Lee was unconcerned about this conflict:

> No, it's very, they're very, well you know, it doesn't make any difference what community you get into you're going to have that normal curve. And that's those who are all for it and those who are ag'in it. And it doesn't make any difference whether its in your community or intercultural.

Lee sees differences and conflict as a part of people getting together. I shared this view, although was not consciously aware of it until after my first few interviews when the Grandmothers said that they could not think of any examples of conflict within the group. I found myself thinking that maybe there was no conflict because the Grandmothers were not good enough friends. Also, the intensity of female friendships can intensify conflict. In friendship, women may share deep feelings and concerns with each other, leading to increased intimacy and, in turn, vulnerability (Block & Greenberg, 1985, p. 3). As a result, actions perceived as a breach of intimacy can engender strong responses, intensifying conflict. The Grandmothers make themselves vulnerable to each other through their intimate sharing and free offering of support. Many of the Grandmothers, as discussed with regard to support in the group, revealed aspects of themselves and their lives that they had kept private for many years. This required a considerable amount of trust and relied on others respect for them and the confidentiality guideline. In spite of this apparent intimacy, there were few examples of conflict provided by the Grandmothers even though I specifically asked about it.

There are several possible reasons for a lack of conflict reports in my interviews. The first is that perhaps the Grandmothers really do not engage in much conflict. This could be the result of the respectful environment they have created and the use of guidelines such as affirmation and confidentiality. Another possible explanation is the

way some of the Grandmothers perceive conflict. For example, Mary told me with laughter that "Grandmothers only see the good parts, uh? We're like that." They focus on the positive and "let that bad part go. It's there but, you know, just focus on the good. 'Cause there is a lot of good." While Mary universalizes a quality across all grandmothers, her comment does reveal the idea that our perceptions act to create our reality; if we choose to focus on the good then the conflict becomes unimportant. For Mary, the number of good things about IGU outweighs the negatives and allows her to overlook them.

A cultural reluctance to discuss conflicts could also be influencing the results. Katie, another First Nations elder, told me that "One of the [First Nations] values was if anybody says anything to you, never mind, don't say anything. If anybody hurts you, never mind, don't say anything." Her mother was taught this by her mother and passed it on. "Because she [her mother] was taught that, I guess, to respect others. Treat them positively, say positive things about them. It's always positive it was not the, the negative was never used." For both Mary and Katie, the values of their First Nations cultures taught them that respect meant seeing the best in others and not speaking negatively about them. This would prevent them from telling me about conflicts and instead have them focus on the positive elements of IGU.

Finally, some of the Euro-Canadian Grandmothers were reticent to discuss conflict or negative elements with me out of fear that such accounts would reflect badly on IGU or negatively impact the group's funding. IGU was in a funding crisis at the time of my interviews and many Grandmothers were concerned for the group's continuing existence. Some would confirm the purpose of my research before making

even mildly critical comments about the group and others would preface their comments with qualifiers. Clearly the social discomfort surrounding conflict in friendships is reflected in the responses of the Grandmothers and their reluctance to discuss the issue. Certainly, conflict is not a major issue within IGU but the Grandmothers have had to deal with and carry on through disagreements and disruptions.

The ability to resolve conflict can strengthen a friendship. Carmen Renee Berry and Tamara Traeder, in their 1995 book *Girlfriends: Invisible Bonds, Enduring Ties,* compare problems in friendships to "broken bones – painful and debilitating but, once healed, making the relationship stronger than ever" (p. 107). Such is the case with the Grandmothers. Sue includes "working together and in the context of working together, having to work out some things" as friendship building experiences. The Grandmothers had to learn how to do things together, a difficult part of building any relationship, but compounded in an intercultural context. Tara told me of an incident early in the group's formation where some of the First Nations women complained that the Euro-Canadian women were rude for interrupting dinner conversation. The Euro-Canadian women, on the other hand, felt the First Nations women were rude for not wanting to stop talking to pass food. The Grandmothers openly discussed the conflict using their Talking Rock and Talking Circle and came to understand that neither group was rude, but rather had different customs for dining. Leaving these different expectations unacknowledged could result in disappointment for all parties, particularly given that the group has, as one of its central goals, bridging cultural gaps and these conflicts are clearly rooted in cultural traditions and expectations.

On the surface it appeared that there were differences in how the Grandmothers felt conflict should be handled. Some believed situations were best acknowledged and others believed that it was best to let them pass. Beatrice experienced a personal conflict with another Grandmother, Adele, that was rooted in experiences in their homelands. In order to protect the anonymity of the participants, the details of their home countries and the international conflicts cannot be fully described here, but both Beatrice and Adele are immigrants to Canada and they come from nations that have a history of armed conflict against each other. Armies from Adele's country of origin used force to overtake Beatrice's country and then maintained control over the country through military rule. Beatrice lived for a time under this military rule with her freedom curtailed, and she experienced a great deal of fear.

At one of the gatherings, Beatrice and Adele were in the same small group and Adele began to deny that her country of origin was involved in any wrongdoing. This contrasted sharply with Beatrice's experience of living under foreign military rule and lead to a conflict between the two women.

> Beatrice: (Laughs) I shouldn't mention it but...We were occupied for five years so I still, I carry baggage, I don't want to but, the last time we nearly got into, (deep breath) you know. I mean, if people say it didn't happen, it wasn't true that's when they really get my goat and that sort of thing was happening with it so I [said], "Well I was there so I know the story." But I shouldn't have. (Heavy sigh) Well I think a lots of people feel friction with her but she's better now. She was very sort of, depressed once, I think, you know, so, I don't know but it was just that's one part where I just can't stand any denial or anything like that. That gets me, so.
>
> Kim: Mhm. So what did you do when you...
>
> Beatrice: I shut up. (Laughs). I mean it wasn't worth it you know, with it. But, ah, I wasn't going to...So that's the only friction we ever had. And I know I'm not the only one. It's part of her nature I think, you know. That's her...But there's not usually conflict, no. This was a personal thing. You

know, this has nothing to do with the Grandmothers. But yes, things, it might happen to other people too, I don't know.

Clearly, this incident and the conflict embodied within made Beatrice uncomfortable and she was reluctant to share it with me. She laughed nervously and seemed embarrassed that she had let Adele "get her goat," as she characterized it. Moreover, even though the issue was of grave importance to her, she still felt it was personal and apart from the Grandmothers.

Beatrice is ambivalent about the incident and her response to it. She simultaneously argues that there are no other conflicts within the group while acknowledging that others feel friction with Adele, too and that similar things may also happen to others. Such ambivalence reveals the contradictions within the supposedly friendly environment of the gathering and her experience of conflict. While she justifies her silence by characterizing the incident as personal she also struggles with the thought that others may have the same or similar difficulties yet she is reticent to speak of it as it may reflect poorly on the group. Furthermore, in spite of the fact that the conflict itself is based on intercultural conflict and would seem to speak directly to the goal of IGU as uniting intercultural grandmothers, Beatrice characterized it as "personal…nothing to do with the Grandmothers," perhaps because it seemed only to involve her and Adele and arose from an incident occurring outside of Canada. This, then, seemed to Beatrice, an issue that did not impact the other Grandmothers and while she thought perhaps Adele may have similar disagreements with other Grandmothers she was not sure, and chose to deal with the conflict (or not deal with it) by letting it pass. On one hand it is possible she rationalized her choice by faulting Adele's "nature" or attributing it to her being "depressed" and somewhat absolving Adele from

culpability and excusing herself from taking action. On the other hand it seemed

Beatrice was unclear about her right to be upset or the proper choice of actions and tells

me she "shouldn't have" responded. She was upset with herself for reacting to Adele at

all and not sure that was justified given Adele's "nature" and depression. Furthermore,

cultural restrictions on women regarding displays of anger further complicate her

response. Beatrice clearly experienced a contradiction between Adele's perception of

events and her own lived experience and then was uncertain about how to properly deal

with it. Weighing her need to clear the air, Adele's personality, and her perception of

the importance of the event to the other Grandmothers, Beatrice chose to briefly state

her view and than let the incident pass.

In contrast to Beatrice's choice to keep her conflict to herself, other

Grandmothers often cited acknowledging and openly discussing conflict as an important

aspect of their relationships. Lee said:

> Whatever the issue is, I don't think we put it off, we face it and contribute, each of us contributing to it and uh, I think we come out with a consensus which is one of the things we have done. Now I don't think we, I don't think we avoid it [conflict]. I think that's probably one of the, one of the reasons for our success. I think too often we avoid issues and the thing is they don't go away, they get bigger.

Sue and Katie echoed Lee's thoughts and attributed the ability to discuss issues to the

Talking Rock. Katie explained, "Well, everybody, uh, talks, eh? in the circle and uh,

we talk about things and we can talk about what bothers us. We have a Talking Rock."

And when I asked Sue, "So do you find that [use of the Talking Rock] diffuses conflict

by, because you can't have an instant exchange?" She replied:

> Well, certainly, it can diffuse conflict. I think that what it does is it just, it um, it equalizes power. Which is <u>terribly</u> important in the face of their powerful emotions. Um, you know, one example of a difficult time was early on in our

being together, there was a conflict that arose. And I don't even remember what was the basis of the conflict but I could just see that our cultural ways of addressing conflict just rose! Just rose! Like flames!

So the white women, at least some, became very verbal, very agitated. And the First Nations women...became extremely silent and passive. And these are both things that have been learned by these women, probably at a very early age.

So, to try and, you know, I mean, within that, um, complex dynamic, you sure need something to help you find your way through it! (Laugh) [emphasis in original].

Kim: Uh huh, yeah. And so do you find that the Talking Rock, because it comes from an Aboriginal, a First Nations tradition, that that helps them to break, break the silence more readily?

Sue: Well, I think there's certainly some power in using, in being invited to use a tradition of the minority.

As with the at-risk youth, the use of the Talking Rock affords everyone the opportunity to be heard and requires that others listen, or at least remain silent. Lee used the term "consensus" to describe the outcome of conflict situations. I expressed concerns to Sue and Tara that in intercultural situations between Aboriginal and other Canadian women the historical experience of domination can result in the dominant group mistaking acquiescence for consensus. In a process similar to assimilation, there is a risk that the ways of the dominant group could become accepted as the ways of the group as a whole. Both Sue and Tara agreed that the risk existed but found decisions were resulting in practices that were a combination of cultures and customs. Conflicts were not always resolved but rather the group acknowledged differences and then retained them without judgment. Sue considered the ability to be comfortable in difference a strength:

I don't know that they [conflicts] are resolved and I think that that's really pretty healthy. I think that that dynamic is still pretty much alive. Although as familiarity increases, or friendship increases, or you know, we're together more often, then I think what does mostly happen is the norms or the culture of

99

the majority become, become what is practised...I just want to reiterate that I don't think it is resolved. Although, you know, it shifts. I think the shift in which it goes is to majority culture.

However, "majority culture" does not always have the same connotations in the context of IGU as in general feminist analysis. For example, when the Grandmothers held their anniversary celebration in Lebret and had a Pow Wow and traditional First Nations feast, the customs of the feast, such as accepting all food offered, were followed. In that case the First Nations women were in the majority and their customs were adopted. The outcome of disagreements within the Grandmothers opens for examination some of the power dynamics of the group in its intercultural context and will be further examined in Chapter 5.

Jealousy is a form of conflict that often arises between and among women. Typically, jealousy takes place in the context of competition for men (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1988; Tracy, 1991). This is not an issue for IGU because men are not involved with the organization or its activities. Jealousy can also arise over other women's friendships with other women. Faderman (1998), for example, describes how jealousy arose between close romantic friends in the eighteenth century: "They were jealous of other female friends who impinged on their beloved's time or threatened to carry away a portion of her affections" (p. 84). Closely related to jealousy is envy. While "jealousy arises from a sense of entitlement and real or imagined threats" (Tracy, 1991, p. 282) "envy shows craving" (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1988, p. 99). A combination of jealousy and envy was exhibited by several of the Grandmothers who were not on the PWC. According to Sue, "the Project Working Council has had much more opportunity to develop their relationships. They have...had tremendous number of opportunities to

work together. To do planning and implementation and evaluation of programming."

