

**North American Indian, Métis and Inuit Women Speak
about
Culture, Education and Work**

Carolyn Kenny

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ABSTRACT

Three researchers conducted focus groups and interviews with 140 Aboriginal women in eight sites across Canada to study the barriers created by policies which do not support Aboriginal women to maintain full cultural lives while pursuing contemporary education and work. Sites included rural and urban Manitoba; Toronto, Parry Sound and Ottawa, Ontario; Vancouver and Merritt, British Columbia; Iqualuit, Nunavut; and rural and urban Nova Scotia. Researchers worked closely with advisors and site liaisons in each community. Participants offered stories. These were taped and/or transcribed and analyzed for values, themes and policy recommendations. A serious critique of the *Indian Act* and other policies affecting the lives of Aboriginal women is provided by the participants and researchers' analysis of policy documents.

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PREFACE

Good public policy depends on good policy research. In recognition of this, Status of Women Canada instituted the Policy Research Fund in 1996. It supports independent policy research on issues linked to the public policy agenda and in need of gender-based analysis. Our objective is to enhance public debate on gender equality issues in order to enable individuals, organizations, policy makers and policy analysts to participate more effectively in the development of policy.

The focus of the research may be on long-term, emerging policy issues or short-term, urgent policy issues that require an analysis of their gender implications. Funding is awarded through an open, competitive call for proposals. A non-governmental, external committee plays a key role in identifying policy research priorities, selecting research proposals for funding and evaluating the final reports.

This policy research paper was proposed and developed under a call for proposals in April 1997 on *the integration of diversity into policy research, development and analysis*. While it is recognized that women as a group share some common issues and policy concerns, women living in Canada are not a homogeneous group. Aboriginal women, women with disabilities, visible minority women and women of colour, linguistic minority women, immigrant women, lesbians, young women, poor women, older women, and other groups of women experience specific barriers to equality. Through this call for proposals, researchers were asked to consider these differences in experiences and situations when identifying policy gaps, new questions, trends and emerging issues as well as alternatives to existing policies or new policy options.

Six research projects were funded by Status of Women Canada on this issue. They examine the integration of diversity as it pertains to issues of globalization, immigration, health and employment equity policies, as well as intersections between gender, culture, education and work. A complete list of the research projects funded under this call for proposals is included at the end of this report.

We thank all the researchers for their contribution to the public policy debate.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS - GIVING THANKS

Many people contributed to this project. In most cases, we have followed the counsel of our advisors to ask for participation and help from personal contacts. This approach has worked very well and has allowed us to experience the kindness and generosity of friends and family. Often, in-kind services were provided by organizations, which helped with expenses, but also helped enlarge the circle of participants and the sharing of responsibility among Aboriginal women.

First, we want to thank the participants of our study, who donated their time and told their stories. We are also very grateful for the thoughtful guidance of our advisors, Verna Kirkness, Shirley Sterling (advisor and storyteller) and Debbie Jetté. Though Debbie was only involved with our project for a short time, we found her advice invaluable. Marilyn Struthers contributed a great deal of time, creativity and originality in the early stages. Marilyn had to leave the project for personal reasons. We particularly appreciate her help in the design of our research methodology.

This work could not have been even imagined without the dedication of the site liaisons. In particular, we would like to thank Janet Fontaine, Cynthia Bird, Rose Purdy, Joan Chalifoux, June Spence, Faith Pegahmagabow, Cathy McGregor and Oleena Nowyook.

We thank Status of Women Canada for offering the primary funding for this project. Because of the limited funding available, we relied heavily on family and friends for lodging and hospitality. Thanks to Sophie Sterling, Haike's grandmother in Merritt; Pat and Cleve Purdon, Colleen's parents in MacTier; and Dean Purdon and Carol Fetterly, who provided accommodations for the Parry Sound and Ottawa site visits; Chief Debbie Robinson, Carolyn's friend in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia; Janet Fontaine, Carolyn's friend in Winnipeg; Fran and Carl Herman, Carolyn's friends in Toronto; and Noel McDermitt, Colleen's friend in Iqaluit for opening their homes to us and hosting us during project work. Thanks to Eva Arreak for opening up her home for focus groups in Iqaluit.

Good food is important in a gathering. And we had some help here too. We want to thank Shirley Sterling for preparing a wonderful meal for one of the Vancouver focus groups. Janet Fontaine offered many in-kind services personally and through organizations for the Winnipeg site. We would especially like to thank Janet, the Manitoba Women's Advisory Council and Manitoba Industry, Trade and Tourism, as well as Janet's sister, June Spence, who served as an advisor, liaison and representative with the Assembly of First Nations helping to arrange the Ottawa site and establishing contact with the Resource Centre of Toronto, which opened its doors to us and offered space and staff for all of the work in Toronto. Cathy McGregor of the Baffin District Board of Education was extremely helpful in setting up the Iqaluit site. Other organizations that helped us were Arctic College, Nunavut and the Aboriginal Resource Centre at the University of Ottawa, through the help of Claudette Commanda Cote. We want to offer special thanks to Devi Pabla, Eileen Mallory and Surjeet Siddoo, staff members at Simon Fraser University, who put many hours and lots of care into typing transcripts from the Winnipeg, Nova Scotia and Toronto sites; and Eileen and Devi for helping in the preparation of the final report.

THE RESEARCH TEAM

To conduct our research, we had to function in our research identities, which would allow us to be respectful witnesses, conduct our work in a professional manner and employ the skills we have developed over time in ethical and good research practice. Some relevant aspects of our identities are that we are all women, who have raised or are raising children. We struggle with the same issues as most of our participants. In qualitative research, one possible validity criterion is trustworthiness. Trustworthiness compels us to reveal ourselves, at least partially, to the participants, which we were able to do at times. Trustworthiness is also required in the creation of research documents so the reader knows who we are as human beings and will be able to judge our writings and our findings on our human strengths and limitations.

There is an aspect of all research that is interpretive. As researchers in an emerging academic culture of Aboriginal research, it is important that we reveal our identities as people. The integrity of Aboriginal research is closely associated with the integrity of the researchers, who they are as people, the way they live their own lives. Each member of the research team offers statements here revealing important aspects of her identity, which are germane to the project.

Haike Muller

I am a N'lakapamux woman, 29 years old, with a B.A. in Literature with a law degree. I have grown up in my N'lakapamux community — my mother's family. Who you are is the most important aspect of your identity. A lot of times, I work with my grandmother who is a big influence in my life. In our culture, we could just go and live with anyone in the family, and I did. I got a lot of culturally enriched training from my grandmother. I have experienced sexual harassment, racial discrimination, sex discrimination, cultural discrimination and age discrimination. I'm a single mother with a toddler. I am employed as the First Nations legal studies advisor at the University of British Columbia. I have taught courses at the Institute for Indigenous Government here in Vancouver including Indigenous Women and Leadership.

Colleen Purdon

I came to this project through my relationship with Carolyn, the project manager, who is an old and respected friend. I'm a White woman, 47 years old and the mother of four children — two girls, who are just going out into the world of higher education now, and two boys. I have worked for many years with women and children in the area of the oppression of women — discrimination against women and violence against women have been at the centre of my work for almost 15 years now. I have learned to understand what happens to women and children in our culture through this work. I learned to listen and to talk with women about their realities. I've also worked with Aboriginal women and communities in this work as well. I grew up in a small village, with several First Nations communities right next door, but I never knew much about the people, and our community was not welcoming for

Aboriginal people. My parents fostered an Aboriginal child for many years, but I have always felt that I missed learning about Aboriginal people until much later in my life. I'm interested in alternative ways of thinking about things, about healing and bringing people together to look for constructive ways of being together — to create systems relationships that make the world a better place to live. As a woman, I've always worked and have really struggled with trying to do the work of a mother, creating a home for myself, my partner, my children and making money. It is a real juggling act keeping the practical side, the creative side and the spiritual side all going, and to do all of those things at the same time. Those are realities and themes that I know from my own experience. Being involved in this project has helped me to think about all of these things — and to learn a great deal about First Nations and Inuit women and their experiences. We share some common concerns — struggling to do the best we can in a man's world, working hard to keep some balance in our lives, and enjoying time together as women to talk and tell our stories.

Carolyn Kenny

I am a 53-year-old woman with Aboriginal and Ukrainian ancestry. My father, a first-generation immigrant, was raised in the coal mines of Pennsylvania and West Virginia. My mother is Choctaw from Louisiana. My mother was the first Native woman in her community to get a high school diploma. She encouraged me to get an education — to go as far as I could. Education was one of my mother's big priorities for her daughter. I have a Ph.D., and I have used my studies as a way to come to terms with a bicultural heritage, one which was usually not easy, but at the same time held a lot of meaning. My mother lost her Native mother when she was three years old and was tossed from one house to another. She was very bitter about this and consequently directed her bitterness toward her Native heritage. I have attempted to learn and grow culturally for myself, so I could pass our cultural heritage on to my children, and so I could work in my Aboriginal community and be a part of things. One year before my mother died, she came to accept her heritage and was treated with respect, as an elder, here in Vancouver at the First Nations House of Learning at the University of British Columbia. The Native people of Canada have been extremely kind to me and my family. I worked for many years as a music therapist. Now, much of my work is in First Nations education. I am an associate professor at Simon Fraser University in the Faculty of Education. I have experienced both discrimination and abuse as a woman. I have also struggled to raise my two children as a part-time, single mother. Now they are fine adults. I'm very proud of them. They both have a good education. Soon I'll be a grandmother.

All members of the research team are interested in making systemic changes. We all believe it is time to confront the avoiding attitude of “blaming the victim” embedded explicitly or implicitly in many research recommendations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In September 1997, Status of Women Canada provided funding for a two-year project to gather the stories of Aboriginal women in eight research sites across Canada for the purpose of making policy recommendations. Three researchers (two Aboriginal and one non-Aboriginal) worked closely with advisors and site liaisons, and conducted interviews and focus groups with 140 participants. The primary purpose for the research, following the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, was to provide direct benefits to the communities being researched. Researchers studied previous literature on the topic, particularly the latest Status of Women research findings of Madeleine Dion Stout and Gregory D. Kipling. A qualitative research methodology was used to report the stories and words of the participants, to describe values and critical themes, and to report policy recommendations.

Findings

This research gives voice to Aboriginal women. A long history of oppression has not diminished their capacity to work hard to improve their own lives and the lives of their children. However, the need for opportunities for advancement in education is critical. Many of the recommendations for policy changes, new design and implementation, and appropriate cultural interpretation are the same recommendations Aboriginal women have been making for many years. Consequently, researchers responded to the women's most frequent request by formulating one primary policy recommendation that would support communities in making their own policies. As well, researchers provide a critical analysis of current policies, including the *Indian Act*, that impact the lives of Aboriginal women.

Certain limitations of previous research were identified.

- **Often research is not reported around Aboriginal values;** therefore, research documents reflect hegemonic influences of a colonizing authority and continued colonization of Aboriginal women. This project was another attempt to take control of the research methodologies in order to make Aboriginal values the foundation of the research. Thus, the findings emphasize stories, and the power within the stories, along with the identification of four core Native values — respect, trust, knowledge and balance. Aboriginal values are often marginalized or romanticized without respect for their complexity. They provide a foundation from which the research can spring.
- **Policy research, in many cases, reiterates the same recommendations** that have been articulated by Aboriginal women over and over again. This type of research is done primarily by non-Aboriginal researchers who conduct their study with a limited view of how to use research methodology in standardized formats, conforming to “reductionistic” principles and analyzing beyond the words of the participants, when meanings are quite clear from participant expressions. However, some research done by Aboriginal researchers also reflects a type of “internalized oppression” and reiterates the grand narratives of the historically colonizing authority. Often there is little support for a discourse among

Aboriginal researchers and respectful non-Aboriginal researchers to create an appropriate Aboriginal research methodology. Dialogue and sharing shed light on new possibilities.

- **Often, policy recommendations regarding the lives of Aboriginal women are literature based.** Studies that keep the voices of Aboriginal women as the primary source of recommendations are extremely important to ensure decolonizing processes.

Primary Policy Recommendation

One primary policy recommendation, 17 secondary policy recommendations and some specific policy recommendations for each region were identified. These recommendations often reiterate previous research, but they are presented in a new context, specifically, the lives of the participants in this research. Women contributed their time to come once again, to tell their stories, to share their ideas about policy, with the consistency and endurance demonstrated by Aboriginal women throughout history. This commitment reflected the desire to contribute to positive social change for their communities, especially for children.

Our primary policy recommendation is for policymakers to conduct policy workshops in each community and create policies that are regionally based and created through a process of discourse within the communities. The policy makers must be the women themselves. Funds need to be spent on sending facilitators into each community, who can spend time experiencing the daily lives of the women, networking with agencies and individuals to become immersed in the context of the women's lives. These facilitators must have the skills to help women in policy design and implementation. A guarantee of implementation of these policies would be required.

INTRODUCTION

We want to hear the stories of our elders about the way things were before the changes brought about by colonization. We want to hear from young Aboriginal women about their hopes and dreams for the future.... There are many stories waiting for the telling, the listening and hearing, the learning.

This was the opening statement in our 1997 proposal to Status of Women Canada for a project. “Why tell stories at all? The answer is relevant. We tell stories to answer hard questions, to teach behaviour, to purge our emotions, and to put order in our world” (McDermitt 1999). The stories and themes that follow do exactly that.

Traditionally, in most Aboriginal societies, women were the caretakers of the moral character of the community. Leaders were accountable to them for every decision. Against all odds, Aboriginal women endure, and continue to fill this role. In focus groups and interviews, we heard from 140 Aboriginal women in eight sites across Canada, on the traditional territories of the Musqueam, Cree, Ojibway, Inuit, Mi’kmaq and N’lakapamux peoples, in accord with the guidelines established by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP 1996a). Participants in Nova Scotia, British Columbia, Nunavut, Ontario and Manitoba contributed their time to our project. We worked closely with site liaisons in most settings and followed the advice of elders/advisors in designing and implementing our research. They suggested we use our personal contacts whenever possible.

Some settings were rural, some urban. Some of our work was on reserve, some in cities. We worked with women from many different First Nations, from ages 22 to 84. Given the limited resources provided for this project, we believe we have been able to obtain a cross section of Aboriginal women’s views and their specific recommendations for policy, which was an important goal for our project. This approach represents qualitative research, grounded in the voices of the participants.

The four core values that emerged in the analysis of the research data are respect, trust, knowledge and balance. Under this broad umbrella of four values, we also discovered certain critical themes: healing, safety, governance, discrimination, diversity, education/cross-culturalism and work.

We found that most Aboriginal women do not believe their lives will change for the better because of policy. Many other researchers had come through their communities, and gathered “data.” Most often, policies were recommended and not implemented, and women did not recognize their own voices in the policy documents that were produced.

We also heard from strong community leaders. These Aboriginal women had been fighting for many years to create policies to improve the lives of Aboriginal people, in general, and Aboriginal women in particular. But progress is slow. In some cases, we had the sense that these leaders were participating in our research out of respect for the researchers or site liaisons, with little hope that anything positive would result.

After we collected the policy recommendations, studied the literature and wrote our final report, we realized what we had suspected all along: many of the recommendations were the same as those made in previous reports. Aboriginal women have been making the same recommendations for the same policies for a long time with minimal change. One interviewee told us emphatically that this work had already been done by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996). In Manitoba, policy had been recommended for Aboriginal women in 1992. It is rarely implemented. We selected some of the recommendations made by Madeleine Dion Stout and Gregory D. Kipling (1998) in their Status of Women Canada literature-based report, *Aboriginal Women in Canada: Strategic Research Directions for Policy Development*, and built upon them. We offer one key recommendation that will facilitate the implementation of further policy.

Conduct policy workshops in each community and create policies that are regionally based and created through a process of discourse within the communities. The policy makers must be the women themselves. Funds need to be spent on sending facilitators into each community, who can spend time experiencing the daily lives of the women, networking with agencies and individuals to become immersed in the context of the women's lives. These facilitators must have the skills to help women in policy design and implementation. A guarantee of implementation of these policies would be required.

This is the recommendation we heard over and over again. We also made 17 secondary policy recommendations and some recommendations that were specific to each site.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Prepared by Haike Muller

Aboriginal Women and Work, Education, Culture

Of the 27 definitions of work offered by the Oxford dictionary, no more than two make reference to earning money (Lockhead 1998). Yet, when we set out on our review of literature on Aboriginal women and work, it was with the expectation that we were considering the place that Aboriginal women hold in the paid economy of this country and the policies which influence their roles as workers. The reviewed literature looks at the intersection of two characteristics of workers' issues in the workplace: that of being Aboriginal and of being a woman. The picture that unfolds in the literature is much more about unpaid work, and the low-paying nature of the work of Aboriginal women: issues that hold Aboriginal women statistically as the poorest of the poor (Blaney 1997).

The review provides an overview of literature that explores work and education policies that impact Aboriginal women. Then, it looks specifically at federal, provincial and community government policies that affect Aboriginal women's work experiences in the work force. A discussion of self-government and its pertinence and application to Aboriginal women within the context of work and education is included.

The central policy themes that emerge in the literature are as follows:

- Aboriginal women's control of their work, their definition of work and the value of the work they do in the larger social context;
- Aboriginal women's participation in governance at the federal, provincial and community levels, and the impact of self-government policies and structures on them;
- the availability and role of education and training programs in preparing Aboriginal women for work;
- the recognition and accommodation of traditional Aboriginal economies, including Aboriginal women's economies and evolving traditional work practices;
- the diverse nature of Aboriginal women's cultural and work experiences, and of their needs and aspirations with respect to work within their communities; and
- the misperceptions about work arrangements and structures among Aboriginal peoples, and the impacts of those misperceptions on Aboriginal women.

To be a woman worker in this country is to have the majority of one's work held as largely invisible. The spotlight shines clearly on paid work, often unskilled or poorly paid, because it is what counts in the measured economy. The range, quantity and significance of women's work have been massively underestimated, not least of all by women themselves (Miles 1989). Women workers are, at best, referred to as dual-employed with scant recognition for the unpaid home labour of women in child care, housework and family making. Today, nearly half of the paid labour force is made up of women, yet working women with children continue to spend on average 1.6 hours a day more doing unpaid work in the home compared to their male

partners (Lockhead 1998). Despite employment and equality rights under the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and policy efforts concerning pay equity and equal access in the work place, women continue to earn 63 cents for every dollar earned by men. Only one woman in five has a full-time job paying over \$30,000, and women fill 70 percent of part-time jobs.

Aboriginal women face an array of race-related issues in the work force that are compounded by issues around gender and socio-economic status. Issues identified for women generally are present for Aboriginal women, but magnified, and made many times more complex by cultural and economic differences, and by the systemic racism and sexism entrenched in Canadian culture. For many Aboriginal women, being Native in the work force is much more a defining issue than being a woman. In a 1984 study, Linda Lange examined the work experience of women at the Norman Wells Oilfield Expansion and Pipeline Project. She pointed out that while prejudices with respect to both race and sex prevailed, being Native felt like a more important factor than being female (Lange 1984 in Nahanee 1997). Similarly, Jeremy Hull in his 1983 study of Native women and work in Winnipeg, found that 60 percent of the women in his sample experienced being Native as “at least a partial barrier to employment,” while less than 50 percent felt that their gender was a barrier “to some extent.” When asked to identify major barriers to employment, 9.5 percent of responses reflected prejudice against Native peoples and four percent mentioned gender prejudice (Hull 1984).

Equality for women is a central position for the Canadian women’s movement and a key platform with regard to policy construction in the areas of women’s work. However, it is not an easy fit for Aboriginal women, and there are different perceptions of whether gender equality should be sought in the work force where Aboriginal women are present. Turpel-Lafond (1997) examined the Royal Commission on the Status of Women’s mandate to “inquire into the status of women in Canada to ensure for women equal opportunities with men in all aspects of Canadian society.” The goal of equality with White men, she suggested, creates a concept of gender equality that denies Aboriginal experiences and is conceptually and culturally inappropriate for First Nations women. She notes that in the Cree community, women are at the centre and men traditionally have a responsibility to be women’s helpers. Responsibility to the people is the central organizing principle of the community, not equality (Turpel-Lafond 1997).

Teresa Nahanee (1997), on the other hand, suggested that Aboriginal women must embrace the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* in order to guard against the erosion of gender equality within the context of Aboriginal self-government. She argued that the *Indian Act* imposed a system of patriarchal customs and laws on First Nations communities that has become so ingrained among First Nations peoples that it stripped women of gender equality and created male privilege as the norm on reserve lands.

In a broader discussion, other authors, such as Andrew and Rodgers (1997) and Irving (1990), stepped out of the equality issue as framed in Canadian labour politics and focussed on Aboriginal women and the relationship between work and culture. Such studies are important in that they transcend the Canadian political context and the European tradition of White male dominance, and situate women in roles within very different, older and more traditional political structures. Because Aboriginal nations are not a single nation, and do not

have a single common political structure, the role of Aboriginal women in this literature is diverse, situational and cannot be reduced to a single tradition in the way it can be for women of European descent. The article acknowledges matrilineal, matriarchal and woman-centred traditional systems, where women transmitted the core values and beliefs of the communities to which they belonged, had the power to select and dispose of male chiefs and filled leadership roles as clan mothers. Further, it describes how in contemporary settings, Aboriginal women struggle to maintain the traditional roles they held within their communities (Andrew and Rodgers 1997).

As noted, generalizing Aboriginal women's experiences with respect to education and work does not accurately reflect the diversity and uniqueness of their experiences; thus, it is difficult to clearly pinpoint markers of "successful" Aboriginal women in the work world, in categorical terms. Caroline Anawak, a northern politician, was asked specifically about the qualities of successful northern Aboriginal women. Her response was that successful women are those who step out of traditional women's roles; they either marry outside their Aboriginal culture, or separate from their husbands to obtain a living (Illnik 1990). For Aboriginal women of other nations, success may be understood and defined differently. Further, the work and education experiences of women in other communities may require a different focus in terms of policy revision and development.

Along with the relationship of gender to work, Aboriginal women's varied cultural and political histories shape their relationship to work in Canada. Culture can be seen as more than the rich mosaic of Aboriginal tradition. Couture (1985) described culture as a continuum of experience, ranging from highly acculturated urban experiences, to traditional land-based experiences in northern communities. Couture's continuum of experience includes language and custom, culture, organization and personal identity. This view of culture compels us to focus on the multi-dimensional qualities of "experience" and on the diverse factors that have influenced Aboriginal peoples' work and education experiences, such as colonization.

Nahanee (1990) traced the restructuring of Dene women's work from the traditional bush and craft work that fit well with a nomadic life, to work in the village in contemporary settings. In the village, there is ready access to cheaply made consumer goods. Thus, women's traditional handwork is no longer sought after by the community; as a result, the work becomes undervalued. Since the community no longer expresses a need for the goods produced in traditional times, many women residing in the village no longer have a compelling desire to carry out the practices, and the practices themselves begin to fade.

Moreover, the breakdown of women's traditional culture has a direct effect on children and their education. Children who live in the contemporary villages attend school in which the skills they learn are skills that prepare them for paid work and participation in Western economies leaving less and less time and emphasis on traditional work. New moral codes of behaviour, role expectations and values about paid work learned at school and in church create further alienation from culture and traditional work.

Salomie Cousins (1994) explored the impacts of subsistence cycles on the choices Aboriginal women make about work and their satisfaction within the work force. For example, during certain times of the year, many Aboriginal peoples go hunting, fishing or berry picking, which

takes them away from their work. If they are prevented from carrying out these activities, they are unhappy and, in many cases, have to choose between their job and the activity. Thus, employers need to be more sensitive to the cultural and subsistence practices of Aboriginal communities, particularly where they have employed Aboriginal women, as these subsistence practices have a direct bearing on the retention and satisfaction of Aboriginal employees.

Education is tied closely to the discussion of work and, frequently, is offered as a solution to many of the employment problems faced by Aboriginal women. However, research indicates that although education policies offer some solutions for Aboriginal women seeking better work opportunities for themselves, the education system has, conversely, been a site of oppression. For instance, many Aboriginal peoples in Canada attended residential schools set up by the Canadian government and churches to provide schooling and vocational training to Aboriginal children. But these schools were also part of the Canadian government's systemic attack on Aboriginal languages, traditional practices and family structures. Many who attended these schools suffered physical, emotional and mental abuse and, as a result, have been unable to lead healthy lives and obtain jobs. Further, those responsible for running the schools reinforced Victorian notions of gender by separating the girls from the boys, and by restricting the girls to vocational training and domestic work. This affects the choices Aboriginal women make regarding their work, and the opportunities available to them outside the domestic sphere. Finally, many of the children who attended the schools graduated from the residential schools with a substandard education; thus, they were unable to attend university and develop professional careers.

On the other hand, many traditional educational practices of Aboriginal peoples have been a source of strength for Aboriginal women. Traditional education prepared Aboriginal children to live successfully in their societies through example, experiential learning and oral tradition in a system based on holistic development and transmitted by cultural experts such as elders. In today's education system, such practices have the potential to prepare Aboriginal children for academic training and professional careers, and increase the retention rate of Aboriginal students within the school system. But often, such practices are underutilized, or not used at all. Rather, the education system imposes Western values and Western approaches to education, rendering the education system a very undesirable and hostile place for Aboriginal students.

One must also examine the historical developments in Aboriginal education to understand better the contrast between traditional education and contemporary, Western education systems and their impact on Aboriginal women. In *First Nations Schools: Struggles and Triumph* (1994) Bowman and Kirkness identified four stages in Aboriginal education:

- traditional;
- federal government day schools and residential schools;
- provincially run schooling; and
- the era of *Indian Control of Indian Education* (NIB c1972).

As noted, residential schools have had a devastating impact on Aboriginal women. Provincial schools have also proven to be unsuccessful in providing Aboriginal women with an adequate

education and preparing them for the Canadian work force with up to 98 percent drop-out rates among Aboriginal students.

Indian Control of Indian Education (NIB c1972) was a policy paper drafted by the National Indian Brotherhood (precursor of the Assembly of First Nations). The policy argued for parental involvement and local control of Aboriginal education. This led to the establishment of local band schools, local education agreements negotiated between bands and school districts for better Aboriginal language and culture curriculums and programs, such as the Native Indian Teacher Education Program, which combines teacher training with cultural education. While there are still vast discrepancies in funding (few band schools have gymnasiums), and current education policies regarding Aboriginal students do not fully address the issues that many Aboriginal peoples face, Aboriginal peoples have made major gains in education. Many have assumed control of education within their own communities, and the retention rate of students in local band schools has been much higher than the retention rate of Aboriginal students in public schools.

Although the education system has changed in many respects since residential schools were in operation, Couture (1985) suggested that the current system still embodies Western ideals and standards that are at odds with Aboriginal approaches to learning. He warned that current educational programming for Aboriginal people is still inadequate in terms of retaining students and providing them with an adequate education that will prepare them for the work force.

Hull (1984) tied socio-economic background to the success of Aboriginal women's employment. Since many Aboriginal women are poor, they are unable to obtain a higher education and reap the work benefits of education. In his study, he pointed out that the level of formal education Aboriginal women attain bears a relationship to employment only in sectors where Aboriginal women do not have a significant presence, such as social services and manufacturing. In sectors where they have a strong presence, such as clerical and sales work, the level of education women attain bears little relationship to their employability.

Lange (1984) challenged the link between employment and education. She suggested that employability within the community is related to the level of education gained outside the community. Thus, there is little point in negotiating for policies that provide more and better training programs to increase employment within the community. Such programs are only useful when they are tied to upgrading skills for women who are already employed.

Other authors (Irving 1990; Nahanee 1990) suggested that how one engages in analyses of Aboriginal peoples and economics has a direct bearing on the value placed on traditional work. Nahanee (1997) critiqued the Royal Commission on the Economic Union and Development Prospects for Canada and suggested that, often, current economic analyses ignore the importance of traditional Aboriginal approaches to economics. Yet, such approaches may be crucial to understanding how economics work within Aboriginal communities. Barter, subsistence hunting, gathering and farming, trapping and craft work simply don't enter into the Commission's analysis. Rather, the Commission proposes solutions that benefit White, rather than Aboriginal northerners.

Nahanee's framework for considering Aboriginal women's work sets out three distinct economies: domestic work in the home, paid work outside the home and a third area unique to Aboriginal women — traditional or bush work. She draws a unique relationship between the "welfare economy and bushwork." Domestic work that includes housework and child care is largely unpaid work for Aboriginal women. To compound problems for Aboriginal women, many are unable to access child care and, thus, are unable to obtain jobs and participate in the formal economy (Hull 1984). One's ability to access education is also of central importance to finding work; for many Aboriginal peoples, education is not available for a variety of reasons, including inadequate schooling and preparation.

Bush work or women's traditional work is related to the land and to crafts. For some Aboriginal women, it is the area of work most affected by the loss of identity and culture. For the Dene, it is the area of work identified as contributing to a greater understanding of economic development and analysis. Nahanee noted that the welfare economy, typically seen by Western cultures as the result of a lack of work ethics, is vital to many Aboriginal people in that it supports their main pursuit of traditional work by providing them with cash to purchase traps and other equipment without requiring time away from traditional work.

Irving (1991) continued this discussion in an examination of the women's craft industry in the Northwest Territories. This women's industry amounted to \$22 million in external sales in 1987, a figure deceptively low, because it too, does not account for "informal sales" and "in-kind" transactions. Her analysis pointed to the importance of traditional work to Aboriginal women, and set recommendations for the restructuring of women's work so they can take control of their work.

M'Closkey (1996) examined how Western perceptions which see craft work as being distinct from fine art affect the value placed on Aboriginal women's craft work, which is not seen as fine art. Consequently, the craft work these women do is often undervalued and subject to economic exploitation. M'Closkey then argued that, despite these distinctions, the economic pressures and the barriers these women face, they continue to engage in weaving because they see it as central to their culture and find personal fulfillment in it.

Government Policies that Impact Aboriginal Women's Work and Education

In this section, we concentrate on the three levels of government (federal, provincial and local) that are responsible for developing policy on Aboriginal women. We examine the extent to which policies developed by each level of government have directly or indirectly affected Aboriginal women's experiences with work and education. The focus is on four areas in particular:

- Aboriginal women and leadership;
- employment opportunities for Aboriginal women;
- child-care support; and
- treaty making and local governance.

The *Indian Act* includes provisions that deal with the structure, composition and powers of band councils: the eligibility of members who run for council, the voting procedures and a statement that all band council resolutions are subject to ministerial approval. There are no sections that focus specifically on the needs of Aboriginal women or that guarantee a place for Aboriginal women on council. This has a bearing on Aboriginal women and their work both within and outside the community. If they are not guaranteed a place on council, they have no power to make decisions regarding their work opportunities and the treatment of workers in the community. Further, they cannot participate in negotiations with employers and government outside the community to further their interests. In sum, they cannot formally make decisions respecting work policies on any level whether in respect of work or education in their own communities or outside the community. Any opportunity for Aboriginal women to have a voice, to take leadership and to ensure support for an issue (i.e., day care) in this system will be accidental, and very much dependent on the whims of those with the power to make decisions.

Further, the powerlessness of women with respect to policy development at the local band council level is further exacerbated by the requirement that all band council decisions be subject to ministerial approval. Thus, Aboriginal women are not required to adhere to the decisions of their own council members, and are also subject to a Western value system that places men at the forefront of decision making.

A chapter in *Aboriginal Law: Cases, Materials and Commentaries* (Isaac 1995) considers the issue of sexual equality in the Canadian legal system. Its focus is on the *Indian Act*, particularly the sections dealing with status and membership. It looks at the history of *Indian Act* policy on status and membership, and its effects on the economic and social conditions of Aboriginal women. "The position of Indian women with respect to labour-force participation and income, suggests that they are the most severely handicapped in their exchange relations with employers" (p. 400). Isaac suggested that this is largely a result of *Indian Act* policies referring to Aboriginal women, specifically the sections on status and membership, which he criticizes. Before the 1985 amendments to the *Indian Act*, Aboriginal women lost their status and membership when they married non-Aboriginal men. After 1985, Aboriginal women regained status and membership; however, the Act prevents grandchildren of these women from getting status, limiting status to the children of the Aboriginal women who were denied their status before 1985.

Another issue regarding the amendments to the *Indian Act* on status and membership is that they interfere with efforts by Aboriginal communities to secure local governance for themselves. Specifically, the amendments interfere with the Aboriginal right to determine membership and status. In the *Twinn* decision (*Sawridge Band v. Canada* [1997] F.C.J. No. 794 (F.C.A.)), an Aboriginal band argued that its right to determine its own membership and status had been breached by the amendments to the *Indian Act*. Although the court decided that Aboriginal women's right to retain status and membership on marriage must be preserved, the decision gave rise to mixed feelings. On the one hand, many feel it is critical that Aboriginal women's rights be preserved. On the other hand, many also feel that communities should have the right to govern themselves and determine their own laws on membership and status. The amendments and the decision bring into question whether self-determination of Aboriginal peoples is possible under present legal and constitutional

ambiguities. This has serious implications for Aboriginal women in the workplace, particularly in Aboriginal communities, because if Aboriginal women are denied the right to status and membership, they are denied eligibility to sit on council and make decisions about internal policies on employment.

There are no sections within the *Indian Act* that specifically address employment. Further, there are no sections that protect the property interests of Aboriginal women who live on reserve land, which is also tied to Aboriginal women's employment. Self-employment opportunities for women become difficult, if not impossible, when they are denied access to land use in their own communities and cannot obtain a division of matrimonial property on reserve lands.

In *Discrimination in the Law and the Administration of Justice* (Water 1993), human rights laws are criticized for failing to live up to Charter standards on discrimination. Specifically, Water's article raised the concern that there is a tendency by groups who encounter discrimination, particularly those who are doubly disadvantaged (i.e., Aboriginal women), to endure incidents of discrimination because of the delays and difficulties of filing human rights complaints. Further, human rights commissions rarely use their legislation in a proactive way to advance equality rights, and tend to take a passive approach in dealing with discrimination (i.e., waiting for individuals to file complaints before taking action). Further, the commission focusses on individual rather than collective experiences; this leaves those who address such issues, in a collective sense, with feelings of frustration because the system does not adequately address their concerns in a manner that is sensitive to their particular needs.

Recommendations for change to human rights legislation and policy include:

- provide open-ended coverage to those groups that are discriminated against;
- allow for the protection of groups that have not had the benefit of human rights protection because they are not included in the legislation (i.e., discrimination against persons who are on welfare, particularly single mothers);
- ensure that human rights commissions and tribunals are independent of government and powerful interests in our society, and representing the views of the population rather than those of the elite;
- set up new separate agencies to address systemic discrimination; and
- provide an adequate remedy to those seeking relief for discriminatory conduct.

The *Sahtu Dene and Métis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement*, 1993 has sections dealing with economic development and government employment contracts. Its focus is on economic and employment activity of the government, and it sets out policies on how government economic development programs and public activities should be structured. Section 12 states that the government shall support the traditional economy of the people, assist with economic development and encourage employment within that community. It also states: "Government shall review job qualifications and recruitment procedures to remove inappropriate requirements in respect of cultural factors, experience, or education." (Section 12.1.2 (d)). Further policies include consultation with the Sahtu Tribal Council on a regular

basis (sections 12.1.3 and 12.1.4) on matters relating to economic development programs and on its contracting policies, procedures and approaches regarding government activities which give rise to employment (Section 12.2.2).

The Agreement between the Inuit of the Nunavut Settlement Area and Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada (1993) has a section entitled “Inuit Employment Within Government,” which sets out employment objectives and policies. Part 2 sets out the objective of this article of the agreement, which is to increase Inuit participation in government employment in the Nunavut Settlement Area to a representational level (Section 23.2.1). Part 3 provides that the Government shall undertake a detailed analysis of the labour force of that community to determine the availability, interest and level of preparedness of Inuit for government employment (Section 23.3.1). Part 4 states that the Government shall prepare an Inuit employment plan to increase and maintain the employment of Inuit at a representational level (Section 23.4.1) and outlines what to include in this employment plan (Section 23.4.2).

The agreement also requires the Government to develop and implement pre-employment training plans (Section 23.5.1), and assist with the establishment and maintenance of support measures to enhance the potential for success of the measures undertaken (Section 23.6.1). It states that a review panel is to identify and recommend measures to correct any deficiencies in the implementation of this part of the agreement (Section 23.7.1).