The close friendships of the PWC members have not gone unnoticed by other Grandmothers. Beatrice, for example, says:

> I'm not friendly with any of them special...I'm not on the executive else I might...You know it wouldn't be so good if we started having friendship between two or three of us. You know, I suppose the executive is pretty friendly between each other because they're always together meeting and things like that. But the rest of us, I mean, being acquaintances, it's not a bad thing.

She draws comparisons between her friendships in the group with the dyadic and triadic friendships of the women on the PWC, which results in reevaluating her friendships as acquaintanceships. When the interview began she told me she was "in it for the friendships" and that she had made friends but then examining her relationships with the group of woman in comparison to a more Western view of smaller friendship pairings she began to wish for more. She created categories of "real friends" and acquaintances and thought, perhaps, the executive members had formed real friendships and she had not. As we discussed further though, she characterized a friend as "somebody I can trust with anything" and then characterized a Grandmother as "somebody you can trust. Who is there for you. [Long pause] Helps and teaches, teaches a lot." When I asked, "And so do you see those characteristics carry over to the Grandmother's group?" she replied:

> Oh, yeah. Yeah, they're there. And we do it too, between each other too. Because we have those workshops, you know about writing and drama and things like that. We teach each other...You know, we just, er, we can talk in those groups and we can say anything we like. And if people are really bothered or something it will come out and it's, it's, we keep it in the group. You know. Or even if you've got the big group together, that is confidential, so. As being <u>real</u>, I suppose in a way we are friends in <u>that</u> way. Because we do say what we like and you know, and accept it. So, uh, yes, I mean, you

know, I suppose (laugh) I didn't think of it that way but, yah, maybe we are friends, you know, as a group [emphasis in original].

Beatrice's ideas of friendship led her to discount her relationships with the larger group and created a desire for and envy of the close friendships she saw demonstrated by the members of the PWC. The opportunity to articulate her thoughts about the characteristics of friendship and her relationships in IGU during our discussion led Beatrice to reevaluate her thoughts on friendship and affirm her initial idea that she had friends within the group. All friendships are not the same and will have their own balance of positive and negative elements but in order to carry on past the negative there usually needs to be some positive aspect that makes it worthwhile.

4.9   Love and Affection

When I think of friends, a level of affection or even love for them is a necessary element. The depth of the affection varies from friendship to friendship and over time within friendships, but there is some level of affection. I find it difficult to conceptualize a friendship without some minimal level of affection for the other person, but some researchers conceptualize friendship in a way that omits affection (Reisman, 1979; Todd, 1980). Reisman (1979), for example, included a friendship of association in his types of friendship that includes little or no affection between the parties, is shallow or superficial and can extend over time or be the beginning or end stage of a more in-depth friendship (pp. 2-24). The use of the term "friendship" in this case demonstrates a limitation in the discourse of relationships, creating the temptation to use "friendship" as a catchall category, a term that can be used indiscriminately when no other term will suffice. This is the difficulty Beatrice struggled with above when she had trouble deciding whether her friendships in IGU were real. I have used the term

"acquaintanceship" rather than "friendship" to describe those relationships that lack affection but are still friendly.

Other researchers often explicitly include the terms "love or affection" in discussions of friendship (Badhwar, 1993; Faderman, 1998; Todd, 1980). While Stern-Gillet (1995) did not use the term affection, she described friendship as containing "reciprocal awareness, intimate communion, and benevolence" (p. 173). The combination of these factors seems to indicate a high level of affection, or even love. They embody a form of caring that I would characterize as affection. Two categories of Todd's (1980) included references to love; her "sentimental friendship" was defined as "a close, effusive tie" and the "erotic friendship" included physical love (pp. 3-4). The use of the words "close" and "effusive" indicates personal connection and a fervent display of affection. These definitions, while including love and affection, either explicitly or implicitly, do not provide much information on what love or affection is considered to be.

A more descriptive definition of love was provided by Mary Hunt in her 1991 book, *Fierce Tenderness,* where she described friendship as "an orientation toward the world as if my friend and I were more united than separated, more at one among the many than separate and alone...Love is the commitment to deepen in unity without losing the uniqueness of the individuals at hand" (p. 100). Hunt's love is a unity without loss of self. Agency is maintained while connection is made; two people come together in friendship, engaging the world together while retaining their individuality. Hunt's language calls to mind the idea of two becoming one in the institution of

marriage and this reflects a history of women's friendships as intense committed loving relationships.

The myth of women's inability to get along is a construction that has acted to keep women apart. In the 1890's to 1900's "love between women was becoming identified with disease, insanity and tragedy" and the label of lesbian was created by a male dominated medical profession as a means of keeping women apart (Faderman, 1998, p. 252). Prior to that time, women in Western culture had a history of intense passionate but primarily non-sexual relationships.

> Since it was once "normal" for women to fall passionately in love with other women, the morbidification of such love (which has been relatively recent) can be seen as a patent attempt that began in the second part of the nineteenth century to minoritize what came to be viewed...as a dangerous feminist threat (Faderman, 1998, p. 19).

Faderman explores a number of historical examples that illuminate the intensity and passion of women's friendship relationships in Western history. Today, the fear of being labeled lesbian remains a powerful societal force limiting women's affections for each other (Faderman, 1998; Lorde, 1988). This is changing as lesbian activists work to counter myths, stereotypes and prejudices, claiming "lesbian" as a positive identity.

The Grandmothers appear relatively free of worries about being labeled as lesbian. Perhaps their definition of a Grandmother as a loving and caring person opens the door for them to act loving to all without concern. Also, many in the group are women-centred women and while none of the Grandmothers self-identified as lesbian, Jean, for example, plainly stated she loved women. Stereotypes of aging and desexualization of the elderly could also contribute to freeing the Grandmothers from stigmas that younger women may face. In Western youth culture, young women are

treated as objects of desire for men and presented primarily through sexual representations. As women age though, popular culture represents them (if they are represented at all) as beings devoid of a sexual identity. This would preclude the consideration of lesbian relationships. Whatever the reason, the lack of concern over the potential labeling allows the Grandmothers to interact freely and passionately. They dance together, share lodgings, mingle naked in the shower rooms, skinny dip and freely exchange physical exchanges of affection such as hugs and kisses.

The Grandmothers cited their physical displays of affection as examples of their friendships' closeness and the love they share for each other. A Euro-Canadian woman also commented on the importance of demonstrations of affection in the development of friendship. Lee says, "when we first met...we shook hands. We never shook hands again. From then on it was always a hug. A hug. And its gone on and on." To Wilma, a First Nations woman, demonstrating affection and caring through hugs was the most important symbol of friendship Euro-Canadian women could offer First Nations women.

> We all shared the friendship we had with one another and all the extra things they [white women] showed us, their friendship and their caring, you know. And when we're leaving we all just embrace each other, you know. And, like for us, you know, for us Native people, for a white lady to hug us, I think that's the most important really. You know, because, you know you just, you know, it's something that draws the Grandmothers together, you know.

The embrace demonstrates a willingness to disregard the conventions of our segregated society and cross the invisible barriers that keep women apart as well as the visible barrier of race that those separations have been constructed upon. Moreover, it shows that the white women embrace the First Nations Grandmothers as equals and eschew stereotypes such as the "dirty Indian" (Anderson, 2000, p. 99). Against such a

backdrop, love and affection among the Grandmothers is a powerful force, treated as a

tangible reflection of friendship. While all the dimensions discussed thus far overlap

and interact, love and affection more than most is the bond that draws the other

dimensions together to create and sustain a friendship.

Love and affection provide a reason to work through conflict, to respect each

other and to continue to support one another.

> Intimacy also requires the giving of affection through words and actions...It means being able to praise, to be nonjudgmental but honest. It means accepting each other totally without trying to change each other. It means being able to tolerate anger and each other's differences (Block & Greenberg, 1985, pp. 76-77).

The embodiment of love and affection is the foundation of the other dimensions of

friendships that the Grandmothers so charismatically display.

4.10   Summary

Friendships among women are complex relationships. Each relationship has its

own dynamics and balance of positive and negative elements. Drawing on the

Grandmothers' experiences, this chapter has used the dimensions of choice, humour,

support, power and economics, equity and respect, agency and activism, conflict and

jealousy, and love and affection as a means of exploring how the Grandmothers speak

about their friendships, social factors that limit or facilitate the development of those

friendships and the perceived impact on the ability to engage in social action. Each

friendship will have its own unique blend of these dimensions and will change over

time and within a friendship, some dimensions may be weak and need strengthening

and others may be strong, but a combination of these dimensions is a strong indicator

that a friendship relationship exists. The Grandmothers of IGU have clearly developed

a variety of friendships that continue to support them in their commitment to making

changes for future generations. I will now examine how these friendships and issues of

identity come together to create change.

Chapter 5

Perspectives on Identity

5.1   Overview

The Grandmothers come together in friendship building bridges on the
foundations of their identities. They use identity descriptors of "Grandmother," "older"
"First Nations," "Metis," "other," "Canadian" and "women." These terms relate to
issues of age, race, culture, nationality, parenthood and gender and clearly ground the
Grandmothers in identity-based standpoints. Furthermore, while the listing of the
descriptors and the use of self-definitions create the appearance of discreet identity
units, the traits are complexly interwoven into the individual women's lives. While
grounding my research in feminist notions of fluid and constructed identities rather than
essentialist and static views, it was important to examine how identity concepts are
developed and how the Grandmothers draw on such identity categories in developing
their friendships. This chapter examines identity issues arising within the context of
IGU.

The identity terminology used by the Grandmothers carries with it layers of
meaning. Terms of commonality, such as "older" and "Grandmothers," are used to
bridge differences in cultural identities while at the same time the cultural identities are
maintained and prioritized as "First Nations, Metis and other." Operating within
broader social ideologies that characterize such categories as mutually exclusive and
segregated, it is paradoxical that the Grandmothers simultaneously occupy a categorical
identity space and highlight the interconnectedness of the categories through their

friendships. Acknowledging and valuing commonalties and difference simultaneously, the Grandmothers celebrate their diversity while bridging differences with those concerns and life experiences they do share. The individuality of each person's experience is respected and learned from, so that while a factor such as age is seen as a commonality, each woman's experience is valued as unique.

The complex interconnections among the various identity categories combined with the paradox presented by the Grandmothers' friendships and self-conceptions have resulted in many insights that I have struggled to translate to the page. At times I have found this portion of my study overwhelming and pondered whether these issues belonged in a separate theoretical piece. But issues of identity are an intricate part of the friendships that the Grandmothers create and the work that they do, as well as how they do it. Therefore, I engage in an analysis of identity issues fully aware that a comprehensive discussion of the processes of crafting selves would have to extend well beyond the scope of this thesis. My comments here are meant to elucidate the dynamics of friendship and they are therefore circumscribed.

It became clear throughout my fieldwork that I was not alone in my struggles with identity issues. There is a real caution among the Grandmothers around use of nonoffensive terminology as they attempted to describe each other and the various cultural groups. The women also come to the group with their own culturally based ideas about what a grandmother is, yet build upon a perceived commonality to create friendships. Competing conceptions of aging also come into play with the varying views of the Grandmothers, the traditions of the First Nations and the ideologies of the dominant culture. Often times the competing ideologies, traditions and personal beliefs

attached to identity can not be delineated into neat categories. While I attempt to structure my analysis around the identity categories that the Grandmothers ascribe to themselves with a focus on race, culture, age and grandmothering, I am continually mindful of the ways in which these categories overlap and inform each other.