One point to be included in the employment plan is an analysis of personnel systems, policies, practices and procedures in the organization to identify those which potentially impede the recruitment, promotion or other employment opportunities of Inuit (Section 23.4.2(c)). Also, there are sections, which provide for more Inuit involvement in selection panels for employment, and cross-cultural awareness and training (Section 23.4.2).

Although there is no specific reference to Aboriginal women, many of these sections impact the way employment procedures and hiring practices affect the women in these communities. For example, the sections dealing with identifying systems, policies, practices and procedures that impede employment opportunities of Inuit, and cross-cultural awareness could have a bearing on subsidies available to Aboriginal women, with the possibility that the policies on subsidies would reflect the cultural differences of Aboriginal people, particularly Aboriginal women. For example, policies on child-care subsidies would allow for Aboriginal relatives who live in the same household to receive subsidies.

In considering policy and law to effect change for Aboriginal women in the areas of work and education, one must be aware of the limitations of using law as a focal point for policy change. Sherry Pictou (1996) noted the danger of using a legal system that speaks to experiences that support the ideology of inferiority/superiority and which locates Aboriginal women and their cultures within the realm of the inferior. How can law be used as a tool to effect change for Aboriginal women, when it is a male-dominated system, and the language of the legal system is largely based on Eurocentric, male-oriented experiences?

Aboriginal Women and Self-Governance

It is important to examine further the relationship between Aboriginal women's work and education experiences and self-government. Bill C-31 amendments, as noted earlier, led to positive changes for women and community members who lost their status. But the amendments also give rise to other concerns such as how communities are going to reconcile the need to preserve the interests of women with the desire to secure self-government. Further, for many communities, band lands have not been increased to accommodate the influx of Bill C-31 members, and land disputes have created conflict. Moreover, the amendments do not provide for continued status and membership to the future generations of Aboriginal people who are descendants of the Aboriginal women who regained their status.

Many participants in our study expressed fears about the implementation of self-government in their communities. Many feel community governments are not being regulated and are permitted by current policies to make decisions that benefit themselves. Many questioned whether current councils would be willing to address the needs of Aboriginal women or give women a voice in government.

The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) has provided suggestions for how best to address the needs of Aboriginal women while at the same time preserving the right of Aboriginal peoples to self-govern (Krosenbrink-Gelissen 1991: 358-360). In sum, constitutional protection for the rights of Aboriginal peoples must be clear, unambiguous and adequately secured. NWAC takes the position that while self-government is a political priority for Aboriginal peoples, sexual equality must stand above Aboriginal self-government, at least until the self-governing structures and laws of Aboriginal peoples incorporate the concerns and rights of Aboriginal women. Further, NWAC refuses to accept any proposal by the federal government unless sexual equality for Aboriginal women is guaranteed.

As have many authors who addressed the problems created by the 1985 amendments to the *Indian Act*, Jackson (1994: 184) noted the dilemma Aboriginal peoples face in their attempts to recover what she calls a "fading cultural identity" with the right of Aboriginal women to equal participation in government and to membership and status in their own communities.

On the other hand, Turpel (1991) stated that equality is not always seen as central to the policy goals of Aboriginal women and is often seen by Aboriginal women as an individualistic notion that alienates women from others in the community. She noted (pp. 179-180) that her commitment is to a "communitarian" notion of responsibilities to her peoples, as learned through traditional teachings and life experiences, as opposed to her own interests as an individual.

Aboriginal women scholars have also criticized some feminist theories for being blind to the larger concern of colonization and its impact on Aboriginal communities (Donaldson 1999). Arguably, certain theories of feminism are seen as attempts to colonize because they identify problems and offer solutions that are largely focussed on non-Aboriginal, rather than Aboriginal, problems and experiences.

Pictou (1996), on the other hand, stated that feminism offers women from her community an opportunity to locate and express experiences as Mi'kmaq women. She argued that feminism provides a way to reclaim experiences of equality inherent in Mi'kmaq culture, not to impose values that are inherently non-Aboriginal. While feminism tends to focus on gender and patriarchy as central sites of struggle, it can provide more and better insights for Aboriginal women seeking answers to questions about their work and education experiences.

Ultimately, whether communities are contemplating the establishment or recognition of self-government through the making of treaties or through court proceedings, Aboriginal women insist they be given high priority in the development of Aboriginal justice systems and program initiatives. They want significant power in decision making to ensure they and their children are safe within their communities and in relation to other Canadian governments (RCAP 1995: 275).

This report emphasizes the importance of Aboriginal women's voice and control over policies affecting their lives and the lives of Aboriginal peoples, particularly children.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Every effort was made to keep the research methodology accessible to the participants. Our philosophy allowed us to focus on direct experience. We used a form of participatory research conducting interviews and soliciting feedback. Our research was qualitative in nature. We conducted a content analysis keeping our methods simple so we would not overshadow the narratives of the women themselves.

Doing Aboriginal Research

Since the publication of the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* in 1996, researchers in Aboriginal communities are advised to follow the guidelines set out by the Royal Commission. The abstract from the Commission's "Ethical Guidelines for Research" (RCAP 1996a: 1) states:

These guidelines have been developed to help ensure that, in all research sponsored by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, appropriate respect is given to the cultures, languages, knowledge and values of Aboriginal peoples, and to the standards used by Aboriginal peoples to legitimate knowledge.

Guidelines are described at length in the government publication under the categories of principles, guidelines, consent, collaborative research, review procedures, access to research results and community (RCAP 1996a).

The following is a paraphrased summary of the major points from these guidelines that have been applied to the current study funded by Status of Women.

- Research about Aboriginal people must reflect their own perspectives.
- A purpose of any study of Aboriginal peoples should be to establish the authenticity of orally transmitted knowledge.
- A multiplicity of viewpoints must be represented from each Aboriginal community.
- How does the current study challenge previous assumptions based on research in the area?
- The consent process is extremely important and should be fully understood by the participants.
- Collaborative procedures in Aboriginal community-based research are essential.
- Consultation in these communities is also essential at the levels of planning, execution and evaluation of results.

- Results must be presented when possible in accessible terms so participants can understand the meaning of the research and the implications for their lives.
- It is extremely important that participants in the study receive some benefit from the research.
- The transfer of skills to Aboriginal peoples in the communities is very important so they can work toward managing their own research.

We designed the current project to comply with these guidelines.

Problems Doing Aboriginal Research

Linda Tuhiwai Smith, in *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999), offered a dramatic critique of much of the research that studies Aboriginal peoples. A few succinct quotes from her introduction provide another context for our research methodology.

The word itself, “research”, is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary (p. 1).

This book identifies research as a significant site of struggle between the interests and ways of knowing of the West and the interests and ways of resisting of the Other (p. 2).

[S]tories about research and particularly about researchers were intertwined with stories about all other forms of colonization and injustice (p. 3).

Research is one of the ways in which the underlying code of imperialism and colonialism is both regulated and realized. It is regulated through the formal rules of individual scholarly disciplines and scientific paradigms, and the institutions that support them (p. 8).

Smith emphasized the importance of histories in studies about the lives and conditions of Indigenous peoples. And at the centre of histories are stories. Even before the publication of Smith’s book, as researchers, we made a commitment to stories.

Project researcher Colleen Purdon quotes Noel McDermit from his Inuit myths lecture at Arctic College (1999): “Why tell stories at all? The answer is relevant. We tell stories to answer hard questions, to teach behaviour, to purge our emotions, and to put order in our world. The stories and themes that follow do exactly that.”

Methods

This study is exploratory and qualitative in nature. Three researchers interviewed 140 Aboriginal women in one-to-one interviews or focus groups in eight Aboriginal communities across Canada. Because of funding restraints, only one researcher worked in each community

in partnership with local Aboriginal agencies, networks and bands. Though demographics were not a formal focus of the study, the informal gathering of data indicated that participants ranged in age from 21 to 84 years and represented a variety of socio-economic levels.

The study is also ethnographic, ethnography meaning literally “portrait of people.” It is influenced by the methods developed by Sara Lawrence Lightfoot and Jessica Hoffmann Davis (1997).

Researchers worked extensively with liaisons from each community to design the research, engage participants in education about the study, especially the consent form, locate elders to be advisors and begin meetings with prayers, arrange for food and advise on local matters. As well, several National advisors, all of whom were Aboriginal leaders and elders, were involved at all stages.

The Four Research Questions

1. What have you experienced in attempting to advance your education and find meaningful work?
2. Have you experienced conflict between realizing your work goals and living a “cultural” life? What have they been?
3. What do you recommend in terms of policy changes that would diminish these conflicts?
4. What do you need in a general sense to support coherence between your cultural life and your work life?

In Manitoba, Toronto and Nova Scotia, interviews were taped and transcribed. Liaisons served as note takers in these communities. At all the other sites, the liaisons, official note takers or the researchers themselves took extensive notes.

When all the data were collected, each researcher sent transcripts to the liaisons to circulate to participants for feedback. Liaisons then returned these transcripts to researchers. In the next phase of the project, researchers wrote preliminary reports for their sites and sent them to each community for feedback. Once again, liaisons circulated the reports to participants and sent back the revised drafts. The changes were incorporated. As well, interim reports were sent to Status of Women Canada at each stage of the project, as required by contract.

Results were analyzed through a qualitative content analysis into core values, critical themes and policy recommendations based on the narrative reports of the participants. Policy recommendations were made and the findings were analyzed by the project manager. The final draft, submitted to Status of Women Canada made extensive use of the stories and narrative reports of the participants and was organized into chapters so each of the eight communities could maintain the integrity of difference.

In the original research design, action plans were to be a component. Once in the communities, we realized that the limitations of the study included the ability to formulate action plans, which would have taken a lot more time to design, than the time allotted this project.

Notes on Action Plans

Action plans, when designed within the research process, are a form of action or participatory research advocated by Paulo Freire and Peter Park (Freire et al. 1998). Bentz and Shapiro (1998: 127) stated: “The intention [of action research] is to change a system, and the values are those of participation, self-determination, empowerment through knowledge, and change.”

This research project reflects a broad approach to action research in that it encouraged participants to take responsibility for policy by making their own recommendations. The telling and recording of the women’s stories was also a form of action research, in the broad sense, because these are critical components for enduring social change. Respectful listening to participants is important if the data collected are to be authentic and true. Therefore, respectful listening is an element of action research. Accurate reporting is also necessary for social responsibility in the research process. These foundational steps begin to create a trust between the participants and researchers, a foundation that can lead to more formal action research and the creation of action plans.

The limits of this study prevented the long-term building of the knowledge and trust through the creation of action plans. As well, action plans must have their origin in the communities and be created over time by community members if they are to be enduring and effective. In Aboriginal communities, they must include an elaborate consultation process, which is community based.

Critique of Research Methodologies

The tendency to diminish or dismiss the direct experience or lives in context of Aboriginal women and others is reinforced by limited definitions of science. This is a problem in the social sciences in general. It is specifically a problem in Aboriginal research when, as Smith (1999) proposed, the historical contexts, and thus the stories, are so important. In cases of injustice or inequity, it is through the stories that we can logically deduce “where we went wrong.” This is particularly true in the case of policy. Shapiro and Bentz (1998) proposed a view of social research that considers cultures of inquiry, with each culture holding a position of equal authority. One of these cultures of inquiry is phenomenology, which studies direct experience. Though it is based more on a philosophical position, phenomenology can also be reflected in methodology. In fact, phenomenological methods of inquiry are available in this tradition, for example, Clark Moustakas (1994). In feminist research, there are many examples of women’s stories being the focus of studies, (Fine 1991; Hahn 1983; Haraway 1988; Harding 1987; hooks 1990).

Even some Aboriginal researchers reflect irreconcilable positions when it comes to research that highlights the experience of Aboriginal women. In a 1998 study by Madeleine Dion Stout

and Gregory D. Kipling for Status of Women Canada, entitled *Aboriginal Women in Canada: Strategic Research Directions for Policy Development*, the researchers stated:

[O]ne must also question whether the existing research priorities of policy makers and project funders accurately adhere to the day-to-day realities of Aboriginal women “on the ground,” or whether they are not more reflective of the political agendas of politicians, bureaucrats and other elites whose interests are far removed from the immediate concerns of Aboriginal women (p. 28).

In this succinct statement, Dion Stout and Kipling characterized the core dilemma existing between the policy makers and Aboriginal women “on the ground.” How to eliminate this dilemma is yet another question. One would assume that education on both sides might create positive change. On the one hand, policy makers become educated about the lives of Aboriginal women “on the ground,” their immediate concerns, their day-to-day realities, in essence, their stories. On the other, Aboriginal women become educated about policy and the role of policy in their lives, and they are empowered to participate fully in the policy-making process.

However, in another part of their report, Dion Stout and Kipling diminished the place of these stories.

[A]t a time when evidence-based decision making reigns supreme, complete dependence on small sample sizes, life histories, personal narratives or other qualitative research methodologies is likely to affect the credibility of the research findings, and also the chance of decisive action (p. 28).

Dion Stout and Kipling later implied that qualitative research is not even scientifically credible (p. 39).

Often, participatory methodologies are set aside at the analysis stage. Professional research analysts take over interpretation of the data with little experience or specific day-to-day knowledge of participants “on the ground.” This eliminates the possibility for understanding and, critically, for empathy, an important element of the decision-making process. Thus, communication between Aboriginal women and policy makers becomes an ever-widening gap based on professional expertise and interpretation, which often has very little to do with the lives of the women themselves. Therefore, the women cannot relate to the policies. Policies do not reflect their day-to-day needs, their experiences “on the ground,” in day-to-day lives.

Indeed, though the Stout Dion and Kipling study is an excellent review of the literature for strategic development, it is a study based entirely on academic texts and documents. Not one interview was done with an Aboriginal woman in this study.

The unfortunate result of this widening gap is, as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) might suggest, the recolonization of Aboriginal women in which the power over the lives of these women is placed in the hands of an elite few. Most often, these elite few have very little understanding of their direct experience, of their lived contexts.

3. CONTEXTS: ABORIGINAL WOMEN'S STORIES

These stories are representative of the Aboriginal women who participated in our study. Though we would have liked to include many more narratives, the women who offered these particular stories gave collective voice to many of the values, critical themes and policy recommendations echoed by the vast majority of the 140 women participating in the study within a context of their lived experience.

The Story of Barbara Bruce (Manitoba)

It's very hard to do this in this kind of setting and in such a short time. It takes a long time to tell your story. I am going to try to answer some of these questions. My spiritual name is Flies High Thunderbird Woman. I follow the red road. I am from Saulteaux and Cree descent. I have always known who I've been. My father was a fisherman, trapper and dug seneca root for a living. My mother was a housewife and mother. My father was an alcoholic and a batterer. So it was a difficult situation, difficult upbringing. I am the middle child who played the role of mediator between my siblings and, most important, between my father and mother. Often, I stopped my father from hitting my mother. I wanted to share a little bit of my history because it has to do with the number one question. I was sexually abused by the age of six months and when you talk about being stalked, being raped, being manipulated, being molested, I too suffered with these things for a very long time. The perpetrator died in 1985. Until that time, I felt he was my shadow. My healing process started in 1985 with traditional and contemporary healing methods. As a result of my abuse, I always felt I couldn't accomplish anything. There is no way that I could go to university because nuns and priests told me that I couldn't go. They said I would never make it. I couldn't go to university because I was too stupid and I always remembered that. Well it was more difficult than that. My abuse also prevented me from believing in myself. In school there is no way on earth that I would ever lift my hand to speak, never, never, and that's basically because of an incident in Grade 1. So, those experiences were very difficult to say the least. They prevented me from becoming who I really wanted to be. I always felt I could have been a damn good lawyer. But I thought I could never do it. I majored in sociology and psychology and I also graduated as a certified inter-cultural trainer. In the past, I felt I couldn't do it. I guess being told you can't do it often enough...you start believing it and you can't do it. There are existing blocks. You manage through them one by one. My history as an infant, a child, a young teenager and a young adult prevented me from advancing. The kind of education that I wanted did not take place. The missionaries, the nuns and priests controlled our lives. It was power and control, and it prevented me from doing what I wanted to do. Now, as far as work is concerned, I did find meaningful work. I accomplished a lot of things. I don't know how sometimes, because half the time I felt like I didn't know what I was doing.

In the early '70s, the leaders depended on us because we had a little bit of education. In regards to culture...I always tried to live the cultural life. Culture is a way of life. That's the meaning of culture, and the core of culture is beliefs and values. I was brought up with values of respect of sharing and caring. We always shared with people and cared for them as well. I was brought up that way. I never remembered being taught to discriminate against people. The only clear division in my community was the difference between the French and mixed-blood people. I sensed discrimination there. Culture is a way of life for me. I do training in that area. Sometimes, you sit like we are today and what you perceive from people is their external shell only. You never know the internal space of a person, the values and beliefs they have, unless you start to share with them and they with you. I always try to remember to do that. I always try to walk that way; never to make an assumption in that way. We talk about policy changes. I wish that we would stop writing policies in a colonial sense and in a sexist sense. Who are the ones writing policies? Men are still doing it. If it's women, it will be White women. It's never women of color or Aboriginal women. They are not involved. So if we are going to change policy that affects us and will effect change, we must be involved. Maybe this kind of project is the first step. I have been self-employed for the last 15 years. I've had an opportunity to practise to be me; to live the culture and to choose to live the cultural life that I choose. Further, to live the spiritual life that I want to live. I have been fortunate. I can appreciate what people go through when they are working in institutions where they are not allowed to practise what they believe in. It must be very conflicting and must create a lot of friction for them. I can't even see myself being there. I can appreciate what other women are going through in that regard. Now the conflicting work experience that I've had is patronizing and sexist attitudes. Yes, there are changes happening. You have to be very centred and have absolute respect for yourself to protect yourself from that kind of mentality. Sometimes, I feel frustrated with the lack of change. Your number four question. Support? Women always meet to work, but rarely meet to share and socialize. However, when we do meet at various functions, retreats, gatherings, it revitalizes us and the support is there. We have to get rid of policies that are controlling and replace these with the policies that empower.

The Story of Louise Chippeway (Manitoba)

I attended a mission school operated by the Oblate nuns. Unlike residential school kids, we got to go home every day. The nuns were often condescending toward us as kids and to our parents. They called us savages and dirty drunken Indians. From an early age, I learned to feel and believe I was inferior, no good and at the bottom of human development. I learned to play my inferior/victim role as a child because that was what I believed society expected of me. I was colonized heart and soul. I allowed myself to be a victim well into my adult years...I learned racial inferiority or low self-worth from the church leaders. The shame I felt from the nuns remains forever

etched in my memory.... My victim mentality stayed with me for many years. That racial inferiority and low self-esteem I felt as a child transferred over to my adult life, particularly into my relationships and my work life, including how I raised my children. The forces that shaped and molded me as a child intensified as an adult. I guess this was colonization and internalized racism in action.

Initially, it was difficult working in government because of cultural conflict and racism. Sometimes, it was a struggle to get along with my colleagues because of their bias and stereotyped feelings toward Native people. Being a Native person, coming from a Native community and working for only Native organizations was not exactly what they wanted. According to them, my experience was limited, and I was not objective and professional enough. They said I was too emotional and I should be working for Native organizations. I challenged them on those statements, and I said that I had as much right to be working in government as they did. They never brought it up again. Working for government required major shifts in my life and values. Everything that I stood for as a Native person, culturally, linguistically and racially was challenged, questioned and sometimes undermined. I felt I almost had to give up who I was as a Native person to work in government. I almost became what they wanted me to be. Traditionally, governments most often hire persons that are most like themselves: White, middle class and mainstream. A person had to fit into their mold to survive in the system. In order for Native people to be hired by governments, we sometimes have to adopt their values and corporate culture at the expense of our own. You almost have to sell out on yourself to survive. But I was not going to allow that to happen because I had something to contribute and I had a right to work for government and government needed to be overhauled. That was the conflict I faced initially.

Justice is a department that impacts directly on Aboriginal people, especially the provincial jails, courts, remand centre and so on. Mostly White people staff these institutions. We want to change that to make it more reflective and proportional to the population and clients being served.

I conducted a needs assessment survey on Native employees in government. The Aboriginal Advisory Council and I developed four major recommendations as a result of the survey. One of them is to have a network support system for Native employees in government. The second one is to have an Aboriginal management development program. The Manitoba government was sorely lacking Native people in management positions. The third was to have a province-wide, anti-racism policy. The fourth recommendation is to have a comprehensive career development program for Native employees. That was our strategy to increase Aboriginal representation in government. Priority was to have more Aboriginal employees in management positions.

My other priority is to have a province-wide anti-racism policy in place. A major finding of our Aboriginal survey is that Aboriginal employees are compressed and concentrated at the bottom levels of the civil service. Many of the Aboriginal employees are in entry-level positions, such as clerical also known as the pink ghetto — at the bottom of the barrel so to speak. This is one example of how racism is manifested in the civil service besides the underrepresentation and underutilization of Aboriginal employees. Many in government do not believe racism exists. They think that racism exists only in the southern United States. If you talk to them about racism they get defensive or deny it exists. I guess if they have never experienced racism, they don't know what it's like. Telling them that racism is alive and well in Manitoba is offensive to them. They can't comprehend or don't want to believe it exists. That is the reason why this anti-racism policy and the Aboriginal management project are so critical. Achieving critical mass is essential to change the racial inequities in government.

One effect this had on me is that I hated being called a Métis and I hated my fair skin. Indians called me White and White people called me Indian. I felt shame, hurt and rejection everywhere. I thought being a Métis was a form of internalized racism. Cree and Ojibway was my true ancestry. In my heart, I really believed I was Cree and Ojibway culturally, linguistically and racially. I denied and rejected the Métis part of me for those reasons. I remember one incident where I suggested to a Métis leader that Métis people were a tribal group. She nearly hit me and proceeded to get really angry for suggesting such a ludicrous thing.

My anger and bitterness often affected my relationships with people and work environments. In the workplace, I often felt and acted like a victim, my thought patterns were “Oh they don't like me” or “They don't like Indians, that's why they are treating me this way” or “I'm not good enough, I'm not wanted.” The victimization and racism I experienced from my mother, the church, the school and the White community combined with my own internalized racism was at the root of my anger and shame.

The Story of Cynthia Bear Bird (Manitoba)

For me, education was important and it still is because I grew up in a home where my parents both only have Grade 9 education, and they didn't get to go to residential school like everybody else because they had to go to work right away. My mother's father died so she had to start working to contribute to the family, and my father grew up on a farm and he had a choice, go to school or to work and he chose to work. So I watched them work really hard all their lives and thought I would never be a farmer, never be a farmer's wife. The work was too hard. But throughout that they always encouraged us strongly to go to school and it was easier to go to school, you know, than to work at home. So that was a good choice I thought, and they continued that kind of support through the years. That was good. Although when I got to

higher education I found that I was experiencing some conflict because of my position in the family. I was the oldest child. You have to do everything. There are expectations of you because of that pecking order and so your own personal things have to be put on hold for the family and other people and that sort of happened to me over the years. So it started in my education and it continued through my work life. I've always had to choose things and I've just come to learn this about myself in the last maybe six years in terms of my choices. I had to look for flexible education and work experiences and environments where if I had to leave for two days or a week or two weeks, it would be OK. I could still come back to this work place and I've been really lucky over the years that I've been able to be in those kinds of places. I didn't find that kind of support so much in the structured institution or educational settings. That was OK. My family at those times were more important so I just knew later in my life I could go back to education if I wanted to. But my family might not always be there, people were dying around me and I had to just go. So I look back now at those choices and they were good. I don't regret any of them and in terms of my work as I said I felt really fortunate in that way. But through those experiences I also learned different things about the work place.

Working with men I found to be very difficult, all men, Aboriginal men. I had one experience with men for almost three years, in administration and it was very difficult. Every day was a struggle and I had to fight for whatever to the point where they would be scared to share things with me because they knew what my reaction would be. I would say no we can't do this because or we need to do this because...for that's not right and they didn't like that. I didn't serve them coffee. But they were men of different ages too. There were young and older men and I went to other men before and it just depends on, I guess, men's sense, or who they are and how they treat us. Not all of them are like that I've known some really good men and one in fact has been a mentor for all of my education and work life and continues to be today — very supportive.

So I was lucky enough to see that balance too in perspective, and that's one of the things, I guess, that led me to choose to just leave a structured work environment and work at home and do contract work and thinking I might be lucky to be able to work with good people along the way and pick and choose. So I've had four good years of those kinds of work experiences and I've been really enjoying it. I guess the other thing too is I've come to accept the position in my family as well. For a few years when I was quite a bit younger I didn't. I just did things because they had to be done and then I went through this period of feeling sorry for myself for a few years, like why always me, but I still had to do it anyway. But I'd finally come to the point of realizing that oh well that's just life. I guess that is what I am supposed to do and talking to other people and sharing with other women in terms of their positions in the family, I came to realize that there were such similarities in those kinds of responsibilities and things are fine, you know, and also I've

learned not to mother. And I still try not to do that but it is really hard. Yes my friends will tell you that. They've known that about me for some time.

So I guess part of it is letting go and accepting people, They had their own decisions to make, and you can't always protect them and your friends and things will just happen. They share and it's their choice. So that's been part of my learning too over the years.

In terms of policy changes for women in the workplace, I think about it in a number of workplaces, in institutional workplaces like government and corporations where there needs to be flexibility to allow for women and to recognize that women have additional responsibilities besides working for money in terms of paid employment. They also have responsibilities within the family, as a mother or grandmother, you know, the one that does all the supporting or the eldest maybe in the family. Whatever position she holds in the family, might take her away from work. In terms of our own places, our own communities and our institutions or organizations that we set up, I see some real flexibility there already but sometimes the sensitivity isn't always there because people are on power trips or whatever and that comes from men handling it, not just men because I've experienced that too. So we need to somehow put in place our own checks and balances of conscious-raising sensitivity to employees, men and women.

What do Aboriginal women need in a general sense? I think we all need support, to be able to come to circles like this to share informally, you know, to just visit and talk and share. I felt the strength of a woman's support group about six years ago when I was going through a difficult time for a couple of years and it was just so powerful. They will never know how much those women helped me through a difficult time in my life. Never once did they tell me you should do this, you should do that. Just shared in their own stories, and pieces of those experiences helped me. I think we all need that and in that kind of sharing. We learn from each other and get support. I don't think it happens enough because we come to meetings like this and it's more structured for a person so much to support and share. We need to find more informal ways of doing that and I can see more of those things happening now over the last few years like Mae's group and Linda, our elder, the circle that she started so well, and so those are good things. But I see the flexibility of understanding the need to have it in the workplace too, to recognize that it doesn't always have to be a mixed staff sharing. That's good too, but women sometimes just need to do their own sharing. That's all I want to share today. Thanks.

The Story of Elsie Basque (Nova Scotia)

As a child, my father advocated education, and he always ended his little speech about education with "babe it is the only thing that nobody will be able to take away from you." And so, we were as poor as church mice and my

father was a guide, but at the time he was recovering as a tuberculosis patient. So his recourse was limited. So when we saw the article in the Halifax Chronicle about a school for Indian children, he determined it was the proper way to get an education. So he immediately applied for my acceptance. I was accepted. I was 13 years old when I went to the residential school. I was in the eighth grade. So educationally, I was on the same level as my non-Native peers at that time. I was at the residential school for two years, four months and six days. And when I left there at age 16, I was still in the eighth grade. So that was a hindrance toward my education. The household chores that we were forced to do, I don't think taught me anything. If you look around my house you will see dust a foot thick because I hate dusting. I hate housework. I hate everything that's involved with housework. I think it has been the effects of the residential school.

So we got to the residential school. As I said, I was 16 when I left there. My father pulled some strings and got me into Sacred Heart Academy down here and that was where I went to high school. From there I went to teachers' college and graduated in 1937. I was the first Mi'kmaq to graduate from teachers' college. They recognized my work and the fact that I worked among the Mi'kmaq people practically all my life and gave me an honorary doctorate degree three years ago. So I am Doctor Elsie Basque. My father would be proud. The residential school was the stumbling block because I have always said that I lost the two years, four months and the six days out of my life. In residential school, you were fortunate if you went to school for half a day. At that time in Nova Scotia, each little village had its own school. Even if there were only three or four families in that village, you were entitled to a school. So that meant that there was a demand for teachers. And probably the supply couldn't fit the demand. So as a result, the Department of Education allowed people who were in Grade 9 to get permits from the Department of Education and teach which always had made me wonder how many of those teachers of that type were teaching on Indian reserves. And they had permanent tenure. They had it made. Since I didn't have a school, and it didn't seem likely that they were going to get one on an Indian reserve then, I applied for school in the non-Native community. I went to Cape Breton.

My first school was in a little village called Mabou, which is about five miles away from the larger village of Mabou itself. And they were all Scottish people. So I was being introduced to a new culture, a new history, a new language, a new everything and it was fun. It really was fun. Anyway, I stayed there for a whole year and I was happy, and didn't see or was not made aware of racism or discrimination of any sort. They accepted me for what I was. I was their teacher, and I evidently was qualified to teach their children and that was what was the most important thing. It doesn't matter what you look like on the outside. It is what you are on the inside that counts. That was my first school and I have great memories of it. And that was my introduction into the work force of that era.

The following year, I stayed home with my father, but then that February I received a letter in the mail which stated that I would open this school in Indianbrook in September of that fall, which brings us back to residential school again. Indianbrook was five miles away from Shubenacadi where the residential school was at that time. All Indian children in Nova Scotia were supposed to go to the residential school. They were forced to go. There were a lot of children whose parents, like mine, were focussing on education only to find that it was not that type of institution. So the people of Shubenacadie had long determined they weren't going to send their children to the residential school no matter what.

I arrived there on September 3, 1939. The Indian agent had told me that the building would probably be empty, not to worry. They would see to it that I had provisions for the children. The desks and all the necessary amenities for a classroom had been ordered and they would be there in a short period of time, if not by tomorrow. That morning there were 26 children, 18 had never been inside a classroom before. There were four wooden benches and a box of chalk.

Fifty-four years later (for our reunion), there were 24 of the 48 that had been in my class from 1939 to 1947. And 24 of them were still alive and 17 came back to say thank you. And when I looked at this group of children, I saw bachelor of arts degrees, a master's degree in social work. I saw an honorary doctoral degree from Dalhousie. I saw teachers. I saw a registered nurse. I saw two chiefs. I saw carpenters. And I thought about the four wooden church benches and the box of chalk. And I still get teary-eyed over it. They had done themselves proud. And nobody could ask for anything more.

Then Will [my son] became the president and things began to happen. They had a grant for an after-school program. And they were still calling, gnawing at me. I always had this same response. Till one day a friend knew exactly what to do. She called and said:

"What are you doing this afternoon?"

"Nothing. Why?"

"Let's go for a drive."

I said:

"OK."

The car stopped in front of this house. I said:

"Where are we?"

"Well you will see. Come on in."

This was the after-school program of the Boston Indian Council, and I met a lot of friends from Indianbrook. So I was teaching again a week later. At the Boston Indian Council I was given a free hand to do what I wanted to do. In Boston, I was a frequent guest lecturer at universities, colleges, public schools, churches on Mi'kmaq culture, the status of Indian elderly, the status of urban Indian people. I was appointed to key committees and associations: Governor's Citizen's Advisory Committee for the Massachusetts Department

of Elder Affairs, Governor's Advisory Council on Massachusetts Commission against Discrimination, Mayor's Advisory Council on Affairs of the Elderly, Mayor's Advisory Council on Aging — Planning Committee, National Indian Council on Aging, Boston Indian Council, Concerned Citizens of Boston, School Volunteers of Boston, National Urban Indian Council, National Council on Aging.

You know I was brought up as a little Mi'kmaq girl, and the only thing that was missing, I think, was the language part. My father taught me how to paddle a canoe, and he always told me stories, and used to tell me to write them down — I wish I had, but see when you're a teenager, you don't realize the value of what your parents are telling you. That's why I'm telling my grandchildren, Marty and her children, you know, well, Grammy's writing it down because some day she won't be here. You have to do those things, because I know they're no more interested in the stories that I tell — no child is. It's not only them. It's every child. You can't sit around and talk about your history — it's so boring (in a whisper and laughing).

The Story of Patricia Doyle Bedwell (Nova Scotia)

When I was in sociology, I was doing research on Mi'kmaq women and domestic islands which was something that was very close to my heart anyway. Looking at feminist theory. It was a real awakening for me starting to read all the stuff that people have read in the books — feminism, and about women's rights, what is domestic violence and what does it mean, patriarchal society, critical theory and I was having a great time, and it was a real awakening and a real learning experience for me. But I didn't feel that conflict. I had my son. My family was all supportive. But it was when I got to law school that the conflict started. And it is because I went into law school under an affirmative action program. To me, affirmative action means that the law school has to learn who we are and how to respect our abilities. The way that they assess White students' abilities doesn't work for us. So that is what it means. It doesn't mean that I am less than anybody else. It doesn't mean that I am stupid. But when I got to law school that's when it was bad. Because I was, well: "You aren't qualified to be here." So my response would be — it was a real fight.

I remember going to the class on racism and people saying in public law class, which is the class on equality law, saying: "You know White people are in the majority. There is no such thing as racism. It's a bunch of people whining. They are not working hard." Blah, blah or whatever. I was so upset. I remember thinking, My God, these people are so narrow-minded. There were five Mi'kmaq women in my class. We always hung together. We might fight between each other, but we always presented a united front wherever we went. We always felt each other. And I started realizing that. When this whole thing happened with racism in the class and people denying that it existed, I wanted to quit law school right there and then.

So that is when I really began to understand that I was different. I guess I spent my whole life trying to say, I guess I am Mi'kmaq but we are all spiritually the same or equal. I was doing that thing and then I get to law school and I realize that I am fundamentally different.

I had a friend. Well, that Friday, he died. And they think that he committed suicide. He was only 13. My friend called me and said:

“Patti did you read the paper yesterday?”

I said:

“No, I am up to my eyeballs with work”

And she said to me:

“Well, there is an obituary in the paper.”

I said:

“Obituary of who?”

“Jonathon.”

“Well, it can't be him because he is just a kid.”

The funeral was 10:00 the next morning. So I went home. I stayed there with Sherry for a while. I can't write that exam tomorrow, I can't. So I called up Trish and told her that my friend's son just died. It might be suicide. And I'm totally shaken up by it. She said:

“Patti, you have got to write that exam.”

I said:

“I can't.”

She said:

“They won't understand.”

But it doesn't fit the list of acceptable lists of “who has died.” So I said:

“What am I going to do?”

She said:

“You are just going to have to pull your act together and you are going to have to write that exam.”

So, the next morning, I get up and try to study and I told Sherry I can't go to the funeral because I have got to be here. I felt so sick. I sat all morning crying. I went in and wrote the exam at 1:30. I don't remember what the exam was about. I don't remember anything. I ended up passing it. But to me, when Trish said to me, they are not going to understand, that's when I began to see how I oriented myself differently. Because these are people in my community that were close to me. That wasn't recognized as being valid. Trish said they won't understand and I knew they wouldn't understand. That's where I started to feel a lot of the conflict.

I just did what I was taught to do, and what is the appropriate thing to do and the right thing to do from what my mother taught me. But I didn't see how that distinguished me from like say, a White person. I didn't understand that. That's when I started to see the difference. I thought about things differently — that my connection to my community was different because I actually had a community and a lot of people in the White world don't have a community. But they have responsibilities too. In the next couple of years, I was

constantly feeling conflict. If people die or something happens in the community, I am supposed to go home. And I think part of what I learned by the time I graduated, is that I think differently too. Like Trish taught me. She was the first one that told me that Aboriginal people see things holistically.

When you are writing a paper or an exam and if you have to put: "I am number 959," and you can't put any of your experience or perspective into that exam.... And then I learned why I start with myself all the time. And I didn't realize that at the time. But I was taught that. That you always have to start where I am situated. How does this impact me or what is my experience in relation to this, and then how does that extrapolate against other situations? Trish always said the truth begins with the self. You are always looking at yourself. Truth is not the subjective thing out there. It begins with self. And that was how I was taught and I didn't realize I was taught that (at home).

So that year of teaching — that is when the conflicts came up with my community. One year when I was teaching, my mother got into a really bad accident. She was still going to need a long recovery time, but she was not in danger of dying. I said: "Oh, my God, I have to teach tomorrow. What am I going to do? I should stay here, but the law school is going to get mad at me if I don't go back and teach."