5.2 Literature Review

Unfortunately, studies of older women's identity and relationships are limited. A growing body of work on aging is coming from the field of social gerontology, but an androcentric bias limits its applicability to women even though ageism affects women earlier and to a greater degree (Browne, 1998, p. xxii). One of the results of this androcentric bias is the framing of women's lives around their reproductive and relationship roles. In this manner, women are always being constructed as "other" in relation to those they serve. Browne (1998) argued that defining women by their traditional sex-role functions reinforces gender stereotypes and limits women's ability to self-define (p. 204). As a result, care must be taken not to limit women's identity to one identity label or stereotypes about that identity. Nonetheless, relationships are an important consideration as older women shape their relationships, and in turn, their relationships actively shaped their lives (Roberto 1996, p. 3). One of the key relationships is that of mother and child, but the grandmother-grandchild relationship was also found to be important to most women with relationship "norms vary[ing] according to ethnicity, socioeconomic status and familial need" (Kivett, 1996, p. 28) and their degree of involvement dependent upon "whether she works, marital status, education, number of grandchildren, satisfaction with life and the frequency of friendship and community ties" (Robertson, 1980, p. 293).

Robertson classified grandmothers into types based on their roles with their families and the extent to which they derive meaning from those roles in the context of norms or personal experience. The women evaluated grandmothering with a view to their understanding of cultural expectations (norms), their own experiences or a combination of both. The four types of grandmothers are "symbolic," where most meaning is drawn from norms; "individualized," where the pleasure of personal experience is the focus; "apportioned," where there is "a blend of normative and personal meanings;" and "remote," where little meaning is assigned to the role and it is viewed at a distance (Robertson, 1980, pp. 292-293). As with the use of any categories, the assignment of monikers can obscure the diversity of experience within categories. However, in this case, the multiplicity of roles and meanings assigned to grandmotherhood is demonstrated by expanding the category "grandmother" to delineate some differences. Such taxonomy provides insight into the translation of cultural norms about grandmothering and personal experiences into identity, as well as how the Grandmothers of IGU can draw on common meanings and experiences to bond across difference. The acknowledgement that there are different kinds of Grandmothers with different degrees of involvement with their grandchildren and different perceptions of their role is reflected in IGU's broad idea of a grandmother as a "loving and caring person" and creates space for the acceptance of a variety of grandmothers.

In spite of the multiplicity of roles and meanings assigned to grandmotherhood, some researchers express concerns about linking women's identities to a role that focuses on service to others and questions the role of grandmother: "what typically comes to mind when we think of the aging woman is a fulfilled older woman,

surrounded by her loving family. What is not remarked upon is the fact that her

fulfillment has been achieved through perpetual work for others" (Russell in Browne,

1998, p. 205). Barbara Macdonald goes even further to consider the use of the term

grandmother as derogatory: "each time we see such a woman as 'grandmother,' we

dismiss the courage of her independence, we invalidate her freedom. We tell her, in the

face of her own choices, that her real place is in the home" (in Browne, 1993, p. 205).

This opinion is based on aspects of Western, white, feminist theorizing that home and

the private sphere have been devalued so that caring for grandchildren is not respected

by society, thereby leading to a lack of respect for grandmothers. While this may be the

case for some women, treating this perspective as universal ignores the fact that in

many cultures use of the term "grandmother" is a term of the utmost respect.

> In the beginning was thought, and her name was Woman. The Mother, the Grandmother, recognized from earliest times into the present among those peoples of the Americas who kept to the eldest traditions, is celebrated in social structures, architecture, law, custom, and the oral tradition (Allen, 1986, p. 11)

Allen speaks of the power associated with women and the importance accorded

grandmothers in many Aboriginal cultures.

The placement of the term "grandmother" within the domestic sphere also opens

a space to examine the different understandings of domesticity in white Western and

Aboriginal traditions. In the binaries of Western culture, public and private spheres

have been conceptualized as not only separate, but also unequal in value, with the

private sphere considered inferior. Assigning women to the private sphere contributed

to their devaluation and the continuation of men's power over women. In Aboriginal

cultures, though cultures organized the duties of men and women differently, the roles

of men and women, boys and girls were recognized as necessary for survival and therefore valued, with grandmothers' roles being of particular importance. "Raised and educated by their own grandmothers, they [grandmothers] in turn try to counsel their granddaughters and great-granddaughters" (Wolfart, 1998, p. 26). Eleanor Brass (1987) wrote of receiving loving care from elderly Indian women who referred to her as a grandchild, emphasizing the importance of the role of grandmothers (p. 13). In an address to a conference of First Nations women, Armstrong said:

> We find our strength and our power in our ability to be what our grandmothers were to us: keepers of the next generation in every sense of that word – physically, intellectually, and spiritually. We strive to retain our power and interpret it into all aspects of survival on this earth in the midst of chaos (Armstrong, 1996, p. xi).

The connection of grandmothers and power echoes Allen's (1986) emphasis that Aboriginal respect for grandmothers goes beyond the "sentimental respect" demonstrated in North American Mother's Day observances to a belief that the roles are "ritually powerful" (p. 29). Such a view could potentially provide a strong base from which to organize social change. While organizing around grandmotherhood differs from organizing around motherhood, both are closely linked to the idea of a maternal concern for the well being of children. Examples of activism organized around motherhood can provide insight into activism organized around grandmotherhood.

In an American example, Pardo (1990) found that organizing around motherhood could be effective (1990) while Fiske (1993), in discussing the organizing of Canadian Aboriginal women around motherhood, found that "the discourse of motherhood captures an essentialist cultural view that simultaneously denies time while evoking traditional foundations of respect. Mothers are the past, present and future of

113

the Nation" (p. 31). Yet, she found that organizing around a discourse of motherhood

did not alter the political reality of Aboriginal women, (Fiske, 1993, p. 32) perhaps

supporting critiques of maternal feminism that organizing on the basis of motherhood

acts to reinscribe the role. Nonetheless, the conception of women, and particularly

grandmothers, as powerful and engaged in valuable work contributed to a more

egalitarian society in many of the pre-contact Aboriginal cultures.

Unfortunately, one of the strategies and effects of colonization was to

dramatically alter the power of women by imposing Western stereotypes of weakness

and devaluation. These expectations were informed by prevailing stereotypes of sexist

and racist logic so that while both British and Aboriginal women were characterized as

weaker and of less value than men, Aboriginal women were characterized as "immoral

and sinister" (Carter, 1997) and "slovenly" and "lazy" (Carter, 1996). The clash of

these two cultural ideas creates identity difficulties for Aboriginal women of today.

> Modern American Indian women, like their non-Indian sisters, are deeply
> engaged in the struggle to redefine themselves. In their struggle they must
> reconcile traditional tribal definitions of women with industrial and
> postindustrial non-Indian definitions. Yet while these definitions seem to be
> more or less mutually exclusive, Indian women must somehow harmonize and
> integrate both in their own lives (Allen, 1986, p. 43).

Difficulties creating an identity from such disparate characteristics can result in

contradictory and self-destructive behaviour in Aboriginal women as expectations of

Aboriginal and colonial cultures clash. The contradictory expectations are further

exacerbated by a different understanding of the individual or self: "An American Indian

woman is primarily defined by her tribal identity. In her eyes, her destiny is necessarily

that of her people, and her sense of herself as a woman is first and foremost prescribed

by her tribe" (Allen, 1986, p. 43). Geraldine Dickson (2000) believed Aboriginal

prioritization of community over self was the reason Aboriginal grandmothers in her research were more comfortable acting as a group rather than being singled out individually (204).

The attempt to live with both Aboriginal and Western norms is often described as "walking in two worlds," a phrase Eleanor Brass (1987) used to title her book. While both men and women experience this difficulty, complicating the contradiction between traditional values and Western stereotypes is the contradiction between the expectations for women in the different cultures. In considering the issue of negotiating cultural contradictions, Kim Anderson (2000) presented a "theory of identity formation" proposing "that Native women engage in a process of self-definition that includes four steps: *resist, reclaim, construct and act* [emphasis in original]" (p. 15). Anderson (2000) has developed a complex and distinctly Aboriginal way of identity reconstruction that connects past, present and future and involves "resisting negative definitions of being; reclaiming Aboriginal tradition; constructing a positive identity by translating tradition into the contemporary context; and acting on that identity in a way that nourishes the overall wellbeing of..." the community (p. 15). Such complex identity issues make intercultural friendships difficult. Perhaps this is why intercultural friendships are often ignored or glossed over in friendship literature; they require a different level of analysis that involves deconstructing the cultural bases of the various actors.

A recent review of friendship literature located a few studies supporting the conclusion that there are cultural differences in friendships; however, it is difficult to consider the cultural components because "cross-cultural comparisons of friendship are

rare in the social science literature" (Fehr, 1996, p. 118). Moreover, those studies that did include a cultural dimension focused on relationships between people of the same culture rather than intercultural relationships. An analysis of intercultural female friendship is explicitly excluded from a recent publication about female friendship. Even though Apter and Josselson (1998) spoke to women of different races and classes in three countries they did "not investigate differences that may be culturally based" (xi). They purposely focused on "commonalties across cultural divides. We try to represent experiences that seem universal, even though we recognize that we skim over interesting questions about differences" (Apter & Josselson, 1998, xi).

Ignoring or "skimming over" cultural differences creates the idea that intercultural friendships do not exist or are unimportant and this, in turn, reinforces the idea of homophily that was discussed in Chapter 4 while leaving it unexamined. Regarding homophily as natural or a fact of friendship can obscure the social and cultural factors that create this behaviour and act to keep people separate from those categorized as other to themselves. Theorizing about such factors is limited in the context of friendship but two basic explanatory theories exit. One is that individuals seek friends who confirm their perceived identity (Robinson, 1996) and the other is that "societal forces frequently restrict friendship opportunities to individuals who resemble one another" (Hartup, 1993, p. 14).

In his work with youths in London, England, Hewitt (1986) found that the norms and ideologies of the larger social environment acted to either prevent the formation of interracial friendships or to bring existing friendships to an end. Racism is "able to intervene in friendships not only as a set of linked ideas, practices and symbolic

forms but as a fact about society" and results in the prevention of interracial friendship

formation and a discontinuance of those interracial friendships that do manage to begin

(Hewitt, 1986, p. 236). Similarly, a study of intercultural relationships in an interracial

retirement home found that in spite of socio-economic similarity, racist notions

intervened to prevent the development of, and even to end, long-established interracial

friendships (Quadagno, Kuhar and Peterson, 1980, p. 225). "Close friendships are

discouraged and social pressures are brought to bear on those who attempt to maintain

them" (Quadagno et al., 1980, p. 235). The "social pressures" included harassment

from both races but white people were more preoccupied with racist concerns

(Quadagno et al., pp. 235-236). A 1944 study by Myrdal found that American whites

favoured barriers and prohibitions against engaging in "personal relations" with people

of other races with the most important being the prevention of "intermarriage and

sexual intercourse involving white women" followed by "dancing, bathing, eating,

drinking together, and social intercourse generally" (in Quadagno et al., pp. 224-225).

A perceived need for barriers and prohibitions indicates that some people engaged in, or

at the very least, considered engaging in, interracial friendships. Nonetheless, the

systemic racism that acts to sustain oppressive hierarchies in Western cultures is

brought to bear at the level of individuals' interpersonal relationships. Clearly,

intercultural friendships are an important phenomenon that could provide insights into

the impact of cultural forces on the individual.