So, I drove back to Halifax next morning, which is a four-hour drive from here and I left at 8:00 and got here at 12:00 and I went into my class at 2:00 p.m. to teach. None of my Indian students was there in class. It was all the White students. Then I got out of class, and I ran into one of my Indian students afterward. She said:

"Holy God, what are you doing here?"

"Well, I came back to teach."

"Are you crazy? We heard your mother got into a car accident. Is that true?"

"Yes."

"We never expected you to be here."

But then I felt the conflict with the university because I knew they wouldn't understand and when I went through and it happened in the law school again. I was pregnant twice while I was teaching there. I lost two babies — actually three. So, I am teaching because I don't want them to think that I am not good enough. So, I am in there teaching and I am having these contractions and I am thinking, I am going to lose the baby. It is going to happen, I know. And the next day, I ended up in the hospital with surgery. And I wanted to go back to work right away. Of course, my doctor said:

"You are crazy. You are not going back."

I missed classes when my grandmother died, when my mother got sick. I missed eight classes. But I made them up. And that is where the pull was all the time. So, I have to be there for my family, then this is my job and if I

don't do my job properly, they are going to see me as not being good enough. So that struggle was there. Then the whole process of saying that I am not good enough. Here is a little Indian who came through law school who has the audacity to think that she might teach law. How dare she think that. They hired me. But it was a real huge struggle, and I ended up going on sick leave for a while. That was from losing another pregnancy, all the stress I was under there, and I am diabetic as well.

It is not only that I have a responsibility to my family, which I take very seriously, but I need to be there. I need to be with my family and I need to be with other Aboriginal people, other Mi'kmaq people. I am tired of living a schizophrenic existence sometimes.... But I work here and I learned, like learning a different language. It is like learning a different way to do things. But it is kind of all surface to me.

There is a lot of sexism. The women sometimes, we are not taken seriously and because I can, at least in the society, I can, I am a professor. I can do this now. In the Mi'kmaq community, if you do something like this, well, I am a professor. I have a degree. I have done my research. My research interests include blah, blah. I published here and there or whatever. My family is going to go:

“Who do you think you are? Why are you trying to act like a big shot?” I know this stuff I do here is important. But it doesn't define who I am as a person, as a woman, as a Mi'kmaq woman. And I am not saying that my mom isn't proud of me. But my work, what I do, like if I was working at Dalhousie or working in the community, I would still be doing the same thing trying to help Mi'kmaq people get through school. And that's some of the Status of Women stuff. That is why I went to law school. I wanted to help women who had been in abusive situations. I want to help single moms. I was a single mother and had to get through school. I wanted to see what I could do, like as a lawyer.... I wanted to make a difference, so one of the things that I do with Mi'kmaq women is that we have done a lot of work on victims and violence against women and we publish books on helping women get out of abusive relationships and thing like that. I would be doing that anyway. I did that before. But the law school — working there made me really look at the conflict within myself. And one of the biggest things that I felt that I wasn't good enough.

And I think that it took losing my baby. I think back and I was saying what am I going to do — this is my dream — I wanted to be a teacher. I wanted to be a social activist. I wanted to stir things up. I wanted to make change. I want to do all these things. And when I lost the baby, I don't know if I was ever at a lower point in my life. So I sat there and I thought, here I am. I lost my baby. I dreamed to be a law professor. I tried to be a law professor, and I have failed miserably at that. Because I was so entrenched in who I am to teach by stories, to teach holistically, to use symbols and markers, because that is the way I learned. And I think at that time, I came very close to, “I

don't care if I live or I die." I think that is where I was at. I had to make a decision to live. I made that decision. I am going to say something has got to give here and I knew that it was my responsibility. Because it suddenly occurred to me, after going through this upheaval of trying to live my dreams and stuff and I said, "I have got to do and live by my values. They are not open to compromise. They are not open to discussion." I had to decide what were my values and what were my Mi'kmaq principles and how am I going to live by those principles and stop feeling schizophrenic all the time. I don't need to do that anymore.

I had to make a decision and one of the things that helped me make that decision is that I read a book by Rita Joe — a poet. And I started looking at Mi'kmaq women. The people, my family, sister, my aunties or whatever. And I started feeling the strength of all those Mi'kmaq women who were in my family before I ever got here who had done things so that I can be here. And the values of community, sharing, kindness, respect honesty, caring — those were important and that I had to figure out a way to bring together those two halves with part of me going out there trying to make them like me, do the right thing, to feeling comfortable for me to make this decision — not to turn the power over to the law school or to someone else. I am struggling with that right now. I am taking my power back. It is a constant struggle.

So, I think, one of the things that I really believe and I try to do this as much as I can, I try to live by my principles, live by the values that I was taught about. What is important? And I think that has made a difference for me because it has helped me negotiate that conflict because then there is not a conflict anymore. It is like this is what is important and this is what is not important, and I guess it is important, to choose certain things and to be in certain places and do my work and do my writing and all that kind of stuff.

The Story of Rose Morris (Nova Scotia)

I'm an Indian residential school survivor. And when I left the residential school I didn't have too much education. So I'll start there I guess. And all I had was Grade 8, right. So, I got married very early and raised my kids, and they all left home and had children of their own and time went fast, you know. So my husband, before he died, I'd say about 10 years before he died, I went here and there to get educated as much as I could. And gee whiz — he passed away — I mourned for a whole year, and when that year was up I said there now, I've got to do something about me. I've got to get a higher education. I didn't have the opportunity years before, but I decided I was going to look for an opportunity. So what I did — I applied for a job and I got to be a welfare officer for four or five different reservations in different counties. And so I worked for about five months and then I got the opportunity to take a course at Dalhousie, social work, and I said, "yes sir, I'm for that."

So I took that course, and they said:

"It's going to take five years."

I said:

"That's OK."

There were times that I wanted to quit and say: “You know...I shouldn’t be here,” or make an excuse to myself. It was tiring. But I kept it up. OK. What I did — I worked, and I went to school also. I’d go to work — pick up my papers that I need to go to work, and then I’d come and when it was time for me to go to school, I’d put those books away and pick up these other books that I need for classes, and I did that for five years. Back and forth, back and forth. And I kept pretty busy, and gee whiz — of course I had a friend with me too, you know, we travelled together, and she told me that — we encouraged each other because she was a grandmother too. So I told her, I said, gee whiz — her name was Marilyn, I said:

“Marilyn, I don’t know what I’m doing here — I should be at home. I don’t know why I’m taking these courses.”

She says:

“Rose, don’t give up, you know. You’ll get over it — tomorrow when you get up in the morning, you’ll be back.”

And I said:

“Yeah, OK.”

That’s all I wanted to hear I guess. So I’d pick up my books and I’d start all over again. And there were times that she got discouraged, you know, and I told her the same thing. I said:

“OK, Marilyn, I’m telling you the same thing you told me — don’t give up, hang right in there, you know.”

She said:

“Thank you, you know, for saying that.”

We did that for five years. And I would say about every three months or so we’d start getting tired. So anyway, we managed, and we graduated. We didn’t graduate at the same time. I was, I think, six months behind, but I hung right in there — I could hear her just like an echo, you know, hang in there Rose, hang in there. I had every intention of graduating anyway. So, gee whiz, the day came for me to get my degree — aaah, my God I was nervous. And they were told, no clapping, no whistling, no anything, just be quiet — but you know when they called my name, you should have heard the noise in there, the stamping their feet, and the clapping and the whistling, oooh, oooh, oooh. And that made me feel good, you know, oh I felt so good, I was so proud of myself. I went up there and I got my papers, and I sat down, oh I felt as if — “there now,” I said, “I’m satisfied.” I’ve got this paper to prove, you know. And it was quite an experience. What a good experience that was. I felt good, and I reached my goal.

When my parents had the language and when we went to the school we weren’t allowed to speak, and when we came home my parents spoke to us in their Mi’kmaq — at first we answered them good because we knew what they were talking about, but after your eight years and nine years then you are not allowed to speak your language then you tend to forget. Then when your parents talk to you, you have to think yes, what did they say and most of the time, I didn’t even know what they were saying. Because you are just a little tot when you first realize that you cannot speak your language and then and

especially when you are being punished because you say a few words in your language. And it is very sad, but we can't stop at that. We have to continue on as people and as role models. So the children and the people behind us, they are watching. They are watching and they see what we are doing. It was sad to see my parents realizing that their language was dying. Nobody was speaking it hardly, just them and when they were gone, we have to do the best we can. And you don't realize that at first. You realize it after a while. Of course, there were obstacles that we had to step over like discrimination and things like that. These things, they hurt. They hurt very much. But I think we have been through it for so many times that I think we know just how to handle it. And we also know that they will always be there. We might lessen the situation a little bit. But I think people who are discriminative will always be there because that is just nature, that is just how it is. We have learned how to step over them. Because I experienced quite a bit of it in my days. It hurts you know, but we can't let that block us. We have just to take the steps that are more positive in terms of being good role models. There are many role models and things are getting a whole lot better. And compared to when I was young. When I was raising up my kids. That was real hard times. Things are getting better.

I just put everything aside and decided to keep my culture up. Well language and spiritual values are the heartbeat of our culture. But how do you live a life of long ago when we lived off the land and stuff like that. We can't. But we could do things, the spiritual things, like burning sweet grass when we pray to the Creator, you know, and respect Mother Earth and to nature, and you know...it isn't difficult to do. I enjoy it because that's me. I feel whole when I can stand on Mother Earth and pray to the Creator. I think that's the best part of our culture right there. We've got a beautiful culture and it's very rich. We have to keep at it. Whatever is lost we have to try and bring it back, and in time, you know, the younger folks will follow in our footsteps. Just like what my children are doing right now — two of my daughters and my son too, my oldest son. He graduated and he got to be a teacher. Very smart. Well, they're all smart. All they had to do is just get out there and do it, like I did I guess.

The Story of Tecla Neganegijig (Toronto)

I lived in Toronto most of my life. I was living on the reserve before then kind of like on and off. So the big move was when I was eight years old. On the reserve we didn't really see too much of other people, other races.... And when I started school I didn't know the English language. I just had my Native language.

As far as being Native, at that time when they talk about culture and traditions, that was about all we had, the language. They didn't have any of these things today that are talked about like using sacred medicines or going to ceremonies. Anyway, shortly after when I got into my early teen years, they

had this after-school program for Native kids where they tried to gear it toward Native culture. They started to do the traditional Native dancing and later on some boys were taught to sing and drum and other things like bead work, leather work. When I was through that I progressed to the youth group. We went to powwows, doing the singing and dancing. That was OK.

At Wassebin College...we had one component of Native studies and the teacher, she didn't really know all that much either so she just tried to make up what she can like examining the art. We talked a little bit about herbal medicine, the Native people use that. We really didn't know any of that so we tried to go out and pick some wiikenh (calamus root) but it wasn't the right plant we found. We tried to look for mint tea, but we didn't find that either. In the course we got to sample mint tea when we went to the Ojibwe Cultural Foundation and somebody came in and did a pipe ceremony. So that was my first experience of what a pipe ceremony was like.

Then I went to Sudbury...they had a Native studies program over there, but I guess I was being, I don't know what the word is, maybe a little bit like a rebel. I figured it was kind of embarrassing to take Native studies. I should know about my background and I didn't. But I didn't take that course either. So one cultural thing we did over there was to host a powwow, a mini powwow...I don't remember how long — one day or two days. There was a Native friendship centre over there, but they really didn't have cultural events there either. There were no elders there at the time. They had social night but not really anything that would help us to learn about our Native background. I came back to Toronto and I had my family. I came back to the Native Centre and over there they started having feasts, family feasts to bring the families together. That is when they started having the elders coming to speak and there were a few of them that came, but I felt like I didn't learn all that much from those elders at the time. But I wanted to learn more so I just kept going because I figured maybe one day there will be the right person that will teach me. There is this Native Women's Resource Centre. I guess that is where I really made that jump into really knowing myself as a Native woman and learning about Native culture.

So one thing we got into right away was learning about smudging. Giving the prayer. We were told we could do this every day ourselves. There was a nice woman that was running the place at the time and she came and talked to us a couple of times. As well, she came and taught us about the sweat lodge. We didn't do the sweat lodge at the time. She just came and talked about it. And we got to go camping at a reserve and this reserve, one of the people there they knew how to do the sweet grass braiding ceremony. I never heard of that before. My own grandmother, she always picked sweet grass but she used it in her birch bark work. That is when I first learned that sweet grass was one of the sacred medicines and so we did a little ceremony to go and pick the sweet grass and you have to pick it a certain way. It was really hard and then

we were going to do the sweet grass braiding ceremony and we were anxious to do it right away. The teacher said:

“No, it takes quite a while. There is not enough time. It is the evening. It took me one and a half hours to make my first one.”

So I wondered how can it take so long to make a braid? So we had to be patient. We waited until the next day to do it and so we started to do it and so we learned as we went along. As people made mistakes they had to drop out of the ceremony and so I was the only one to finish making the braid after the teacher. That was quite an experience that I had and I felt purified. After I left there I thought about it at night time, trying to relive it, trying to remember how it is done. Every time I thought about it at my bedtime, going through the process of it I always fell asleep, never got to finish it in my mind. I really cherished that sweet grass for a long time. I didn't want to use it because I didn't want it to be all gone. But eventually I just had to finish using it because I couldn't let it be there like that. I think of that from time to time and I would love to be able to do that again, but I don't remember how to do it all by myself. I need a teacher to help me along.

After that moms and tots program finished for the summer, there was going to be continuing work here at the Native Women's Resource Centre. They had women's circles and they would be like once a month. We had more elders come in and it was really good. It was something that really helped me along to know myself and in a way to help me about what direction to go when it is time to get a job.

At work, they talked about using the Native way over there so about the only thing they had was at the staff meeting, we always did smudging and praying. Once in a while they would bring in an elder for the residents to listen to and if we were lucky, staff could listen to the elder as well. And they also had full moon ceremonies at the time there.... At that same job we had the opportunity as well to attend the sweat lodge. That was my first sweat lodge. I was pretty lucky.

I still had my language even though I wasn't speaking it. That was another factor that helped me to develop my being when I learned about the Native culture at the circles that Native language was emphasized. That was another desire that I had when my children were born — for them to learn the Native language, and I was really challenged by that because of not using it for so long. There was this program happening in Thunder Bay, Native language instructor program. So when I heard about it right away I felt like I wanted to go over there.

I came back to Toronto and I got another job with a Native organization. That was pretty good because we got to bring in elders if we could. Or if there was any special happenings in the community we got to attend them. There was recognition provided in the employment policy that ceremonial leave was allowed for five days out of the year and then if somebody

wanted more time other than the five days, you would have to get a special permission to do that. So I took advantage of that and I went fasting again and this time for four days.

My ongoing work is to gain fluency of my Native language and one, day I would like to get my kids to be fluent as well. But it is pretty hard to think in a Native language where there is so much English language all the time and we are so used to using that. Sometimes I think: "OK, I would like to take them and just immerse them (students)." When I get over there I just forget to do it. That is one of the things I feel is really important as well. Learning about the ceremonies, the culture, the Native language is fairly important in being a Native person. I hear some people, how they talk. I can sense in them that in a way, there is some disconnection when they don't have that. I find that when they are starting to learn more about the cultures as well, they pick up the language and I find they start to be more of a complete being when they start picking up the Native language.

The Story of Peggy Jamieson-Smith (Toronto)

The most meaningful work that I've ever done is with the homeless. Because I wanted to find out why people gave up hope; why people gave up their dignity, their hope and their will to live, you know, by drinking and doing drugs. I believe that's a way to kill themselves. Slowly but surely they're going to kill themselves. It's not as quick as taking pills. It's not as quick as taking a gun and putting it to your head, or even, you know, like jumping in front of a bus or a train or anything like that. But you're going to kill yourself. And I needed to sit and I needed to talk to those people to find out why. And to me it meant that I had to learn about me, through them. I had to understand me too. Because there have been points in my life where I've felt like I wanted to give up, and I've wanted to join them, and I've wanted to let go of life too. And I'm a mother of six children. And I'm a grandmother of 15 grandchildren, another one on the way, plus I have a newborn baby that I'm taking care of right now.

So for me to understand that I had to go to the source and I had to sit and I had to accept those people as they were, or as they are. You know, sit there and say hi, you know, tell them who I am. And ask them:

"What do you need, how can I help you? Do you have anything that you want to talk to me about? Can I help you in any way?"

And just show the human part of me so that they in turn can show me, you know, the things that they needed. And I have a lot of street people out there that have died, and I've cried for them and I grieve for them. And I've done what I consider a traditional thing for them. I've gone and offered food, I've offered the tobacco. I've talked to them.

I give them my last, you know, my last little bit that I have, and it doesn't bother me to do that. Because some day it might be my son, it might be my

daughter. You know. And I hope that someone would have the heart to do that for my family. Because culturally we're all related, you know like we're all connected in some way or another. And we're all family. Nobody says that I'm not their sister or mother or grandmother or auntie, you know, because I am. I feel that way. And I know that I can't save the world, but it's been nice trying. You know, it's been nice doing the things that I have, and I know that a lot of times here its "have you experienced any conflict between realizing your work goals and living a meaningful cultural life?" — Yeah, yeah. Because I know that the people that I've worked with, like a lot of the women that are my age, have become hard and cold. They've lost a gift that people tell me that I still have. And that's kindness. That it's really important to remember that as a woman, that we have to have that kindness. Because that was the first thing that was ever given to me, as a newborn baby, even though I wasn't put to my mother's breast, you know, the first little bit of milk that was given to me was an act of kindness. It was given to me. It was given to me and I was fed, and I was given life. And this life that I have, you know, like when you go into the job and they're telling you well you can't be kind to these people. These people are...you know, like the last 10 years I've been working with alcoholics and drug addicts. These people are alcoholics and drug addicts. They didn't understand that. They're selfish, you know, they're out to gain their own way. But I figure, but who has ever given them their way? You know who has ever, ever sat down and really said, you know, "I care about you. I care about your life. And it really bothers me and it really hurts me inside to see you drinking and hurting yourself in the way that you are." You know, who ever really sits down and says that to them, and who really genuinely does...you know, anybody can say it, but they don't mean it. So, the conflict that I've always had in my work is that letting them know that they're genuinely cared about. That there are people out there that don't want nothing from them. I would tell them you don't have to give me nothing. Because they think, because I walk around with a smile and I'm happy and everything like that, and then if I'm sitting there at night, when I was doing my job, and I would do maybe a lighter case, or maybe a key chain or else a necklace, or even just having a stone that I would carry. And I would give that to someone that was troubled. They would think that there was something that I wanted from them. You know, just giving from my heart and telling them, teaching them when you give something to someone from your left hand, you're giving from your heart. And your heart, you know, my heart won't talk to you. My heart's not going to jump out and grab or say to you, this is what I want, or this is what I need. It doesn't do that. My heart will beat, and my heart will bleed for you. Which means, you know, if you ever hurt yourself, or anything ever happens, then it would — my heart would bleed for someone that would really hurt themselves. And you know, like in my work I was let go because of it. Because of the kindness that I was showing to people. I grieve for my work...and they told me...that I had to be tough and I had to be — there was so many tough people there.