Friendships of all kinds are part of our identities and self-concepts, and are

often characterized as the reflection of self in another (Aristotle, 1975; Raymond,

1986). It may be more difficult to identify another self in those that have been socially

117

constructed as "other." Judith Butler (1990) examines the interaction between social

construction and the development of identity and how this in turn influences our ability

to effect social change. "The domains of political and linguistic 'representation' set out

in advance the criterion by which subjects themselves are formed, with the result that

representation is extended only to what can be acknowledged as a subject" (Butler,

1990, p. 1). The ability of women to form friendships with other women is influenced

by criteria that construct notions of women and race. Everybody is born into a

particular place, time and culture, and each culture has a system of markers or symbols

that allows that person to organize the world into something understandable. Such

symbols give individuals "intelligibility" or the ability to be understood and identified

by others with whom they interact (Butler, 1993). The symbols of representation

influence the construction of self-identity as well as whom we recognize as similar to

ourselves and, therefore, belonging, and whom we see as "others" and, therefore, not

belonging. Constructions of difference or cultural symbols that are mutually exclusive

make the development of identity a struggle for those, such as Aboriginal people, who

must function in both systems. Furthermore, a lack of cross-cultural understanding

impairs intelligibility and prevents the development of friendships.

Women regarded as white women and racialized women have been socialized to

believe that they are fundamentally different and separate, and therefore when women

of different races meet "we clash, coming to each other with our mythologies and the

different meanings of our actual experience" (Bernikow, 1980, p. 262). The dominant

Western representations that influence the crafting of selves and social identities "may

be historically and culturally created fictions [but they can]...come to have

psychological reality if they are institutionalized by the dominant culture" (Bem, 1993, p. 175). The impact of institutional structures on our identitities and relationships is critical as "there is little chance of disturbing relations of domination unless we consider how they structure our subject positions" (Razack, 1998, p. 170).

While there are as many, if not more, manifestations of identity as there are individuals, cultural factors can be considered to create similarities in the development of a sense of self. For example, Backhouse (1999) described how Give-Away ceremonies reflected an Aboriginal worldview of cooperation and kinship, and Klein (1983) posited that the collectivity of Plains hunting and distribution methods institutionalized an egalitarian social structure. Without implying that all Aboriginal people are raised in this worldview, it can be considered likely that those who were raised in such a worldview would retain elements of these ideals in their identity while at the same time struggling with the institutionalized and European messages of individual gain and competition.

Similarly, Canadians considered white are raised within a fictionalized worldview that tells them that they are not racist but in fact help others, particularly women who, in Inderpal Grewal's view, are promoted as the "saviour of less fortunate women" (cited in Razack, 1998, p. 5). We are a culmination of such ideas and ideologies and bring them with us into any friendship we attempt to form. A dominant group identity built upon ideas of benevolence and innocence regarding racism can create difficulties when forming intercultural relationships. Concerns about racism may be met with guilt, denial or even anger as complaints clash with a self-concept of nonracism and benevolence (Bishop, 1994). It is only when the dominant group is open

to really hearing what is being said and willing to accept responsibility in maintaining systems of oppression without guilt and denial, that intercultural barriers can truly be overcome.

Speaking to the issue of guilt, Razack (1995) explored bell hooks' idea that "the desire to make contact with those bodies deemed other, with no apparent will to dominate, assuages the guilt of the past, even takes the form of a defiant gesture where one denies accountability and historical connections" (p. 5). Razack (1998) characterized "encounters between dominant and subordinate groups as moments marked by ambivalence, desire, and the performance of domination" and is concerned that a lack of intention to dominate may obscure the domination that is an inevitable feature of intercultural relationships in a hierarchical society (p. 7). The "cultural difference approach," in Razack's (1998) opinion, falsely claims that once we understand each other's cultural rules we can proceed from a position of equality and this approach overlooks societal structures and our roles in reproducing them, rendering power relations invisible and maintaining dominant cultural norms (pp. 8-10). Razack (1998) challenged the "position of innocence" asking everyone to be accountable in "a process that begins with a recognition that we are each implicated in systems of oppression that profoundly structure our understanding of one another. That is, we come to know and perform ourselves in ways that reproduce social heirarchies" (p. 10). It is this complex interplay of identity already formed yet constantly in formation that I wish to examine in the context of the Grandmothers' intercultural friendships.

The women participating in my study identify as friends and intercultural grandmothers. The friendships they form occur within preexisting constructions of

cultural selves and power structures, all of which influence what it means to be a grandmother. Yet, their development of friendships across cultures destabilizes existing subjective categories and makes clear their interrelatedness. Working with IGU provides the opportunity to bring into focus the complex intersections of gender, age, race and family affiliation and to examine how these are produced and reproduced in each woman's life and her relationships.

5.3   Implicit Segregation: Separate Lives

The metaphor the Grandmothers use when they describe their mandate as "building bridges" brings to mind two separate entities that are not connected. Similar sentiments are expressed in the name of their "parallel lives" project. The impact of living along this divide became evident when I was analyzing the Grandmothers' narratives and writing about the research findings. A pattern emerged wherein the Euro-Canadian Grandmothers saw many things differently from the Aboriginal Grandmothers. One example of differing perspectives is the perceived benefits of belonging to IGU. Although both groups of women cited learning as a benefit of IGU, to many of the Aboriginal Grandmothers this learning related to items such as literacy and parenting. This reflects the legacy of residential schooling, which taught many of the Aboriginal Grandmothers domestic skills rather than academic skills like reading and separated children from their parents so that parenting skills could not be passed on. On the other hand, many of the Euro-Canadian women spoke of learning about First Nations traditions and the realities of living as an Aboriginal woman in Saskatchewan. Coming to IGU via markedly different paths has resulted in different needs and priorities.

During the Closing Circle at the gathering I attended, one of the Grandmothers shared a poem she had written which described our world as "segregated." This reflects the situation in Saskatchewan where in many instances Aboriginal and other Canadians live in separate realities. Recalling Saskatchewan in 1922, Eleanor Brass (1987) remembered that: "at that time the white people didn't understand the Indian people very well; neither did the Indian people understand the whites, this was probably the cause of many of my problems" (p. 33). Brass lived in the File Hills area, the home of some of my project participants, and while she considered "both the reserve and the white district" part of her broader community, she called the nearby white settlement of Balcarrres "stuck-up." She explained that "we very seldom socialized with the whites and the few that did speak to us made sure that nobody else from the town saw them doing it" (Brass, 1987, p. 38). She contrasted this to the settlement of Abernethy where the white people "were sympathetic towards the Indian people and treated us as equals. We were always put in the same room as their company and didn't have to sit in the kitchen" (Brass, 1987, p. 38). The groups generally led separate lives with the white group having the power to dominate the Aboriginal group to the point of nonacknowledgement or segregation into the kitchen. While Brass also offers hope through the example of the people of Abernethy, it is still clear that the settlers had the ability to choose to dominate.

It is important to realize that separations, such as the ones between File Hills and Balcarres, are neither accidental nor the work of a few prejudiced people, but rather the result of a concerted government effort that results in structural racism and is perceived

by many as being inescapable. Colonial governments saw advantages in keeping the races separate (Carter, 1997) and enshrined their racist ideas into law:

> Legislators and judges working in combination nipped, kneaded, and squeezed artificial [racial] classifications into rigid, congealed definitions of race under Canadian law. They jointly erected hierarchies of racial groupings and delineated segregated boundaries based on race...It is essential to recognize that racism is located in the systems and structures that girded the legal system of Canada's past. Racism is not primarily manifest in isolated, idiosyncratic, and haphazard acts by individual actors who, from time to time, consciously intended to assert racial hierarchy over others. The roots of racialization run far deeper than individualized, intentional activities. Racism resonates through institutions, intellectual theory, popular culture, and law (Backhouse, 1999, p. 15).

Race, while an artificial and socially constructed category based on physical manifestations, was converted, through law, into limitations on freedoms. The colonization project assigned "immutable behavioural traits which suited different people for different roles" to physical characteristics and thus was the modern day conception of race produced (Walker, 1997, p. 13). This allowed the Europeans to blame the colonized for the actions of the colonizers and maintain the view of a benevolent civilizer.

In spite of the limitations imposed by colonial rule, the First Nations people continued to resist and were proving themselves equal to their settler neighbours in areas such as agriculture, thereby rupturing the imperialist construction of inferiority upon which the oppressive system was based. Unfortunately, success was met with swift and heavy-handed legal responses meant to further limit Aboriginal opportunity. The history of mistreatment by whites means that most Aboriginal people are "reared in an anglophobic world that views white society with fear and hostility" and feel "fear of and bitterness toward whites" (Allen, 1986, p. 224). This fear can keep Aboriginal

people from associating with white people as much as possible. However, Aboriginal

people are forced to interact with white social institutions and therefore they have to

develop skills that allow them to navigate in this hostile cultural territory. The choices

about where, how and even whether to "build bridges" and challenge this segregation is

different for the dominant white and marginalized Aboriginal peoples. For example,

very few Euro-Canadian people I have met have ever been to an Indian reserve;

however, virtually all Aboriginal people I have met have been to a primarily white

settlement. Similarly, all First Nations Grandmothers in my study had experience with

the European culture and endured some form of a forced acculturation through

schooling while most of the Euro-Canadian Grandmothers had no exposure to

Aboriginal cultures prior to their involvement with IGU.

Echoing many of the stories told to Constance Deiter (1999), Wilma described

her experience at residential school:

> So anyway, my culture, I really, uh, I think I really started learning my culture
> after I left school...Because we lost all. We weren't supposed to do it. We
> didn't speak our language or, or, we had to forget everything and start a new
> life altogether. Learn the white, the white way, I guess. In the white society.

Wilma and others had no choice but to learn about Euro-Canadian culture, at the same

time they were forcibly denied access to their culture and that of their ancestors.

Furthermore, while they were being forcibly introduced to a foreign culture many were

enduring further physical, emotional or sexual abuse administered by representatives of

Euro-Canadian society. It is little wonder that many Aboriginal people approach white

people with fear and caution. When Brass (1987) claimed "an Indian possesses a keen

sense of detection and can readily see through attitudes (p. 69), she was not necessarily

describing an innate characteristic but rather a survival tactic that could mean the

difference between safety and danger when dealing with a dominant colonial culture. One of the Euro-Canadian Grandmothers, Eleanor, noticed this ability and commented on it during our interview:

> If you get one to one with those [Aboriginal] ladies, they have, they're so perceptive, I think, their intuition tells them whether or not we're open to accept them as they <u>are</u>. Knowing you're not always putting them <u>down</u>, in that <u>native</u> category. You accept them as a person, and I try very hard to make sure that's, that's the message they're getting [emphasis in original].

I was hesitant to use this quote out of the context of my interview with Eleanor as it could be read as considering the "native category" as negative. However, in the context of my interview with Eleanor I believe she is saying that "native" has been inappropriately treated as "down" or lesser than the concomitant white category as a result of prevailing stereotypes. Eleanor views this as inaccurate as she sees everyone as equal; she is therefore refusing to accept the assignments that dominant society tells her are associated with identity categories.

While racial and cultural segregation is the main focus of the Grandmothers, Tara drew my attention to a variety of segregations including segregation "between those who have adequate income and those who have less than adequate income. Um, it's between people who...have had lifelong security and people who have had lifelong insecurity." The Grandmothers have used their friendship to bridge the gap created by differing economic circumstances to ensure a lack of financial resources does not prevent women from becoming involved in either the PWC or gatherings. Tara spoke of "creative" solution to an administrative policy that was causing problems for some of the Grandmothers. PWC meetings are held at PCTC in Fort Qu'Appelle and this requires Grandmothers to travel from nearby reserves and Regina. The Grandmothers

are reimbursed for the expenses of this travel through the University of Regina accounting system. However, the reimbursement system is based on the assumption that people can economically afford to make a cash outlay, complete an expense form and wait for the money:

> and for some of the women that were coming to Grandmothers' gatherings, that wasn't an option...One reason might be that they just didn't have money to sustain them for that next five days if they had to wait. Another was that with literacy...difficulties, sending in an expense form is not an eas[y thing]...[it] is an extra step...and also not being used to...that sort of paper trail...[and] one of the realities of our world is that if you're poor, banks won't cash your cheque.

The classist economic assumptions underlying the policy did not take into account the circumstances of many of the Grandmothers.