The Story of Sandra Monette (Toronto)

What I recommend in policy changes, particularly to do with conflict around Aboriginal women and opening more doors for their cultural and work goals is, in particular in Toronto and in Ontario, recognition of the urban needs, particularly around employment and training. The federal government has changed the processes that they support and caused unlimited chaos in that training and employment have been impacted for a long time in a negative way. In 1996, we suffered through all of this chaos and uncertainty; we're gaining experience in these things in 1999. These kinds of practices by the federal government close doors for Aboriginal women who are looking to better their lives and improve their lot for themselves and their families. And this type of training employment opportunities is in great demand in Toronto. Being in the Aboriginal community and working with Aboriginal people I find that some of the cultural components that have been lacking in my life are now available to me.

Policy changes — federal government policy changes need to change, particularly for Aboriginal people. It's not only around training and employment but health issues. There is a large population in Toronto that we call off-reserve people. The federal government has made policies to recognize the First Nations on reserve, and the people in large metropolitan areas like Toronto and the Golden Horseshoe in Ontario are overlooked. These people that are in these areas and communities need to be served equally to their First Nations brothers and sisters that reside on reserves. And to do otherwise is to do an injustice.

Bill C-31 corrected something that the federal government tried to impose by eliminating what they call "Indians" by determining that you are no longer Indian. If you're born with a bloodline, you retain that; you are who you are. So Bill C-31 was to appease some of those concerns. However, certain things under Bill C-31 and the Indian Act still impose certain things upon Aboriginal people. One for example, is to have allowed First Nations people to take control of their own membership. By taking control of their own memberships, certain groups of people decided not to use the Indian Act any longer to set up their own policies. Within these policies they determined, for example, that if you are 50 percent bloodline or whatever, that you are deemed to be an Aboriginal person of their community. This blood quantum, quorum thing is not necessarily true because it's based upon someone's interpretation at a particular time in space, in place, that certain people were 100 percent Aboriginal. That's not necessarily true, nor should it even be of consideration. There is no way to measure your blood quorum unless you took the blood out of my arm to do that. And it's like — I don't think that's a very good idea either. I think Aboriginal people are Aboriginal people, based upon they're born within families that practice and are connected to Aboriginal communities. As I am a Torontonians because I was born here, I

am a Canadian because I was born in Canada and I was educated in Canada. Although I lived in the United States and moved there for a short time, I was still a Canadian because I had not left my country, I was still a Torontonion because I had still that large connection to this area and returned here. If I had lived away from here for a long period of time, and perhaps found a new way of life, I might have become an American or a Californian, beach person or whatever. But those things I chose not to do because of the choices I made in my life. There I'm an Aboriginal person...I'm a Torontonion and I'm a Canadian.

My particular First Nation not only has this blood quorum chaos going on in the community, but they've also written things such as you must have one parent who is a band member, which is unreasonable to accept in that they have not accepted back their disenfranchised membership. Therefore, there is a large population of people who are denied membership due to this one parent situation. I have adopted children. My children are Aboriginal children by choice. My children are not members of my First Nation because my First Nation does not recognize them as being blood quorum of our First Nation. They can live there as First Nations people — because they're First Nations they're welcome to be there, but they cannot be members.

So there's an awful lot of junk in the Indian Act, the membership codes that were being established by communities and I think that we need to be more positive in our policies, to be more inclusive as opposed to exclusive, because the more we are inclusive we build those bridges between one another as opposed to trying to establish small islands with no connection to one another and, therefore, isolated and unsupported. And that's not what life is really about. You need to have those connections, you need to have those supports in place, and the more of those connections and supports and positive things that are there, the more successful any person, nation or country can be.

If I had my way, my Indian rights and my access to land would be portable. My First Nation, regardless of where I was, would be portable. If I wish to live in the urban environment of Toronto — if I purchased a piece of property, as to entitlement to have a house there — then all of my rights that I would normally have on a First Nation would be there at that piece of property where I am situated, for my whole family. Therefore, taxation rules, all of that stuff, are applicable to that little piece of property. It goes with me. If I decide that I want to run a 200-acre farm, that's my economic stability where I plan to be, and it's over there, then I should be able to do that. If I plan that I am going to be an accountant and live in a modest house in the city of Toronto, then that's where my economic place and my land is, that's where my home is, and all of those rights are there with me. If I plan that I decide I'm going to go to Calgary, Alberta, it moves to Calgary, Alberta. None of this stuff about it has to be all here, within this boundary line. It moves. And therefore the prosperity of the First Nations people could

improve, and the ghettos that were established when all of these reserves were established hundreds of years ago, could be done away with.

The Story of Kim Wheatley (Toronto)

So I like working a lot and what I found as I got older was that I had a greater need for self-fulfillment. I am a mother, and I am a partner and I am a daughter. But I needed more for myself, so I started actively seeking spiritual fulfillment in our community. One of the current ways I am doing it is through drumming but I also participate in ceremonies and I have been doing that for a year and a half now, going to sweats, fasting, whatever is going on. I am learning as I go along. I am also learning that it is a real time commitment that you have to be ready at a moment's notice. You don't have the freedom to pre-plan that, OK, this is going to happen then. That kind of comes up and then you have to drop everything and go if you are committed. So that has been a bit of a problem for me. But I am juggling it. So right now I am not working, just so I can have full commitment to do those things and have the freedom to do it.

Oh yes, I used to work at a bank and to say that you need two days off because you have a ceremony to go to for, instance, fasting in the fall, fasting for four days so I need a Friday and a Monday off and then you need a day in preparations. So it is like one week off. How do you explain that to an employer without going into this big long detail of actually explaining the importance of it in a way that they could grasp in a nutshell? It is impossible. There is a communication breakdown almost instantaneously. They don't want to hear anything that can possibly fall into the categories of excuses. They want to know that you will be there. You made the commitment to take the job and they expect you to be there regardless of your cultural commitment. So, yes I had a little bit to do in the fall when I went on my fast. And I chose to go on the fast and left the job. It was more important to me. It is really important to me to be a balanced person and be the best person I can, not only for my family, but for the community in general.

My Dad died in October and we had a traditional ceremony for him and I was in school trying to get an OAC [Ontario Academic Credit] I needed to get into Trent [University]. And the traditional ceremony is a long ceremony so I needed a whole week off of school. And, of course, I needed some time for myself. And I wasn't given that. I was told after going to my teacher, to the vice-principal and the principal that if I did take that time off I would be expelled from the class and I would have to start all over again. And the class was from September to January so it was October and past the halfway point. I was doing exceptionally well. I had a 97 percent average and, because I took half the time instead of the full time, I was penalized 10 percent in my mark for missing that time period. And I tried to explain to them the importance of the ceremony not to mention my dad had died. There was no leeway at all, and they said it is their policy and they have to follow

the policy that is given to them. They are very strict about the time lines and, if you miss more than two days, there is nothing that they can do regardless of extenuating circumstances so that was in school. Could you imagine what it would be like in a job? That was very difficult. As a result of that experience, I had a bit of regression and kind of lost my momentum for a while. How important is school, and how important is getting a job that won't give me freedom in such extenuating circumstances to do what it is that I needed to do in our way.... Shortly thereafter, is when I quit my job too. I went fasting right after that and I tried to explain what I needed to do. I think I was still hurting from that experience with school. I couldn't even make the effort to really explain it to my employer, I just said I am leaving. It was just too hard.

The Story of Shirley Sterling (Vancouver)

I am an Aboriginal woman from the interior of British Columbia. When I was growing up, most girls expected to get married and live happily ever after. My first job was helping my dad on our family ranch. First, I was the water girl carrying fresh and cool water to my dad's haying crew. Then I pitched hay into stacks, then onto a sloop to be carried to the main stack to be stored for winter use. Later I drove the horses and helped my dad feed the animals and water them. My pay was to get new clothes at the end of summer just before going back to the residential school.

My second job was cook's helper at a residential school on the coast the summer I was 15. My older sister was the cook. I made \$100 a month, and my sister helped me open an account at the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, and she taught me how to deposit and withdraw money.

I had an opportunity to work in an accounting office the summer after I graduated from the residential school, but I was hoping to make a career in the arts. Indian Affairs had to be convinced to support my training in Vancouver. At the time, their policy was to fund technical and vocational training and later university programs. When I dropped out of my program after six months I felt very guilty because they said they would likely not fund arts training for other Aboriginal students if I did not complete and make a career of it.

I met my non-Aboriginal husband when I was 18 years old. He was at UBC [University of British Columbia] doing a master's in ecology and later, we both signed up for courses at SFU [Simon Fraser University]. I took a foreign language course and zoology. We both ended our training when I got pregnant and my husband got a job. I had three children by the time I was 22. I signed up for an early childhood education program at that time but had to drop out because my husband refused to look after the children one evening a week. He told me that the guys at his office told him to keep his wife barefoot and pregnant and that seemed to be the mentality for marriages

during the late '60s and early '70s. The marriage ended after seven years and I had the responsibility of raising my children while my ex-husband paid \$150 a month for child support.

Employment became a necessity when I became a single parent. I went to visit one of my sisters who was teaching in a small northern town. The local home school co-ordinator who was a friend of my sister informed me that one of the local elementary school principals was looking for a child-care worker to spend time with the Aboriginal children who were having difficulty in the school system. At her recommendation, I got the job. I made the minimum wage, but it was enough to live on, and I was grateful to have any kind of work with no training. The children taught me their language.

I married an Aboriginal man from that area. He was from a different nation than my own. His nation had a matrilineal system and I learned a great deal about female leadership there.

I always had work in that community. I was a child-care worker, day-care supervisor, a recreation worker and home school co-ordinator. In 1978, when I was the home school co-ordinator I was the only Aboriginal worker in the entire school district. Now the school district has a team of a dozen or more support staff doing the same job, and there is a local band school.

In the late 1970s, I went to Northwest Community College for life skills coach training then taught adult basic education (ABE) courses for the next 12 years. After nine years, I found myself once again a single parent and I moved back to my home community and continued to get work as an ABE instructor. I took part-time studies in business administration, fashion design and university transfer while still working.

When my children were out on their own, I went back to university and got a Bachelor of Education, then a Ph.D. I'm glad I got my graduate degree when I did. Qualitative research was accepted by then, and I was able to do research which was relevant to Aboriginal peoples.

After getting the graduate degree, I got a job as an instructor at a university-college. To my surprise, my take-home pay as a full-time college instructor was not much better than when I was an ABE instructor, and a friend who teaches primary at a band school gets better pay because of the tax breaks.

In looking back, I think that getting some training for a specific job before having children would have made my life easier, but then I wonder if I had been making sensible choices as a young woman, would I have married or had children at all? To me, it seems unthinkable to have no family, whatever the cost.

Parenting, especially single parenting, is a full-time job in itself. I believe that the most important job of my life has been raising and nurturing

children and, in many ways, I wish I would have done it exclusively. Unfortunately, in my case, marriage proved a failure and a drain upon my resources.

In terms of my choices, I think that becoming an accountant after high school would have given me the security I needed and, after all these years, I find that I enjoy doing income tax returns. But my heart has always been deeply attached to my children and to the fine arts. In Canada, the arts are not supported very well, even now. Mothering and child care are not always supported very well either.

One thing that pleases me is that my children went to college right after graduating, and I think the fact that I always pursued higher education may have encouraged them to do the same. They have interesting careers and I believe they made good choices for their personalities. They have many strengths and opportunities that I could only dream about when I was that young. I'm glad that educational and work opportunities, and the societal world view have improved with the passing of the years.

One of the most difficult things that I have had to overcome in my university and work careers has been the lasting influence of the residential school. I still have apprehension around authority figures and sleep disorders. As children, we were removed from both societies and not trained to cope in either. I was told for 11 years that I would never amount to anything, that my culture, history were despicable, that I would never earn any kind of worldly success and, if I did, I would lose favour with God. I have seen many people carve out good lives and careers for themselves with little more than determination and a strong sense of their own self-worth. While I have both those qualities, to some extent I always felt that having material wealth was kind of evil and so I put a lot of effort into public service and spiritual development rather than job advancement.

Another difficulty was finding good child care. Parents desperately need to know their children are safe: psychologically, physically, spiritually and parents need respite. I lived too far away from my family to get help from extended family, although my sister kept one of my sons for a year and my mother took care of my children for the summer I took life skills training. In turn, I took my sister's child for several months to help out her family.

I found some non-Aboriginal programs to be very helpful. Parent effectiveness training gave me valuable insights about parenting. A friend gave me a copy of Dale Carnegie's book, How to Win Friends and Influence People when I was 20 years old. People joke about this book now but it taught me a lot about getting along with people. In 1989, I completed the context program in self-development and worked through many issues. The general principles of these programs could be organized to benefit Aboriginal individuals.

For me, reclaiming my culture has been healing and restorative. When my children were growing up, we had a daily talking circle to deal with tough issues. I like drum singing, art, writing, teaching, photography, learning from my mother, visiting friends and relatives, hearing and telling stories, humour, spiritual rituals like using the sweat lodge. All these things keep me happy and well. Most of all, I love being with my children and my best pal, my little grandson.

I teach part time and live alone in an old house in the country, drive a 1985 Firefly. Sometimes, I take a small education contract. I make just enough to get by. From the outside, it may not look like I have much, but I'm very happy with my life. As difficult as it is for Aboriginal peoples in this country, I would not trade the treasure of my cultural heritage for anything. Actually, I think I'm rich.

The Story of Two Aboriginal Woman (Ottawa)

It has been difficult to reach my work goals because I don't have the education that I required. I take a lot of government courses just to keep myself going, to at least be in a position to compete as close as I could to the mainstream. And of course, the language — the French — I tried — I didn't make it. They kicked me out, after about five weeks they asked me to leave, because I asked a question.

I was in my mid-forties, and I said to the teacher. I feel like a six-year-old kid, back in the boarding school. There you stand, a French person, telling me I can't speak English, I have to speak French. When I was six years old, I was told I couldn't speak my Native language, I had to speak English. I learned broken English, and now at this age — will you people ever decide what you want a Native person to speak? And that was the end of that. They told me I couldn't learn.

I was with her when that happened. We were in the same class. They didn't kick me out, but they didn't like the idea that I was there. I'm from a residential school, and I have a lot of trouble trying to adjust to having another language forced on me. I was forced to learn English and now they are forcing me to learn French. I had a lot of difficulties with that. My husband had died three months before that, and when they decided to send me (to French), I asked them to wait another six months, to give me some time to adjust because this was going to be hard experience. You either go now, or look for another job!... There was no expression of understanding. There was nothing — absolutely no support. They were supporting me to go to school, but that was all. My cousin B. was in the same class; we sat together — L., my cousin and me.... Sometimes they came with those French expressions. And the French teacher she was really prim — with the lace and curls and fancy sleeves. "And I want you to put your mouth like this, and I want you to do this!" and she'd do the French sounds — ou, ou, ou, outa.

Oh my God! My cousin and I looked at each other. In Mohawk that means eat really, really raunchy doo doo! I mean really soft raunchy doo doo! And she was so prim and proper. We looked at each other, and we said “we’re not saying that!!” B. got really defensive and I told him to go ahead and I would tell his mother! And we were laughing, we got up and well that just set the tone — she didn’t want to have anything to do with us.... She took a box and put it in the middle of the room and told me:

“For every word of English, it will cost you a nickel.”

That was it — that was the whole boarding school scenario. I reached in my purse and I threw \$20 in the box and I said:

“When that runs out, let me know!”

I was just furious and said:

“Don’t you ever, ever do that to me!”

And she stood there with the \$20 and I said:

“You can wipe your ass with it”

and I just looked at her. And she said:

“You can go to Mr. Black’s office.”

And I said:

“You’re sending me to the principal’s office?”

So I ended up being sent out and kicked out of the class.

These were all adults. It was like unreal. I was moved, B. left and I went to another class, and I couldn’t manage. I pleaded that I wasn’t ready for this, and asked to be pulled out of the class — I can’t concentrate — I went into such deep mourning when my husband died, and I couldn’t come out of that. My husband is dead and I’m sitting in a class that reminds me of residential school and it was really difficult. There was no appreciation for that — when I went to talk to them to ask for time I was told that I had used up the hours for this, and had to continue. So I sat there and I didn’t pass.

It was as though it was all happening again, all out of our control. In my opinion, a different approach would have helped. About a year later, and on my own time, I started going to Ottawa University, and did it at my own pace. Voluntarily, I wouldn’t mind learning French, but I don’t want it shoved down my throat. At the university, it was with a group of young students, and I would have preferred the adult class, if they had given me my own time and tried to understand. But when I’m in a situation like that one I’m really bad and become totally disruptive. I’m not a good girl!

If you don’t have the French language in the national capital region you don’t get very far. You need that French language.