In addition to different economic circumstances among the Grandmothers there was a difference between IGU values and the University of Regina administrative systems. The administrative system was built on the assumption of affluence that did not hold true for many of the Grandmothers. The system would have worked for those Grandmothers who could afford to wait for their money, were familiar with expense forms and had cheque-cashing privileges but the Grandmothers "stood in solidarity and said, 'If this is something that my sister needs, then it has to be the same for me too." Tara remembers one of the more affluent Grandmother saying "this is not working. If it's not working for Joyce or Katie or Pat, it is not working for any of us!" [emphasis in original]. Tara credits this solidarity, the Grandmothers persistent efforts such as letter writing campaigns and "a big step of trust" on the part of the University for resulting in a change in policy that provided IGU with a petty cash fund allowing for immediate reimbursement in cash. The Grandmothers drew attention to the classist assumptions

underlying the administrative reimbursement policy and worked for structural change that would meet the needs of all the members of their group. It is in this way that bridges are built. Conversely, refusing to reconsider stereotypes and myths can prevent the formation of friendships.

We saw in the example of Adele in Chapter 4 that holding onto differences of power and preconceived notions of others can limit the ability to develop friendships. While Adele proved to be the exception in this study, her case is nonetheless illustrative of how perceptions of, and attitudes toward, cultural differences can act to retain barriers to friendship. Adele immigrated to Canada and retains to this day very rigid ideas about what constitutes proper culture and exactly what it means to be civilized. Such civility, in Adele's opinion, is the result of heredity "there is something in the DNA that is, that they are better than the other ones. Better, what can I say, you know what better they are. They are more honest, more civilized." Furthermore, Adele asserts that such civility cannot be acquired through training or education. This civility, or the ability to be "cultured" rather than just have a culture, is displayed through proper attitudes and actions. Adele insists these are natural characteristics, but, contradictorily, she also assigns success or failure in cultivating them to mothers and what they teach their children. The connection to biology is maintained by the assertion that proper mothers know instinctively the proper things to teach.

Adele has a notion of friendship rooted in her cultural understanding of social relations and she measures her interactions with Canadian women against her complete arsenal of requirements. For example, Adele has been taught that proper women demonstrate friendship by exchanging Christmas cards. She intended to send out cards

to the Grandmothers but found the address list incomplete and the women she

approached were unconcerned or "elusive" about a card exchange. Adele made several

assumptions including that everyone could afford to purchase and mail cards, that

everyone is Christian and celebrated Christmas and also that others would agree with

her that it is important for friends to exchange cards. Adele took other women's lack of

interest in a card exchange as proof that they were less civilized than she was rather

than as a point of difference. For Adele, any difference from her way of doing things is

wrong. In this way, Adele works to retain socially constructed barriers between herself

and others, seeing others as opposite and less than she. Thus, it is not surprising when

she relates that she has made no friends in Canada. Fortunately, Adele is the exception

in IGU. Where she stubbornly preserves her exclusionary notions, others draw on

understanding and respect to see other women as equals and work to build bridges

across differences.

5.4   Building Bridges

Everything in which the Grandmothers engage is working toward the common

goal of building bridges. The conceptualization of this process acknowledges that work

needs to be done to bridge the gaps and cross the barriers that have been historically

erected between cultural groups and between individuals within those groups. A review

of the literature has revealed that it can be very difficult for individuals to cross these

boundaries in a sustained, or sustainable, way. However, what I argue here is that the

Grandmothers provide a venue for such sustainable relationships to develop through

IGU and their commitment to friendship and advocacy-based friendship. The

atmosphere of friendship characterized by the dimensions examined in Chapter 4 such

as support, equity and love creates a safe environment where women may explore the possibilities of intercultural friendship. IGU also provides the guidance and a framework for moving into previously uncharted relationship territory. Contrary to concerns that understanding difference obscures structural systems of domination, as suggested by scholars such as Razack (1998), the example of IGU indicates that this kind of organization may in fact expose these hierarchical structures that were previously unacknowledged or viewed as accidental or natural. Tara explained how the exchange of knowledge and understanding in friendship bridges gaps socially constructed as permanent:

> When someone who, who thinks of herself as poor realizes that she knows things that someone who she thinks of as rich ... had never figured out yet. Or when someone who is white realizes that there's a tradition and a richness in the traditions and culture and so on of a woman that she's meeting that she hadn't even imagined. Those are, those are where those bridges are built.

The Grandmothers learn about their individual and cultural differences and in so doing learn to value things about themselves and others. Within the context of IGU, a woman living in poverty may begin to see that societal messages about her worth and knowledge are incorrect and that she does, in fact, hold a kind of knowledge that those who are more affluent do not. Similarly, within this context of friendship and trust, a Euro-Canadian woman may learn that Aboriginal cultures are rich and diverse and that the European settlement project was far from benevolent as it forcibly displaced people who already had well developed social systems. Dominant ideologies become displaced as the group confronts Eurocentrism and recognizes that the Eurocentric stereotypes of glorified "Imaginary Indians" (Francis, 1992) or "savages" do not reflect the character of these enduring cultural traditions. Exposure to each other as individuals

and as agents of cultural difference in a respectful, safe and guided environment allows the Grandmothers to recognize their commonalties at the same time they learn about their differences.

There is much to learn about identity from the Grandmothers whom I interviewed. Feminist standpoint theory, postmodernism and issues of a unified or multiple identity were illuminated by insights from the Grandmothers even though none of them talk in these theoretical terms or even refer to themselves as feminists. The Grandmothers demonstrate how issues are integrated and should be theorized as such. Most of the Grandmothers, except for Adele, see each other as being both the same and different. Wilma had been telling me how much she enjoyed meeting women from other reserves and previous classmates at the Grandmothers' gatherings and I asked:

> And how do you feel about meeting the white women at the gathering and getting to know them?
>
> I think that there's no difference really. You know. We're all the same only we're you know, different. Like they're white and we're Natives and they're all different nationality themselves, you know? There I think, it's the friendliness, you know. And willing to share, you know.

Wilma found that people have much in common, but at the same time, there is no monolithic white identity just as there is no monolithic Aboriginal identity. She drew an analogy between differences among Aboriginal women from various First Nations and differences among white women from various European nations. She sees a variety of cultures and customs shared by people who are, in turn, willing share with one another.

It is the willingness to reach across those differences that Wilma values. Mary, expressed similar sentiments:

130

And the Grandmothers, too, its very open, you feel very much at ease. Although they're...I'll call them 'white,' uh? Yeah whites. Yeah, we all, it's, I learn we all have the same [pause] same feelings no matter what nationality you are the Grandmothers go through the same things, exactly the same things. We go through the hardships. We go through, we're stronger for it. And we're able to give love, like to our [pause], our children, our grandchildren...

Yeah, and I've learned a lot from the Grandmothers. They've taught me a lot. They've taught me that, uh, I always thought they were much better than us, like. Native, I'll call them Natives. But then I see we all go through the same, the same thing. Sometimes it's a vicious circle, and sometimes it's not so vicious. And same with us. There are some of us who haven't been through the hard cycle and some ... very exposed to violence...but it's not all of us. And I find it's the same thing with uh, with uh, other Grandmothers.

That same love, we still love the same, everything is the same. We're all humans. As my <u>great</u>-granddaughter would put it... [at] nine years old. When she sees the differences, you know. Like sometimes in the [settler] community [near the reserve] here we don't get along, yeah? And she always says, 'Why? We're all human!" [emphasis in original].

Calling upon a common humanity as a base for respecting differences and living with one another as the way for proper relations is something that Mary's great-granddaughter, no doubt influenced by Mary's views, already sees at age nine. Unfortunately, this young girl is already experiencing racism in the community and struggling with being labeled as different, "other" and lesser. Mary had been taught in residential school that "whites" and their ways were better and she believed that Euro-Canadian people had no problems. Her experiences with the Grandmothers have shown her that Euro-Canadian people are not better and that many Grandmothers of all races and from all cultures have experienced life struggles. She in no way takes this as diminishing or minimizing the suffering of First Nations people under colonialism but rather as evidence that what she has been told about the superiority of Euro-Canadian culture is a fiction or a falsehood.

Sue also believes women can come together across differences. For her, differences are an intrinsic part of our identities, reflecting who we are not just how we do things, and naming and accepting differences is important to developing friendships:

> We have very different ways of being around all kinds of things. And neither way [pause] I think the most important thing is to really suspend judgement. And one of the things that served us very well in terms of building network, building community, building the relationships, friendships...naming. So from my feminist perspective (and I operate very much from a feminist ideology) an important piece of building community is to name what experience is [emphasis in original].

To Sue and the Grandmothers, community and friendship involves rejecting the belief that everyone be the same and accepting that each is of equal value in their difference. In refusing to judge or rank the cultural differences before us, we refuse to judge or rank the person, thereby avoiding the creation of "other." At the same time, in acknowledging the differences, we accept the individual as separate and unique, refusing to insist that she must be another self in order to be our friend. Tara believes that acknowledging differences while recognizing a common humanity bridges the gap between self and other, changing the conception of other in the process: "the bridges come when people can see and hear and know that they are understood by someone who they thought was other than them." In this way, the Grandmothers expose the false dichotomy between categories of self and other, opening the door to new forms of identity construction. This is not to say, however, that the Grandmothers do not struggle with labels of identity, for, as I will now discuss, they do.

IGU is described as a group for "First Nation, Metis and other Canadian women." However, it became clear during interviews that women were uncertain how to properly refer to each other in a racialized context. There was often a pause while a

Grandmother selected the term she would use to describe a racial group. Often they

would ask, either directly or with an "uh?" if I was comfortable with the term they

chose. Sometimes it seemed as if the Grandmothers were using one term for lack of a

better one, as Mary did when she said, "I'll call them whites, *uh?*" Lee informed me

that the group struggled with terminology from the beginning and the label "other

Canadian women" was hard to decide upon. The PWC wanted to prioritize the

Aboriginal people as a direct statement against the dominant culture but could not agree

on how to refer to the "other" women.

> Yeah, we get lost in terminology, don't we? We sure do. And unfortunately, I
> guess when we first went in there they were calling us, 'non-Native' and I
> objected to it. I said, 'I was non-Catholic, I was non-French' [pause] and I was
> a non-Everything, you know over my lifetime, and I said, 'this has got to be
> positive and that's why we make it 'other Canadian women' [in unison].
> Mhm. Because I objected to that [use of 'non'].

The group did not want to use "white" because it wanted to be open to all races and the

initial choice by Sue of non-Native seemed to be an attempt to invert the oft used non-

white. However, Lee, who grew up a Protestant and English minority in Montreal, felt

that her identity was being negated yet again. Often, there is a tendency for those of the

dominant group to see themselves and their identities as neutral or a baseline from

which "others" are then defined. Use of the term "other" to apply to those women not

of First Nations or Metis descent inverts socially constructed hierarchies by recasting

those of privilege as "the other." In the case of IGU, the privileged are defined with

reference to the colonized; subject and object are inverted. However, by avoiding use

of the prefix "non," those grouped as "other" are not negated and remain part of the

overall category of "Canadian women" and all remain subjects. Furthermore, the

ordering encompasses First Nations and Metis women within the category "Canadian

women," placing further emphasis on diversity of experiences within the identity of Canadian women. However, despite the IGU's intentions at inclusion, the Grandmothers that would fit into the "other" category tend to be Euro-Canadian.

IGU has held workshops on racism and has examined white privilege and colonial history, but, it seems, issues of immigration and a further deconstruction of whiteness and the multiple understandings of it are lacking. Lee and I discussed the diversity of the group during our interview:

> Well, we have, Laverne is Metis. We've had, uh, we've had them from, we've had them from Greek background, we've had them from other colours too. But the stress seems to be on the Native Indian and the white community. But everybody's welcome. We don't, you don't see so many of [women of colour], maybe I shouldn't say that because they are in the inner city.

Lee seemed slightly flustered by the direction her response was taking and quickly changed the topic. The focus of the Grandmothers has been how well they are doing to foster intercultural relationships, yet the possibility became apparent to Lee that the group could be excluding people of colour who were not native as well as limiting access to Metis women. Lee then resorted to the defensive responses of "everybody's welcome," which ignores the structures that prevent people from joining or returning, and 'you don't see so many,' which is meant to absolve group by minimizing the number of people excluded.

There also seemed to be confusion about what "other Canadian women" might mean, especially around the notion of whiteness. In reviewing our transcript, Lee added these words to this section: "we've had ladies from Germany, and other European countries from Iceland and a few who have spoken French. They are all Intercultural Grandmothers as are the Natives and <u>whites</u>. Some Europeans ≠ whites!" [emphasis in

original]. Lee seems to have an imperialist definition of white that goes beyond pigmentation to culture in a manner similar to early colonial times in Canada when white was equated with British and other "suitable" cultures and uses her conception to portray the category of "other" as broader than "white." Certainly, the women of European heritage consider themselves white and the Aboriginal women regard them as such. Thus the further complexities of race and intercultural friendship are revealed.

Lee fails to interrogate why women of colour do not return to the group and why there is limited involvement by Metis women, and she is not alone. While the "other Canadian women" are from a variety of cultural backgrounds this may obscure the fact that they are various shades of white. Further work could be done to examine whether the discursive construction of "other Canadian women" is flexible enough to allow women from cultures not based in Europe and whether simply listing Metis creates an inclusive space. The inversion of dominance that occurs when white women are included in the "other" category does not hold true for women of colour who are constructed as other throughout the discourse of Euro-Canadian culture. Perhaps inclusion in the category "other" acts to create a space that is neither affirming nor safe for non-Aboriginal women of colour. I attempted, through the coordinator, to make contact with previous members no longer attending the group in order to explore this issue further, but this was not possible. For now, the women draw together around their shared identity as grandmothers.

Claiming the identity of a grandmother enables the women of IGU to bridge their differences. During our interview, Mary told me the being a Grandmother is "like its no, its no, uh, nationality, you know. You are a Grandmother, you're a

135

Grandmother. You know! You all have something in common." The Grandmothers

describe anyone who is a "loving and caring person" as a grandmother. In our

interviews I asked each woman to describe a Grandmother. A selection of their

responses follows:

> **Lee** - Probably a, now this is general, I'd say a Grandmother is probably someone who, whose body is telling you that she's getting older (laugh). Plus the fact that she's had a lot of experience in life and is willing to share it...And children love grandmothers. They love grandparents, and of course I know the reason...And my own children (chuckle) say, "we have to get them away from you before you spoil them!" Actually, you don't, you're just not on their back all the time (laugh).

> **Wilma** - A grandma. A grandma to me, is a most important person. Other than, besides your mother. Because, to me, she meant so much and she taught me so much. And she was always there for me. [long pause] And uh, I'd give the world to have her, but I can't. Yeah. She was the most wonderful person I've ever known. And she brought up, she raised up a lot of children, my grandmother. Children that were homeless, you know. Even before that, I think that's, like with us Native people, that's why most of us grandparents have got their grandchildren. Because we don't want 'em [raised by strangers]. They're our responsibility you know and they are family and we'd sooner have 'em with us.

> **Adele** – [My grandmother] taught me with proverbs...As a grandmother. Well, I try to do my best to do what I was taught when I was young. Either from my grandmother, who is still my grandmother, that I tried to my grandchildren. Sometimes my daughter doesn't like it very much. Well, what did my grandmother tell me? The most important time was when I didn't go to school yet and I was little and amazingly I soaked it all up like a sponge? Perhaps we all do. And well, little things, about cooking. That's how I remember how to cook...I taught this to my little granddaughter...how children are, she noticed that her mother was not doing that [shared laughter] and then she said, 'oh, grandma's doing this and this, why don't you do that?' You know? And ah, that caused some problems with that I knew that.

> **Eleanor** - Well, I'm not the kind of grandmother that I wish I'd a had. Because of the physical distances and family differences. Well maybe the first or second one but after there got to be too, too many, like my son had 5 boys and we didn't have that relationship that I would have wished for.

I failed grandmotherhood I guess it's the way to say it

Kim – That's how you feel?

Eleanor – Yep. That's hard but I really feel like I missed an awful lot. And the relationship just isn't there.

Kim – Hm. And that again, a lack of time at the time and now distance, I imagine, if they live in BC.

Eleanor – Yes. That's a real loss. It's particularly touching when you're in groups, at Church there are grandmothers there and the kids are running all over them. It's almost hurtful except you have to accept what is.

Kim – So then how do you feel …with the Grandmothers, with being a grandmother as the common bond?

Eleanor – Well, I hear the Aboriginal grandmothers telling their stories about the kids and the grandkids and they always tell them like they're having real fun. (Laugh) You know? And that's good to see; that's good to know. That no matter what you've missed, or what I've personally missed but ah, I think it's good for society.

Ursula – A grandmother is a very important person to be with. I was raised up by my grandmother, my other grandmother [not the one who belongs to IGU] like. My dad's mother. I was raised up by her. Partly with my mother and dad. So a grandmother is a very important thing in this world. Yep. Just like we learn a lot from them, like eh? I guess that's how come now I've got grandchildren! [Laughs]

Kim – [Laughs] I was going to say, "now you're doing that for your grandchildren."

Ursula – Yeah, my grandchildren.

Kim – So, what kind of things do you teach your grandchildren?

Ursula – Well, to be respectful of people. Have respect and listening to somebody that talks to them and all that. To learn a little more about themselves. A lot of things I say to them. I talk to them and tell 'em what I was doing and all that, with meetings. When I come home I always talk to them, you know, about it.

Katie - All grandmothers are good

The Grandmothers usually described a grandmother in terms of their own experience

both as a grandchild and as a grandmother, presenting as what Robertson (1980) would

call an "individualized" grandmother. While Eleanor reflected aspects of the

"apportioned" grandmother category when she expressed her regrets that her experience

differed from ideals of grandmotherhood, she still focused primarily on her experiences

and based her ideal on observations of other grandmothers rather than on a general concept "grandmother." For these women, the identity "grandmother" is grounded in their role as grandmothers today and continually influenced by their memories of their past identity as "grandchild."

As Lee's conception illustrates grandmothering and aging are often conflated, further grounding identities in their corporeal realities. Even though the descriptor, "older," is included in IGU's self-description, age was not mentioned as frequently in interviews as I had expected. Nonetheless, age was a component of the women's self-conceptions and their interactions. Aging was often raised in the context of either physical change, such as decreased mobility and energy, or increased wisdom and knowledge from life experiences. However, age may not have been excluded as much as it was intermeshed with other factors. The example of decreased mobility demonstrates the interconnectedness of oppressions. Decreased mobility was blamed on aging and economic factors. Some women were still physically able to get from place to place but were limited by not being able to afford a private vehicle or public transit. In other cases, physical limitations attributed to aging further exacerbated already limited access to transportation due to economic hardship and economic hardship itself can be regarded as an aspect of aging. Limitations to mobility that changed how the women were able to access their communities acted to circumscribe the development and maintenance of friendship simply by creating an inability to go out and meet with each other. IGU consciously works to remove these barriers by arranging carpools and providing transportation funding for PWC meetings. The First Nation participants living on reserves told me that their Band Councils also fund their

travel to meetings or provide vans. Being able to come together is an important part of friendships, which can become more difficult with aging. The extent to which individual women experience such difficulty varies.

Although the youngest Grandmother in this study's sample was 55 years old, the group has had members as young as 35 and this has led to some of the older Grandmothers, particularly those in their seventies and above, sub-categorizing the category "grandmother" further into the "younger grandmothers" and the "older grandmothers." The older Grandmothers express their tiredness and associate this with age and they hope that the younger Grandmothers, who they assume have more energy, will take a more active leadership role in the group. While the younger Grandmothers did express less concern about limitations imposed by their age, many of them were busy raising grandchildren and did not have the time or energy for additional work. Therefore, while the idea of aging provides a perceived commonality, there are a variety of meanings and experiences attached to the lived realities of aging as it manifests itself in each woman's life. It is the age-related notions of wisdom and responsibilities to future generations upon which the Grandmothers unite and these notions form the locus where age and grandmothering intersect, with the grandmother identity taking precedence in the group's organizing.

Grandmothering, like mothering, is a construct that combines both biology and activity. While Katie seemingly equates grandmothering with an innate ability and universality with her statement that "all grandmothers are good," we can see from the variety of responses that women learned to be grandmothers from their own experiences as grandchildren or from listening to their fellow IGU members. Wilma, Adele and

Ursula clearly identify their grandmothers as important influences in their lives and draw intergenerational links between their treatment as grandchildren and how they, in turn, are treating their grandchildren.

Cultural diversity in the grandmothering role is apparent. The issue of grandmothers raising grandchildren was a common thread among the Aboriginal women's stories. Both Ursula and Wilma were raised by a grandmother and are now raising their own grandchildren; an "older traditional Indian woman, a medicine lady" raised Mary from the age of twelve until marriage and Betty was raising several of her grandchildren. Full-time responsibility for a grandchild can clash with the notion of the indulgent grandparent reflected in Lee's response when she mentions "spoiling." Even the luxury of "not [being]on their back all the time," perhaps in the form of discipline, can be the result of temporary visitations versus the long-term responsibility experienced by grandmothers who are primary caregivers. Across these differences, the recognition that grandmothers are an important part of life and learning with responsibilities for the future of their grandchildren provides a strong starting point from which these women can come together to build and maintain bridges of friendship.

5.5　Summary

Operating within a social structure that encourages segregation and separation, the Grandmothers have come together around the identity "grandmother" to build bridges of friendship across cultural differences. In a complex interplay of ideology and experience, their friendships begin with each person carrying with them not only their own identity but also ideas about other women built on myths and stereotypes. Through their friendship, they come to learn and understand more about themselves and the other women, recognizing commonalties and building upon them while at the same time naming and respecting differences. These women construct humanity and grandmothering as overarching commonalties, yet each remains a unique individual grounded in her culture. The group appears to have some work to do to become more inclusive to those women neither Aboriginal nor Euro-Canadian. Nonetheless, IGU has succeeded in building bridges of friendship between cultures and women that colonization has constructed as irrevocably separate.

Culture, class and age interact in complex ways to influence identities. A construction of identity as fluid and multiple makes possible the reconsideration of self, recognizing the permeability of self so that the "other" need not be constructed as opposite and a friend need not be constructed as exactly the same or another self. Influences of culture, class and age are expressed in distinct ways through experiences and discourses of friendship. Friendship facilitates the sharing of perspectives, a respect for differences and the ability to consider self and others equally valuable in the commonalties and differences.

Chapter 6

Lessons of the Grandmothers: Broader Implications and Conclusions

6.1   Overview

This study of friendships among women of IGU has not only provided a better

understanding of friendship, but has shown how factors of gender, race, culture, class

and age come together to influence those friendships and impact identity. The

Grandmothers have many lessons to teach. I was fortunate to learn from them, not just

about friendship, but also lessons that I could carry into my professional and personal

life. The Grandmothers welcomed me into their circle "as a Grandmother," a loving

caring person. The Grandmothers and I shared a common concern for children and a

desire to bridge cultural gaps. I found my own experience echoed in the words of

Judith Adler Hellman:

> It goes without saying that any pose of 'scientific detachment' would have
> been entirely out of place in this research project...My entry into their world
> required no particular test of loyalty or identification other than an expressed
> desire to learn about them...It seemed natural and appropriate [to them] that
> women should learn from women (1987, p. 6).