I realized that they were putting my back up against the wall. Psychologically, I couldn’t get beyond the feeling of the residential school, and there was nobody or nothing to help me. The one support for me was L. and they took her out of the class. B. was there. He kind of understood, but he was not out of the residential schools. He said:

*“Come on to my house and we’ll study together.”
He would drag me along. He was family and he really tried. Without him, I would not have lasted as long as I did, I’m sure of it. I’m one of these people that has to be around my people.*

I think it may have gotten better no.... no, no, it’s gotten worse (several women disagree). Now you have to meet the French language requirements. They advertise for positions that require the language and have created a barrier for positions and for Aboriginal people. It creates a barrier and there is no recognition of the place that this forced language training brings Aboriginal people with a residential school background. There is no understanding. I went to a woman and I told her:

“When I showed up in Kenora, I couldn’t speak any English at all. I didn’t know how to say my prayers in English, but they were the exact same thing in Mohawk. I would say them in Mohawk. When I was a kid we would go to longhouse around 4:00 or 4:30 in the morning and practise the sunrise ceremony, then we would go to Catholic Church for mass right after. It was all the same — we were with the Creator; that’s the way we look at it. You learn both, so I knew all of the prayers. Then we would go home and get breakfast and work in the garden. Then when I got to Kenora, I couldn’t speak English, so I was a savage, because I didn’t say my prayers in English. And then when they tried to teach me the letters, I couldn’t say “th”, or “r”, so they would sit me for hours in front of the mirror saying “r” “r” ...and if I didn’t do it right they had peas that we would kneel on until we got it right and other punishments. One time they wanted me to be in a play, because I had long hair, and we had to speak English. There were the shepherd boys, all Indians boys, from the school. I’m supposed to be the virgin mother. Well don’t I say something in Indian. So the nun, she cut my hair off, and my hair it was so long and heavy, that my hair just stood up. And then I ended up losing my own language. So it’s a double whammy!”

The whole area of language is not neutral. Learning a language is not neutral. It is full of big land mines. It is one of the worst areas — you can learn computers, learn to type, all that, but when it hits that, it is too close.

It didn’t make any difference when I tried to explain that language is not a “soft area” for me.

The Story of a Young Aboriginal Woman (Ottawa)

My Aboriginal co-worker has the attitude that we need to do very well because we represent all Aboriginal people. I don’t feel this way. I represent me. I feel if I do something well, it reflects on me. I was asked if I would prepare and facilitate a workshop on Aboriginal issues at a department-wide meeting. We had a committee and talked about what we do and what needs to improve. I conducted a talking circle with 30 people and then presented

bilingually on the results of the talking circle in front of 200 people. The presentation was very well received. I did it because I am able to do this. I also wondered what would happen if I say no? I decided that if I say yes and do it, I can say no the next time.

I have to say something to you and to the others. You spoke about the residential schools, being a residential school “product.” I was brought up, and went through the Catholic school and that was all I heard — that’s what I was taught. I learned what they taught me. But at the same time, my Mom didn’t make any effort to promote a connection with her Native side. And it was like I slowly turned from what I remember my mother telling me, to a product like everyone in the class. And it wasn’t so long ago that it hit me. I have no connection whatsoever with my Native side. Nothing. I always saw myself, and all my life, I’ve wanted to be seen as White — as a White person, which is ironic. How do I catch up with my Native side? I’ve lost it. I’ve lost powwows, the sweet grass, that I remember my mom telling me. And my education was “White” I am grateful for being in the military because it has taught me a lot of things. It has also disciplined me. If I want something, I go for it. But being in the military as a Native woman, because there are so few Native women, I was made to stand out; paraded in front of everyone as an example of “this is what you can do.” Over a period of time, I thought this was my role, but I fought that. I wanted to be just like everyone else.... At the same time, I realized by me being an example, people say “good for you,” and it made me feel good. They are trying to get minorities in the armed forces, and where I work, I stand out as an example. One of our buddies said:

“We have our little showpiece.”

I want to be professional just like everyone else. I want to be there as a supervisor to give advice, but I can’t be approached like that, because they don’t know how to approach me as a Native woman first. And I’m dealing with so many issues here. Maybe if I learned more of my Native past, I can deal with the issues in the military. The military is meaningful work, as much as it is downplayed. I’d like to stay and make a difference slowly. Bring in other Native women and say: “Hey, its not so bad, there are good people out there to work with.” And I’d like to be that good person to work with.

I attained a goal going to Bosnia — learning how much my culture is Native, compared to the culture overseas. It really hit on me — hey, I’m Native! I was in Bosnia, in a camp, and I asked if I could go on a patrol.... So we went into a city, very battered by artillery from all sides because it was surrounded by the mountains. Going through the neighbourhoods in an armored carrier, I was in the back; I was standing up in a headset. Now women over there do not have a high level of respect.... Going through the streets you see a lot of people just staring at me. People would ask the men, they wouldn’t ask me:

“Who is she? What does she do? What is her rank? What is her status?”

The men would explain:

“She is in the Canadian Forces, she is Native, she is a master corporal.”

And they would say:

“A bang, bang?”

And the men would say:

“No, no.”

They only thought of the stereotype, and didn't believe I could be in the military, or be side by side with men, or be a master corporal. And I saw how women lived in Bosnia, how the women worked their asses off to get food on the table, and they do this without question. And I wanted to ask the women questions, but they were basically off limits.... And they didn't know how to approach me, because of the old stereotypes — Indians and cowboys. That was an eye opener! At the same time, did I feel like I was a token? If I was, that's OK because I saw things that not a lot of people see, and it felt good. There were only two or three of us at camp who were Natives, and we got together and had our picture taken for the newspaper and it was sent back home. Somehow then, I felt a complete cohesiveness. It started to dawn on me a bit. It was important to be acknowledged because we did the things we wanted to do, not just be used as an example.

The Story of an Aboriginal Woman (Parry Sound)

I was sent to Parry Sound High School as a child. I was used to a one-room school. I didn't have any orientation at the school in Parry Sound, and I didn't know anything about anything at the school. There were no guidance counsellors. I didn't even know how to work the lockers!

I had to board in a White home and eat what they ate. There were no rides arranged to go home on the weekends to Henvey Inlet. My sister and I used to hitchhike. We didn't want to stay in the White home all weekend.

I only stayed in that school from September until May. The first time I experienced prejudice was at that school. There were only four Native kids in the class. A guy said:

“J. is a squaw.”

All the Native students pretended that they didn't hear. The teacher was out of the class. I was so taken aback, and so angry I wanted to sock him. He made me feel so awful. I didn't think I could stay much longer. I felt overpowered, I didn't know who to tell, what to do. I started skipping and the principal was so angry. He said:

“Why are you doing this? You have everything you need.”

I was afraid he would tell my dad. I floated in and out of class each day. Do most White people think that Native girls/women are squaws? I had to pass that guy every day in the hall.

I tried to go back to school — to adult school. A teacher said:

“Please don't make a mess here. Your mother doesn't work here!”

And I thought, I am a mother! The adult students felt so dumb, so bad. It was difficult to concentrate. I believed I had to be a “top performer.” Other

students complained about me because I did so well. I felt badly because I did well. I'm still afraid of school. We worked so hard to fit in and felt so alienated.

There were other boarders from the community, and others from Henvey Inlet. We didn't speak about what we were feeling, but we hitchhiked together to get home. We had an Indian agent and he treated us really badly. He was so tall! Once I was sent away, to a training school in Toronto because I didn't behave the way they wanted me to. Other women were threatened with training school. I was 13 years old. I didn't see my mom or dad for three years, and I had no visits. I lost my language and didn't see my brother grow up. At the training school, I had to speak English. I couldn't talk to my brother, mother or sister when I came back. I had to stand up at dinner and get the butter, because I couldn't say the words when I came home. It took me six months to get my language back and I felt so self-conscious at home. At the school, every time I tried to speak to a Native person, the nun would come along and stop us. There were Native girls from all over at the school. I think education and the church used strategies to assimilate Native people.

The Story of an Inuit Woman

When I first started going to school, our teacher was unilingual English and I was unilingual Inuktitut. My parents had some idea of what White education was. They wanted me to go to school, and to be in "civilization." I was the last of 12 children. My father was very traditional and didn't want to adapt to Western society. He wouldn't have moved into a community but he didn't want me sent away to school. My brothers and sisters went away, but a year before I started going to the school, we moved from the land. It was the straw that broke the camel's back.

I don't remember much of this time. It was so confusing and different for me. It was a total impact for me...before you needed to work so hard, and it was constant work to maintain life. Suddenly, you didn't have to do much at all. My parents still went hunting, but it wasn't life sustaining the way it was before.

Schooling took most of my culture. My parents were very aware of the fact that this is the direction we are now going in. My father was aware of this, that everything that was there in the community — the churches, schools — that these were the direction we were going in. It was very powerful. He was very supportive and helped us to make this change. My parents were very supportive of going to school. They had never gone. They knew this was a very different culture, and they weren't trying to maintain culture or push it down, but they were a great example for how to manage with the new situation, and they were a role model for many Inuit in the community. My mother went to the school board and said:

"There needs to be more culture in the school."

They told her that there was no money, so she set up a tent and taught the children how to sew. She was very popular with the children, and the school board moved her inside. A while ago, a student was talking to me and said that she made her first pair of caribou pants with my mother. This doesn't happen anymore, unless there is a grandmother in the house.

There was very little cultural relevance in all the years of school, All teachers spoke English in all subjects. For 10 months of the year, you lost your daily contact with your culture. Almost all of your waking hours were spent in another language and culture.... I regret that I lost interest in my culture. When I went to school, there was nothing to attach our interest for our culture, because it wasn't part of school. I always looked forward to going home, to going camping. I do have my language. When I went to college here for teacher education, it was one of the best in terms of cultural relevance. Learning about the practices of culture made me aware of the importance of culture, and it gave it back to me again. My culture was always there, but the exposure to my culture that I had at the college made me appreciate it more. The more exposure, the more appreciation for the history of our language and our culture.

The Story of an Inuit Woman (II)

Workplaces are run as they would be in the south so therefore a lot of the time they are set to fail. The biggest fatality of that is the drop-outs of our schools because the schools are southern based, southern imported without really taking into account that they are not in the south. Things could be done differently, but those questions are never asked. Things are just done as they would be done in the south.

Language is a barrier.... You have to speak English, because in the teacher education program, English is the main language in lots of the courses and that creates an actual barrier. A systemic barrier for unilingual Inuit or Inuit who are not totally fluent in English.

Another thing would be to not have southern teachers coming and saying this is the right way to do things, this is appropriate, this is proper. They are coming up from 2,000 miles away with different values. I guess they don't realize what they are saying is, "forget where you are and what you are being taught at home but only remember what you are being taught at school because that is better." I don't know if I can call it "lifestyle imposing."

When I first started working, I was an education trainee, and when I finished my program I was, in turn, teaching adults. One of the areas was to teach nutrition and proper food selection, and I felt very uncomfortable especially when it came to fruit and vegetables because fruit and vegetables were so expensive in the community at the time and so limited. There were some weeks when one would just not have any fresh fruit at all. Sometimes, they

came in already brown and here I am trying to promote the four food groups to the mothers. Later on while I was still in the program, a study was done where it was said that whale has vitamin C and I felt so much better being able to say that as opposed to fruit. Making them know that they can get their vitamin C from this area as well. It's not so much a problem now because almost anything is available now. In the early 1980s, I found it very difficult to teach what I was asked to teach also trying to accommodate the different culture and the environment.

Our courses at Arctic College are very southern oriented and still very much based on the English language. For example, the course called reading processes and methods, and the person who teaches that course is from England and teaches it in English using how a child would learn to read in English to our students who are going to be teaching Inuit which is a different reading system. These things have to be changed instead of having to be allowed to carry on forever.

I feel strongly that the cultural aspect of our lives should be present in everything that we do in our workplaces. It shouldn't have to be something that we have to be ashamed of anymore, like it used to be. This way should be taught all the way from kindergarten up. We are working with people who are long-time northerners, and we hold nothing against them. They mean well, but they do not understand what they are talking about sometimes. We had an orientation at the school and there was a person who has probably lived here for 20 years, and one parent asked why it is not mandatory for Inuktitut to be taught up to Grade 12. From there, she started talking about university entrance requirements and she said you do not need a second language for university, which is true. But what if that child who was trying to get into university is Inuit — he or she will need a second language, because Inuit is her first language and there is no way Inuit will be taught in university. This person did not realize what she was saying, because to the Inuit child, English is the second language.

4. INTERPRETATION OF THE STORIES

Collins (1990: 206-219) offered four criteria of interpretation, which are contrasted to the positivist approaches to research. Derived from an Afro-centric standpoint, her criteria focus on the primacy of concrete lived experience, the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims, the ethic of caring and the ethic of personal accountability.

After all data were collected and all feedback was received from the participant review of transcripts and draft reports, researchers for this study spent three days in dialogues, reading through all the narrative reports of the participants, discussing the possibilities of interpretation. All were present for the telling of the stories, as active listeners. The aspect of caring was immediate in our dialogues as was the aspect of empathy, enabling us to make appropriate decisions in the content analysis. The philosophical position taken by the researchers (phenomenological — direct link to experience) required that the primacy of concrete lived experience remain a focus for the study. Personal accountability was maintained by reflecting on the phenomenological method of suspended judgment, by putting the interpretive work aside for a while, then coming back to it over and over again, attempting to produce an interpretive work which stayed grounded in the stories of the participants, yet engaged the expertise of the researchers and the research process.

In this collaborative setting, researchers discovered core values and critical themes in the stories of the participants. Characteristically, values emerge in the stories of Aboriginal peoples when topics of significance are discussed (Bishop 1996). Critical themes are characteristic of qualitative studies that identify “emergent themes” or “critical themes” from the data (Denzin and Lincoln 1994).

Only after an elaborate content analysis were we able to discern these values and themes, often stated explicitly and sometimes implied in the narratives. These values and themes are essential as precursors to policy and inform policy content, design and implementation.

Core values across the eight research sites were:

- respect
- trust
- knowledge
- balance.

These themes were represented in stories (see Chapter 3), other narratives and direct answers to questions in both focus groups and one-to-one interviews.

The following direct quotes demonstrate the core values.

Respect

I think the major thing you need there is respect. You need to have respect. You've got to have respect for yourself and you've got to have respect for others. That goes both ways. You have to be respected as well — respect for yourself as a human being, respect for who you are, respect for your culture and your society, and you need to respect others as well. So I think that's the key. First of all is the respect for yourself and your own culture. You need that to begin in order to survive. You have to be strong culturally. If a person is strong in their culture when they're a child, and they grow up with that strength and support, when they leave, no matter what happens they can always survive. They can always survive because its strength in the person.

Trust

So for me to understand that I had to go to the source and I had to sit and I had to accept these people as they were, or as they are. You know, sit there and say hi, tell them who I am. And ask them:

“What do you need, how can I help you? Do you have anything that you want to talk to me about? Can I help you in any way?”

And just show the human parts of me so that they in turn can show me, you know, the things that they needed.

Knowledge

I believe in experiential education as well. I follow both. And I respect people who have received their education through experiential education. But I also know that — I believe that if we have both, if we have the knowledge we get from the universities and the colleges, from those people, we can use that as well as learn our own ways, and then carry that cultural knowledge as well, and when we have both, we are going to be a very powerful people — very strong people.

Balance

There are many times when I try to balance the workload with culture. An example is that I want to go to conferences of elders and powwows. But I have a very big workload. It can be very difficult to balance the personal life with the work life. Both are very important. It is important for me to be able to dance and attend ceremonies and cultural events, and to share the culture with others through presentations.

The meaning of the core values is contained within these examples, in the words of the women themselves.

A second level of analysis produced critical themes. Themes discovered in all eight sites were:

- healing
- safety
- governance
- discrimination
- diversity
- education
- work.

The following direct quotes describe the general critical themes.

Healing

When women heal, the family will heal and when the family heals, the community will heal and when the community heals, the Nation will heal.

Safety

I worked for two years, and it was very upsetting — the sexual abuse, spousal abuse and all the things happening in the community. Before I became a social worker, I thought that my community was a safe community. But there is so much happening behind closed doors. The more you find out, the closer it gets to relatives. If it involved a relative, then someone else had to handle it because of conflict of interest, but you still knew. It really changed me. I had so much information about the people in the community. It was all confidential. But I still knew.

Governance

It's bad enough to struggle out there to regain your education and to get it, and to come back to your community and feel really rebuffed. And I know there are a lot of women, myself included, in that category that have experienced this. I really believe it's the systems that we have adapted to, or been forced to adapt to, provided by the Department of Indian Affairs. This is the way that you run your bands. This is the way you're going to be financed. These are the criteria. And so, subsequently, we have bureaucratic structures. I have problems in the community because everything is so fragmented. We can't seem to deal with anything holistically because they divide things up and that's European thinking — divide things up. This is education. This is economic development. This is health. I think that band staff could take a more holistic approach.

Discrimination

Working for government required major shifts in my life and values. Everything that I stood for as a Native person, culturally, linguistically and racially was challenged, questioned and sometimes undermined. I felt I almost had to give up who I was as a Native person to work in government. I almost became what they wanted me to be. Traditionally, governments most often hire persons that are most like themselves: White, middle class and mainstream. A person had to fit into their mold to survive in the system. In order for Native people to be hired by governments, we sometimes have to adopt their values and corporate culture at the expense of our own. You almost have to sell out on yourself to survive. But I was not going to allow that to happen because I had something to contribute and I had a right to work for government.

Diversity

All of the different cultures that exist among the Aboriginal people in this country need to be respected. It's part of our history and part of our culture. And we've always done well considering what we've had to fight against over the last several years and that we have come a long way. But we need to support each other.

Education

We need more. I don't want to say education because education is such an academic term. I don't know if it would ever work. But I've thought of holding community workshops explaining the evolution of the Indian Act and how our membership has become divided, what we were as a people, prior to all these policies — Indian Act policies I call them. And I really think that we need access to information in terms of how reserves work in relationship to the government. I really do not think that we're held accountable enough. There's not enough creativity. We've been stifled.

Work

I took jobs with the province but I always found the barrier for me being an Aboriginal person was I always had to give like 120 percent where the normal non-Native person could just give like 100 percent. I always thought I had to give 120 percent. So I found out I was working, working and working and then you become a workaholic.... But you see it is all that attitude that is built up in our heads because we have to succeed. Right? And we have to perform and we have to outperform everybody else. So that is what I did.

In addition to the general critical themes discovered in all eight sites, each site contained the following specific themes. Sometimes, these themes built new aspects onto the general themes. Sometimes, they were unique to each community.

Manitoba

- Sorrow over loss of language and culture.
- Accountability, dominance and corruption in male leadership.
- Dilemmas of coherence between culture and work.
- Speaking out, being safe, being visible.
- Holding a responsible place in the family.
- Living in two worlds, shame, poor self-image.
- Cross-cultural education.

Nova Scotia

- The influence of residential schools.
- The place of culture and cultural practices.
- The place of the Mi'kmaq language.
- The fact of assimilation and loss of culture.
- A sense of belonging.