During opening introductions, I told the Grandmothers that I had two children and that

my trip to their gathering was the first time I was away from my four-month-old baby,

who was not yet weaned. The Grandmothers concern, caring and offers of advice

inspired, and continue to inspire me in my roles as researcher and mother. Their

enthusiasm for the project (and me) was enhanced by their identification with me as a

mother as well as my interest in their organization. It was clear to them that I shared

their belief in the goals of the group and cared about children, the combination of which

probably contributed to their willingness to participate in my project and share personal information. Furthermore, the Grandmothers believe that the network of friendships and the social changes that they have created is something worthy of study and dissemination beyond their group.

This study suggests the appropriateness and power of creating and facilitating opportunities for safe and respectful intercultural interaction. Beyond this specific analysis, however, this study may illuminate some theoretical, methodological and practical issues that have implications for future studies and intercultural projects.

6.2   The Friendship Circle

Throughout this project, circularity and synergy have repeatedly come to the foreground. This interconnectivity, while confirming my belief that friendship is a potent force in our lives, made a linear academic analysis difficult to achieve and could be the reason it is not often acknowledged in existing friendship literature. Dimensions of friendship were used to organize the discussion and analysis of how the Grandmothers spoke of their friendships, to identify factors that hinder or facilitate friendship development and to explore the relationship between friendship and social activism. The Grandmothers' friendships clearly involve choices, choices that may be constrained by social factors related to gender, class, culture or age, but choices nonetheless. Women must choose their responses and actions throughout a relationship and these choices can create a friendship, even across barriers such as racism.

Humour is an integral part of the Grandmothers' friendships and they use it to build relationships and change ideas. The ability to laugh together contributes to the creation of a safe environment where the Grandmothers offer and accept support in a

reciprocal manner as a sign of their friendship. For many, the support and friendship of the group provides opportunities for learning and increased self-esteem. IGU creates a space where new ideas are created and old ideas examined for relevance and truth. Many old stereotypes and myths are unearthed, found wanting and discarded, replaced with ideas of respect and equality and a drive for social change. Differences in power and economic circumstance are mediated through perspective that everyone equally valuable by virtue of their common humanity. In a synergistic and circularly reinforcing manner, the Grandmothers come together in friendship to engage in social activism and in working together in activism, enhance their friendships.

Friendship and activism enhanced individual agency and the resulting agency led to an increased impetus to engage in social activism. The many positive aspects of the Grandmothers' friendships and their activist goals made working through conflict a worthwhile endeavour and the Talking Circle and the Talking Rock assisted the Grandmothers in the task. The Grandmothers have much to teach us about what Laverne called "the miracle of the Talking Rock," which combined the Grandmothers' guidelines of respect and confidentiality and the power of their desire to make change for future generations, infusing the Circle with energy. The passing of the Talking Rock afforded everyone the opportunity to speak while at the same time allowing a pass without pressure, knowing the Rock returned at closing.

In the Circle, the Grandmothers both create and recreate their friendships with the dimensions of choice, humour, support, equity and respect, agency and activism, conflict and jealousy and love and affection. Furthermore, the love and affection which permeates all the dimensions, provides both means and motive to work through conflict

and emerge with a deeper and stronger friendship, respect for each other and the ability to provide continued support. It became clear that the listening involved in showing support leads to respect, understanding, love and affection, but these qualities were also required to listen in the first place. Just as activism enhances friendship and friendship enhances activism, each dimension enabled and enhanced the other in a circular and reinforcing way. Each element has its own characteristics and contribution to friendship relationships while simultaneously acting in support of the other dimensions. The Circle provides a safe and respectful place where these dimensions can come into play and be practiced for further application when the Grandmothers leave the gatherings. The Grandmothers' friendships interacted with social and cultural factors to impact on their identities and perceptions of their identities as well.

Identity influences our friendships and our friendships influence our identities. Identities are not static; they are fluid, permeable and therefore interconnected with and distinct from the identities of others. The Grandmothers' interactions with the other women in IGU and the friendships that developed continued to shape their identities and their perceptions of both self and other, a significant departure from traditional friendship literature which regards a friend as another self with the same qualities. The women came to IGU as Grandmothers, but while there learned things that helped them continually grow in their roles and identities; they forged stronger selves which they then shared with the group and incorporated into their grandmothering and their identities as grandmothers. Identities are reforged and tried on for size in a caring and nonjudgmental environment. The lessons of the Grandmothers offer practical guidance to be put into practice when we engage in intercultural relationships. Their insights

expand upon existing friendship literature, which typically denies the existence of or ignores intercultural friendships.

The Grandmothers also expose theoretical rifts that call for new approaches. The most startling to me was how their conceptualization of their relationships combined elements from standpoint and postmodern identity theories. The Grandmothers maintain the importance of unique life insights while remaining grounded in identity categories. Again, in an almost circular fashion, we are all the same and we are all different, but because we all share in this difference, this difference becomes a similarity. In other words, one of the similarities emerging from the interviews is an appreciation of the shared differences among the women. While I have thought, theorized and re-theorized about the implications of a simultaneous emphasis on shared identity and unique standpoints, many of the Grandmothers nonchalantly accept it as obvious and even somewhat insignificant. Modern day feminisms can learn from the Grandmothers' ability to celebrate difference from the foundation of a common identity while acknowledging that that identity still means different things to different people. Their respect for different cultural ideas about how to work together, different temperaments, and different skills and abilities allows them to move forward as friends. Respecting each other as both the same and different, self and other, but of equal value, destabilizes hierarchical social constructions and creates a space for the development of intercultural friendships among women.

This study would have been enhanced had I been able to interview a member of the group who no longer participated, perhaps providing further insight into barriers to the development of friendships among women. The intercultural scope of this project,

limited by the participants available for interview, could be expanded to include women of colour who are not Aboriginal and gain their perspectives on the friendships forged or not forged within IGU. Furthermore, I believe a study of intercultural friendship would be enhanced through the use of a team approach with the team composed of people with different cultural backgrounds. Collaboration was not possible for this project as it fulfills a requirement of my Master's program, but it should be a consideration when undertaking intercultural projects.

The findings of this project bring to the fore further questions that could be explored in the future. One of the elements beyond the scope of this paper, but of current relevance, is that of funding for groups such as IGU. Until recently, IGU has been successful at procuring grants to fund their projects but the Grandmothers' view that friendship and activism are interrelated and of equal importance is diametrically opposed to governmental views on project funding. Under the rubric of accountability, there has been a policy shift in government sectors to fund only result-based activities. On the surface, expecting results for funding is a reasonable demand, one that the IGU has successfully met. What the results focus ignores, though, is the important connection of relationships and activism. In fact, based on discussions I have had with funders in other contexts, some believe that groups using funding for social activities like "just meeting" were wasting money, oblivious to the fact that from these relationships activism could result. Furthermore, often the friendship benefits derived from groups such as IGU are not considered results even though both the Grandmothers and a program assessment have said that participants demonstrated improvements in self-esteem, health and childcare skills, all issues that cost governments money.

Unfortunately, the gathering I attended was heavily focused on a serious financial decline for the group. Many Grandmothers raised the issue during our interviews, and expressed fear and concern that they may lose their group. The findings of this study speak to the merits of broadening definitions of "results" given that the IGU are working on many fronts to address long-standing social problems in Saskatchewan at a cost that demonstrates value for money. The Grandmothers have been effective at bridging societal barriers and working for change within their communities. Further study could explore the implications of friendship-based advocacy for communities as well as governments and, perhaps, yield solutions for social issues.

Future research could also theorize further issues of power, economics, respect and equality, especially in conjunction with ideas of identity and agency. The complex ways that social structures, friendships and identities interact to create and recreate themselves could fill several volumes, especially when considered in the context of dynamics such as race, gender, culture, class, age and sexuality. This study reaffirms the importance of studying the particularities of womens' lives to enhance our knowledge of broader social categories. Further research could be conducted about friendship relationships among women in different contexts. Also, the category "grandmother" is under theorized, and as life expectancies increase, many women will spend a large portion of their lives with this title. Therefore, addressing this gap in knowledge about an important part of many women's lives will become even more important.

6.3   Summary

IGU serves as an example of what can be accomplished when opportunities for safe and respectful interactions across traditionally segregated groups are created. The women draw on their collective identities as grandmothers to come together and learn about each other, thereby exposing and destabilizing socially perpetuated myths and stereotypes. With activism as a way of coming together and as an outgrowth of their newly formed friendship, the Grandmothers move together into their communities acting as role models of intercultural friendship. In so doing, the women continue to develop their own self-conceptions and nurture friendships, respectfully acknowledging difference while building bridges from a base of common humanity.

References

Allen, P.G. (1986). *The sacred hoop: Recovering the feminine in American Indian traditions.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Apter, T., & Josselson, R. (1998). *Best friends: The pleasures and perils of girls' and women's friendships.* New York: Crown Publishers.

Anderson, K. (2000). *A Recognition of being: Reconstructing Native womanhood.* Toronto: Second Story Press.

Aristotle. (1975). *Nicomachean ethics.* (Hippocrates G. Apostle, Trans.) Holland: D. Reidel.

Armstrong, J. (1996). Invocation: The real power of Aboriginal women. In C. Miller & P. Chuchryk (Eds.), *Women of the First Nations: Power, wisdom, and strength* (pp. ix-xii). Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press.

Backhouse, C. (1999). *Colour-coded: A legal history of racism in Canada 1900-1950.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Badhwar, N.K. (Ed.). (1993). *Friendship: A philosophical reader.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Bear, S. with the Tobique Women's Group. (1991). "You can't change the Indian Act?" In J. D. Wine and J. L. Ristock (Eds.), *Women and social change: Feminist activism in Canada* (pp. 198-220). Toronto: James Lorimer & Company.

Bem, S. (1993). *The lenses of gender.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Bernard, H.R. (1994). *Research methods in anthropology: Qualitative and quantitative approaches.* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Bernikow, L. (1980). *Among women.* New York: Harmony Books.

Berry, C. R., & Traeder, T. (1995). *Girlfriends: Invisible bonds, enduring ties.* Berkeley: Wildcat Canyon Press.

Bishop, A. (1994). *Becoming an ally: Breaking the cycle of oppression.* Halifax: Fernwood Publishing.

Block, J., & Greenberg, D. (1985). *Women and friendship.* New York: Watts.

Bouson, J. B. (1993). *Brutal choreographies: Oppositional strategies and narrative design in the novels of Margaret Atwood.* Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press.

Brass, E. (1987). *I walk in two worlds.* Calgary: Glenbow-Alberta Institute.

Browne, C. V. (1998). *Women, feminism and aging.* New York: Springer.

Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of "sex."* New York: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity.* New York: Routledge.

Canada. Indian and Native Affairs Canada. *Demographics.* [Online]. Available: http://www.inac.gc.ca/strength/demogr.html [1999, November 1].

Canada. Indian and Native Affairs Canada. (1995). Population projections of registered Indians – 1991 – 2015. *Facts from stats.* [Online], *4.* Available: http://www.inac.gc.ca/stats/facts/1995/poppro.html [1999, November 1].

Canada. Statistics Canada. (1996). *Population by selected age groups and sex for Canada, Provinces and Territories: 1996 census – 100% data.* [Online]

Available: http://www.statcan.ca/english/census96/canprov.htm [2000, November 3].

Carter, S. (1997). *Capturing women: The manipulation of cultural imagery in Canada's Prairie West.* Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press.

Carter, S. (1996). First Nations women of Prairie Canada in the early reserve years, the 1870's to the 1920's: A preliminary inquiry. In C. Miller & P. Chuchryk (Eds.), *Women of the First Nations: Power, wisdom, and strength* (pp. 51-75). Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press.

Collins, P. H. (1991). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment.* New York: Routledge.

Coffey, A. (1996). *Making sense of qualitative data: Complimentary research strategies.* Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Davies C. (1990). *Ethnic humor around the world: A comparative analysis.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Davis, A. Y. (1981). *Women, race and class.* New York: Vintage Books.

Deiter, C. (1999). *From our mothers' arms: The intergenerational impact of residential schools in Saskatchewan.* Toronto: United Church Publishing House.

Dickson, G. (2000). Aboriginal grandmothers' experience with health promotion and participatory action research. *Qualitative Health Research, 10* (2), 188-213.

Downe, P. (1999). Laughing when it hurts: Humor and violence in the lives of Costa Rican Prostitutes. *Women's Studies International Forum, 22* (1), 63-78.

Duck, S. (1991). *Friends for life: The psychology of personal relationships.* New York: Harvester-Wheatsheaf.

Duhamel, R. (1966). *Treaty 4 between Her Majesty the Queen and the Cree and*

    Saulteaux Tribes of Indians at the Qu'Appelle and Fort Ellice. Ottawa: Queen's

    Printer and Controller of Stationery. [Online] Available:

    http://www.inac.ca/treaty4/index.html. [2000, April 14].

Eichenbaum, L., & Orbach, S. (1988). *Between women: Love, envy, and competition in*

    women's friendships. New York: Viking Press.

Ellis, C. (1997). *Project evaluation of Intercultural Grandmothers Uniting Project.*

    Regina: Senior's Education Centre, University Extension, University of Regina.

Faderman, L. (1998). *Surpassing the love of men: Romantic friendship and love*

    between women from the Renaissance to the present. (2nd ed.). New York: Quill

    William Morrow.

Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN). *Treaty issues.* [Online]. Available:

    http://www.fsin.com/Requests/ohrcweb/pages/treaty_issues_7.htm. [1999,

    November 3].

Fehr, B. (1996). *Friendship processes.* Thousand Oaks, California: Sage

    Publications.

Feldman, R. M., Stall, S., & Wright, P. A. (1998). "The community needs to be built

    by us:" Women organizing in Chicago public housing. In N. A. Naples (Ed.),

    Community activism and feminist politics: Organizing across race, class, and

    gender (pp. 257-274). New York: Routledge.

Fife, C. (1993). (Anthologizer). *The colour of resistance: A contemporary collection*

    of writing by Aboriginal women. Toronto: Sister Vision Press.

Fillion, K. (1996). *Lip service: The truth about women's darker side in love, sex, and friendship.* Toronto: HarperCollins.

Fiske, J. (1993). Child of the state mother of the nation: Aboriginal women and the ideology of motherhood. *Culture, 13* (1), 17-36.

Flynn, E. G. (1963). *The Alderson story: My life as a political prisoner.* New York: International Publishers.

Francis, D. (1992). *The Imaginary Indian: The image of the Indian in Canadian culture.* Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press.

Furman, F. K. (1997). *Facing the mirror: Older women and beauty shop culture.* New York: Routledge.

Giddens, A. (1979). *Central problems in social theory: Action, structure and contradiction in social analysis.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Glenn, E. N. (1994). Social constructions of mothering: A thematic overview. In E. N. Glenn, G. Chang & L. R. Forcey (Eds.), *Mothering: Ideology, experience, and agency* (pp. 1-29). New York: Routledge.

Griffin, G. (Ed.). (1995). *Feminist activism in the 1990's.* London: Taylor & Francis.

Hartup, W. W. (1993). Adolescents and their friends. In Brett Laursen (Ed.) *Close friendships in adolescence* (pp. 3-22). San Francisco: Jossey-Boss.

Hellman, J. A. (1987). *Journeys among women: Feminism in five Italian cities.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Hewitt, R. (1986). *White talk, black talk: Inter-racial friendship and communication among adolescents.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

hooks, b. (1989). *Talking back: Thinking feminist, thinking black.* Toronto: Between the Lines.

Howe, C. (1998). Gender, race, and community: Competing strategies in the struggle for public education. In N. A. Naples (Ed.), *Community Activism and Feminist Politics* (pp. 237-254). New York: Routledge.

Hunt, Mary. (1991). *Fierce tenderness: A feminist theology of friendship.* New York: Crossroads.

Intercultural Grandmothers Uniting. (n.d.) (Untitled Information Sheet).

Jayaratne, T. E., & Stewart, A. J. (1995). Quantitative and qualitative methods in the social sciences: Feminist issues and practical strategies. In J. Holland & M. Blair (Eds.), *Debates and issues in feminist research and pedagogy.* Clevedon: The Open University Press.

Kivett, V. R. (1996). The Saliency of the grandmother-granddaughter relationship: Predictors of association. In K. A. Roberto (Ed.), *Relationships between women in later life* (pp. 25-39). New York: The Haworth Press.

Lather, P. (1991). *Getting smart: Feminist research and pedagogy with/in the postmodern.* New York: Routledge.

Lawless, E. (1991). Women's life stories and reciprocal ethnography as feminist and emergent. *Journal of Folklore Research, 28* (1), 35-60.

Lorde, A. (1988). *Burst of light: Essays.* Ithaca, New York: Firebrand Books.

MacLauchlan, B. (Ed.). (1999). *Bringing our stories home.* (2nd ed.). Regina: Seniors' Education Centre, University Extension, University of Regina.

Margolies, E. (1975). *The Best of friends, the worst of enemies: Women's hidden power over women.* Garden City, New York: Dial Press.

Merrill, L. (1988). Feminist Humor: Rebellious and self-affirming. *Women's Studies, 15,* 271-280.

Miles, M.B. & Huberman, A.M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook.* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Miller, J.R. (1989). *Skyscrapers hide the heavens: A history of Indian-White relations in Canada.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Morgen, S., & Bookman, A. (Eds.). (1988). *Women and the politics of empowerment.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Naples, Nancy. (Ed.). (1998). *Community activism and feminist politics: Organizing across race, class and gender.* New York: Routledge.

Naranjo-Huebl, L. (1995). From Peek-a-boo to sarcasm: Women's humor as a means of both connection and resistance. *Feminism and Nonviolence Studies.* [Online], *1* (4), 73 paragraphs. Available: http://www.fnsa.org/vlln4/hue611.html. [1998, January 20].

Noskiye, K. (2000, April 9). A Disillusioning time for Natives. *Saskatoon Sun,* pp. 53.

O'Connor, P. (1992). *Friendships between women: A critical feminist review.* New York: Harvester-Wheatsheaf.

Ouellette, G. J. M. W. (1998). *The fourth world: Aboriginal women's activism and feminism.* Thesis. Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: Department of Native Studies.

Pardo, M. (1990). Mexican American women grassroots community activists: "Mothers of East Los Angeles." *Frontiers XI,* (1). 1-7.

Perkinson, M. A., & Rockemann, D.D. Older women living in a continuing care

    retirement community: Marital status and friendship formation. In K. A. Roberto

    (Ed.). *Relationships between women in later life* (159-177). New York: The

    Haworth Press.

Petr, P. (1985). Marxist theories of the comic. In P. Petr, D. Roberts & P. Thomson

    (Eds.), *Comic relations: Studies in the comic, satire and parody* (pp. 57-66).

    New York: Lang.

Poland, B.D. (1995). Transcription quality as an aspect of rigor in qualitative research.

    Qualitative Inquiry, 1 (3), 290-310.

Quadagno, J. S., Kuhar, R. G., & Peterson, W. A. (1980). Maintaining social distance

    in a racially integrated retirement community. In J. Quadagno (Ed.), *Aging, the*

    individual and society: Readings in social gerontology (pp. 224-239). New York:

    St. Martin's Press.

Raging Grannies. *The Raging Grannies of Seattle.* [Online] Available:

    http://www.raginggrannies.com/home.html [2000, July 17]

Raymond, J. (1986). *A Passion for friends: Toward a philosophy of female affection.*

    Boston: Beacon Press.

Razack, S. H. (1998). *Looking white people in the eye: Gender, race, and culture in*

    courtrooms and classrooms. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Reisman, J. (1979). *Anatomy of a Friendship.* New York: Irvington.

Roberto, K. A., (Ed.). (1996). *Relationships between women in later life.* New York:

    The Haworth Press.

Robertson, J. F. (1980). Grandmotherhood: A study of role conceptions. In J. S.

Quadagno, (Ed.), *Aging, the individual and society: Readings in social*

gerontology (pp. 280-296). New York: St. Martin's Press.

Robinson, D. (1996) Identity and friendship: Affective dynamics and network

formation. *Advances in Group Processes, 13,* 91-111.

Rothman, S. M. (1978). *Woman's proper place: A history of changing ideals and*

practices, 1870 to the present. New York: Basic Books.

Saskatchewan. (1999). Saskatchewan Women's Secretariat. *Profile of Aboriginal*

women in Saskatchewan.

Scott, A. F. (1991). *Natural allies: Women's associations in American history.*

Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Stern-Gillet, S. (1995). *Aristotle's philosophy of friendship.* New York: State

University Press.

Three-quarters of Sask. inmates Native: Report. (2000, June 2, 2000). *The Saskatoon*

Star-Phoenix, A4.

Todd, J. (1980). *Women's friendship in literature.* New York: Columbia University

Press.

Tracy, L. (1991). *The Secret between us: Competition among women.* Boston: Little,

Brown.

Voices of Women (VOW). (2000). *The Raging Grannies.* [Online] Available:

http://www.chebucto.ns.ca/CommunitySupport/VOW/grannies.htm [2000, July

17]

Walker, J. W. S. G. (1997). *"Race," rights and the law in the Supreme Court of Canada: Historical case studies.* The Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History and Wilfred Laurier University Press.

Wolfart, H.C. (1998). Introduction to the texts. In F. Ahenakew and H.C. Wolfart (Eds., trans.), *Our grandmothers' lives as told in their own words* (pp. 17-37). Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre.

Yager, J. (1997). *Friendshifts: The Power of friendship and how it shapes our lives.* Stamford, Connecticut: Hannacroix Creek Books.

APPENDIX I
Consent Form[1]

My name is Kim Morrison. I am a researcher on a project entitled: *Women's Friendship Relationships: Foundations for Change.*

This project is part of my Master's program in the Department of Women's and Gender studies at the University of Saskatchewan. Data collected will be used in my thesis, a colloquium presentation and possibly other publications and presentations.

I am the principal investigator of this project and I may be contacted at 966-6391 should you have any questions. If you have concerns that I have not dealt with, you may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Pamela Downe at 966-4163 or the Department of Research Services at 966-8576 (fax 966-8597).

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research project. Your participation is very much appreciated. There are no risks entailed by your participation. I am interested in your experiences of friendship within the Intercultural Grandmothers Uniting. I would like to learn about your experiences told in a manner that you are comfortable with and at your own pace. I may ask questions along the way about cultural heritage, grandmothering, and the benefits and struggles of friendship. A possible benefit of your participation is the opportunity to reflect on your experiences with the Intercultural Grandmothers and share those experiences with others.

Just before we start the interview, I would like to reassure you that as a participant in this project you have several very definite rights.

- Your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary.
- You are free to refuse to answer any question at any time.
- You are free to withdraw from the interview at any time and if you do your data will be deleted from the study and destroyed.
- This interview will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to my supervisor and me.
- You will be asked to sign a Transcript Release Form once you are satisfied with the accuracy of the transcript.
- The tapes and transcripts of all interviews conducted for this research will be securely stored by Professor Pamela Downe (the supervising faculty member) at the University of Saskatchewan for the requisite period of 5 years. After this period has elapsed, the tapes and transcripts will be destroyed.
- Excerpts of this interview may be made part of the final research report, but under no circumstances will your name or identifying characteristics be included in this report.

---

[1] The format of the consent form has been changed for printing and binding in the thesis. The original form was one page in length.

I would be grateful if you would sign this form to show that I have read you its contents and that you have received a copy of the consent form for your own records.

_____   _____
(signed)   (printed)

_____ (date)

Would you like a report on the results of this research project? YES   NO (circle one).

Do you agree to having our interview taped? YES   NO (circle one).

If yes, please sign here: _____