Toronto

- Recovering culture through Aboriginal organizations.
- Finding more support for Native organizations.
- Living a meaningful life.
- Knowing that culture and work are not separate.
- Walking away from school and work for family and culture.
- Living in two worlds.
- Finding child care and dealing with deadbeat dads.
- Persistence and strength of Aboriginal women.

Vancouver

- Child care.
- Needs of Aboriginal women vary according to age.
- Importance of the role of Aboriginal women in their communities.
- Aboriginal women leaders criticized and give up quickly.

Merritt

- Mismanagement of bands.
- Aboriginal women powerless to make changes in employment.
- Nepotism a problem when it comes to hiring.
- Colonization has led to internalized oppression.

- Bands prefer to fund economic development instead of education.
- Local colleges offer a limited number of programs of interest to Aboriginal people.
- Aboriginal women do not access policy.

Ottawa

- The impact of French language training on women in the federal civil service.
- The importance of personal goals and organization.
- Overcoming isolation.
- The impact of placing cultural responsibilities ahead of work responsibilities.
- The importance of mentors.
- The impact of supervisors on work and culture.
- Problems presented by inconsistency in the interpretation of policy.
- Perception — how women see themselves, and how others see them at their place of work.
- The need for culturally appropriate counselling in the workplace.
- The advancement of Aboriginal women.

Parry Sound

- Traumatic past education experiences had a profound impact.
- Dislocation from family and community led to an inability to cope.
- Assimilation policies in training schools and low academic expectations interfered with positive self-development.
- Women not able to develop their educational potential.
- Isolation and lack of resources in Native communities.
- Native women may not know their employment rights.

Iqaluit

- How schooling took away most of Aboriginal culture.
- Barriers to culture at the workplace.
- Defining culture.
- Women have two full-time jobs.
- Putting needs and goals on hold.
- Advantages for women in Nunavut.
- Women don't have a collective voice.
- Isolation.
- Barriers that teachers face with work and culture.
- Meeting the expectations from two cultures.

- The impact of cultural change.
- Concerns about the loss of Inuit value and culture.
- Making Inuktitut the first language for Nunavut.
- Barriers to culture in the education system.
- The impact of gender.
- Standing up for our rights.
- The need for Inuit in positions to make change happen.

These core values and critical themes, stated by participants in each of the research sites were supported by many stories and narrative descriptions. They demonstrate the individuality of each community, which is an extremely important aspect of this study. The uniqueness of each community is the foundation for the study's primary policy recommendation, which emphasizes the importance of Aboriginal women in each community taking charge of their own policy design.

It is the belief of the researchers on this project that if the primary policy recommendation was followed, there would be opportunities in each community for the expression of the core values and critical themes articulated in this section for the general population of Aboriginal woman and for populations specific to each region. The next chapter offers policy recommendations.

5. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Participants made many policy recommendations. Most women expressed frustration about policies indicating that they were merely reiterating their recommendations over and over again with little results. One participant said:

It scares me because I travelled around a lot with my grandmother when I was small and heard her fights and some of the issues way back then. I look now, and I don't know, maybe it's because I've got such a newborn daughter, I say, well, I am fighting the same fight my grandmother is fighting. And I said that at a treaty workshop. At the time, she was 12 weeks old. And I said, is she going to have to stand here in 20 years time and fight this same fight?

In spite of the lack of results over the years, 140 participants came, once again, to reiterate their ideas about policy, perhaps because of the intergenerational hope.

The primary policy recommendation, stated in one form or another in every site was formulated by the research team into the following statement.

Primary Policy Recommendation

Conduct policy workshops in each community and create policies that are regionally based and created through a process of discourse within the communities. The policy makers must be the women themselves. Funds need to be spent on sending facilitators into each community, who can spend time experiencing the daily lives of the women, networking with agencies and individuals to become immersed in the context of the women's lives. These facilitators must have the skills to help women in policy design and implementation. A guarantee of implementation of these policies would be required.

Secondary Policy Recommendations

Recommendations to Reform the Indian Act

1. Require the active role of the Assembly of First Nations to lobby for government policies that improve the lives of Aboriginal women through the active participation of the women themselves.
2. Design and implement policies that require the inclusion of success stories of Aboriginal women in formal and informal educational materials, including advertisements that feature role models.
3. Design and implement policy that requires reform or elimination of the *Indian Act* in order to diminish the fiduciary relationship between the Government of Canada and Aboriginal peoples. Where appropriate, work within treaty processes to address the issue of Native rights.

4. Reform governance systems for both White government agencies and chiefs and band councils (*Indian Act*) to guarantee positions of authority to Aboriginal women so they will be in a decision-making capacity. Consider alternative forms of governance, more traditional in nature, not electoral systems.
5. Reform the *Indian Act*, Bill C-31, to be inclusive of all Aboriginal women and their children so future generations will be able to maintain their status.
6. Reform the *Employment Equity Act* to include anti-racist legislation.
7. Design and implement policy that makes rights portable for Aboriginal peoples, for example, Aboriginal people retain their rights on or off reserve.

Recommendations on Other Policies

8. Design and implement policies that respond to the specific needs of Aboriginal peoples in different Nations, bands and regions rather than standardizing across Canada.
9. Design and implement policies that guarantee child care for Aboriginal women who are attempting to upgrade their education or participate in the work force, and policies that are respectful to children by giving mothers leave when necessary for the care of their children.
10. Design and implement policies that ensure culturally appropriate curricula, pedagogy and consultation in educational settings. These policies must reflect the *Indian Control of Indian Education* (NIB c1972).
11. Design and implement employment and educational policies in the government and private sector to accommodate cultural leave as required for elaborate funerals and cultural events. All leave would prohibit penalizing students or employees for taking cultural leaves.
12. Design and implement institutional policies in work and education settings that require administrators and employees to take training in cultural sensitivity and policies to guarantee culturally appropriate delivery of services to Aboriginal peoples.
13. Design and implement language immersion programs in regions where Aboriginal people are trying to maintain and revitalize their language.
14. Design and implement anti-discrimination policies in all settings. These policies should specifically be aimed at eliminating sexual harassment and violent acts based on discrimination against Aboriginal women and be associated with an effective human rights commission. Band councils should establish their own human rights codes and use traditional laws in the development of anti-discrimination policies.
15. Design and implement policies to increase Aboriginal women's access to knowledge of their employment rights through educational seminars, workshops and media.

16. Design and implement policies at all government levels, including band councils, which would support the development of Aboriginal women for spiritual and cultural growth and advancement of academic education and training. Education and training need to be flexible in delivery. Institute mentoring processes in educational and work settings.
17. Additional funding is needed to support and promote Native women's healing, learning about traditional healing and to support women to develop and implement healing practices in their community. This issue needs to be addressed at the government level and by chiefs and band councils.

Regional Recommendations

Several policies were recommended which were regionally based.

Manitoba participants recommended that there be implementation of a policy that was designed in 1993, signed by the Honourable Gary Filmon, 1993 Premier of Manitoba, the Honourable Bonnie Mieselson, 1993 Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, the Honourable James Downey, 1993 Minister of Northern Affairs (Canada 1992). This policy promised government initiatives in the areas of social services/ family violence/justice, health, education/training, economic development, housing; access to government and community partnerships.

Ottawa participants recommended a review of current policies and procedures on French language instruction for Aboriginal peoples.

Iqaluit participants had many additional recommendations which were particularly time sensitive because of the formation of a new government. Colleen Purdon prepared the following list of recommendations from Iqaluit.

Policy recommendations in education

- All teachers in the education system should be required to have language proficiency in Inuktitut that will allow them to communicate in the classroom setting. The intent of this policy is to ensure that teachers in the classrooms of Nunavut are able to meet the language and cultural needs of Inuit students.
- Put additional resources into distance learning, additional distance learning courses and the co-ordination of distance learning in order to make college accessible for all communities in Nunavut. There is also a need for more information and advertising on opportunities for education and distance education in the communities. There is a lack of information available about distance education in Nunavut.
- Employers and Arctic College should investigate partnerships that would support opportunities for women in the work force to continue their education while remaining employed, including the development of policies that would allow women to take time off for studies, and practical supports to encourage upgrading and skill development.

Policy recommendations for the Government of Nunavut

- The Government of Nunavut should implement a language charter for Nunavut, with Inuktitut the official language for the territory. The implementation of this policy will require sufficient financial and human resources from the government.
- There is support for the development of policy and plans that will require that government employees complete basic language instruction in Inuktitut. It is recommended that this policy be strengthened by including clear expectations for the level of language proficiency that will need to be reached by the end of the first year of employment, and include paid work time for language training on the job. The intent of this policy is to ensure that government officials do not present language barriers to Inuit in Nunavut, and to ensure that Inuktitut is the working language of the Government of Nunavut in all aspects of government work.
- The Government of Nunavut should establish a commission to oversee the structural and policy changes that are put in place to ensure the Government of Nunavut and its funded programs are culturally appropriate and reflect the needs of Inuit men, women, families and communities. The commission should be made up of representatives from government and from Inuit organizations. It needs to be a strong and effective group, with a clear mandate and terms of reference.
- The Government of Nunavut should develop human resource policies and procedures to encourage and support the advancement of Inuit in positions of leadership and decision making in the civil service, and in government-funded programs and agencies. The purpose is to reduce barriers faced by Inuit, and to make government and government-funded programs more accessible to the Inuit in Nunavut.
- The Government of Nunavut should ensure that recruitment and screening policies are in place to ensure that new employees coming to Nunavut are personally suitable, have adequate language skills and are sincerely interested in working in a culturally sensitive way. Personal suitability, the ability to demonstrate cultural awareness and sensitivity, and proficiency in basic Inuktitut (or a willingness to achieve this as a condition of employment), should be viewed as necessary qualifications for any government or government-funded position. Non-Inuit employees who are new to the community would be supported with an Inuit mentor, and would take part in cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity programs, as part of their employment.
- It is recommended that the government develop policies that focus on an investment in keeping government employees connected with the people, communities and the land. Several options for this were suggested, including:
 - periodic outward-bound programs for managers, senior managers and employees in bureaucratic work settings;
 - employee retreats, where groups spend time together on the land; and
 - orientation programs for new employees to connect them with the land and the community.

- There is need for employment policies and programs that will address barriers in the workplace faced by Inuit women. Recommendations include:
 - employee assistance programs that are more proactive around issues of abuse and drug/alcohol issues, and available for women; and
 - flexible benefit packages that are relevant to the needs of women, and young women with children.
- There is a need for policy and program development to address the issues of battering and abusing women. Specifically, women recommended that:
 - community shelters and safe homes expand their services to provide programs for men who batter;
 - correctional services include a men's program as part of the rehabilitation process for men in custody or on probation; and
 - the Government of Nunavut increase spending to develop culturally appropriate programs and services that address violence toward women and children, and to support men dealing with their changing roles in Nunavut society.
- Have the justice system review the handling of domestic violence cases. Participants in this study noted that the justice system treats women and men differently, and that the system supports the notion that drug and alcohol abuse causes domestic assault. Participants also reported that the justice system accepts the notion that men who abuse should receive lighter sentences when they have personal experiences of abuse. Women in this study reject both of these concepts and would like to see the justice system reformed to put the emphasis on men taking responsibility for their behaviour, and a court process that is fair and equal for men and women.
- The Government of Nunavut should develop policies and programs to ensure there is an equal voice and equal participation for women in government and government-funded programs, and to develop and support the leadership and participation of women in government and senior management positions.

Policy recommendations for community agencies and employers

- It is recommended that communities set up an interagency group to co-ordinate their social service agencies (shelters, alcohol programs and other not-for-profit agencies). This would be an alternative to the board system where programs often work in isolation and are managed by small groups of community volunteers. It was noted that the board system has become inoperable in many communities because community volunteers are burned out, the population is small and women have many responsibilities. The recommended interagency group would allow for more co-ordination in the community, with fewer volunteer positions and a different way of doing this necessary work in the community.
- It is recommended that the Government of Nunavut review the way social services are delivered in communities and consider a decentralized model of service delivery that would:
 - provide more training, support and supervision for social service workers in their communities;

- foster a positive and supportive relationship between the people in communities and the social service supports;
 - allow for parents and the extended family to be more involved in the decision-making and healing work in communities;
 - allow for a greater level of community accountability and involvement in healing work and social service programs;
 - provide more resources in the community, instead of removing people from their communities; and
 - put more focus on community wellness programs and initiatives.
- It is recommended that community agencies and employers move the responsibility for dealing with cultural expectations away from individual employees, and deal with this as a workplace responsibility. This shift in responsibility from the individual to the workplace could include:
 - acknowledge the stresses involved for employees who must work in their second language at their place of work, and putting adequate supports and training in place for the employee;
 - provide supports at the place of work to address the health, emotional or cultural sensitivity issues that will occur when there are cultural differences in the workplace, instead of ignoring these and having employees deal with them at home; and
 - implement hiring procedures that include a review of the cultural and language preparation prospective employees would bring to the workplace, and their willingness to learn about culture and cultural differences in the workplace.

Many suggestions were made for improvements. Though these were not formal policies, they are significant and are represented in the stories of Aboriginal women in Chapter 3.

6. ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS

All the stories reported in this study are stories of strength. Barbara Bruce, Louise Chippeway, Cynthia Bear Bird, Elsie Basque, Patricia Bedwell Doyle, Rose Morris, Tecla Neganegijig, Peggy Jamieson-Smith, Sandra Monette, Kim Wheatley, Shirley Sterling and the Aboriginal women from Ottawa, Parry Sound and Nunavut speak of difficult conditions in their lives which would present barriers to integrating their cultures, educational aspirations and work opportunities. The stories of the women reported here are representative of many other stories from the 140 participants in eight sites across Canada.

A careful reading of the stories reveals specific strengths and sensibilities: a commitment to quality of life for themselves, their children and their communities, an ability to adapt to adverse circumstances, and resourcefulness and creativity in “getting around” dilemmas which would inhibit their capacities to grow and change, to make a contribution to society as a whole. In fact, they have often succeeded against all odds.

This analysis of findings concentrates on the voices of the women in the study in the spirit of a naturalistic inquiry, which honours their experience “on the ground.” The analysis also makes reference to aspects of the literature review in Chapter 1. Finally, a few closing comments bring forward a brief treatment of other supportive literature.

Coherence

The strength of the findings of this report is demonstrated in the coherence of the stories, core values, critical themes and policy recommendations expressed by the participants in the study. Though there were many regional differences, there was a national consensus on many issues. These findings are supported in the critical analysis of the literature on policy, particularly the *Indian Act*. And even when critical themes or policy recommendations varied from region to region, the same four core values of respect, trust, knowledge and balance were consistent across region, age, First Nation, educational level and socio-economic background.

Core values are at the centre of responses of an overwhelming number of participants. This focus on values is exemplified by such remarks as:

The core of culture is beliefs and values (Barbara Bruce).

In order for Native people to be hired by governments, we sometimes have to adopt their values and corporate culture at the expense of our own. You almost have to sell out on yourself to survive (Louise Chippeway).

I tried to be a law professor, and I have failed miserably at that. Because I was so entrenched in who I am to teach by stories, to teach holistically, to use symbols and markers, because that is the way I learned. And I think at that time, I came very close to, “I don’t care if I live or I die....” I had to make a decision to live. I made that decision.... Because it suddenly occurred to me,

after going through this upheaval of trying to live my dreams and stuff and I said, "I have got to live by my values. They are not open to compromise. They are not open to discussion." I had to decide what were my values and what were my Mi'kmaq principles and how am I going to live by those principles and stop feeling schizophrenic all the time (Patricia Doyle Bedwell).

I just put everything aside and decided to keep my culture up. Well, language and spiritual values are the heartbeat of our culture. But how do you live a life of long ago when we lived off the land?... We can't. But we can do things, the spiritual things, like burning sweet grass when we pray to the Creator, you know, and respect Mother Earth and to nature...it isn't difficult to do. I enjoy it because that's me. I feel whole when I can stand on Mother Earth and pray to the Creator. I think that's the best part of our culture right there. We've got a beautiful culture and it's very rich. We have to keep at it. Whatever is lost we have to try and bring it back, and in time, you know, the younger folks will follow in our footsteps (Rose Morris).

These quotes from narratives presented earlier in the report demonstrate the importance of values for Aboriginal women. Notably, there are diverse values in each region. Yet, the fact that values are perceived as central to cultural and individual survival is the significant factor here. And when the individual or the culture is required to surrender these values, spiritual sustenance is gone.

So many of the women in this study reported that when forced to make a choice between these cultural values, which represented the soul or spirit of their people, and work offered by colonizing authorities including band councils, they would choose values and culture over the education and work. This is the strength of Aboriginal women. Yet, it is also the benchmark in the conflict between retaining their most important support, spiritually, and "getting ahead" in the modern world.

This finding was not limited to a specific age category or educational category. The women quoted above represent highly educated young Aboriginal women, elders with minimal education, women working in government, at universities, for Aboriginal agencies and some Aboriginal women without formal academic education but with a tremendous amount of traditional knowledge.

Indeed, one has to question the loss of Aboriginal women's traditional roles in the society as the keepers of the moral character of the community, as one of the indicators for Aboriginal women's difficult choices when it comes to culture, education and work. When in a position of choosing, culture and family must come first.

As noted earlier in our literature review, Nahanee (1997) argued that the *Indian Act* imposed upon all First Nations communities a system of patriarchal customs and laws that became so ingrained that it stripped women of equality and created male privilege as the norm on reserve lands. She believes Indian women face a tremendous struggle to regain their social position. If in fact the women are the trustees of the moral character in Aboriginal communities, the primary advocates for values as the informing agent in critical decisions

about community life, how can anything go well without their elevated social and political position?

Paradoxes

The colonization of Aboriginal societies and the introduction of the residential schools also divested women of their social position resulting in widespread psychological trauma that continues in subsequent generations (Ing 2001). An abundance of devastating stories are now being documented about these traumas. These stories relate to the critical themes of healing, safety, discrimination and education presented by the participants in this study.

My healing process started in 1985 with traditional and contemporary healing methods.... There is no way that I could go to university because nuns and priests told me that I couldn't go. They said I would never make it. I couldn't go to university because I was too stupid and I always remembered that.... The missionaries, the nuns and priests controlled our lives (Barbara Bruce).

I learned to play my inferior/victim role as a child because that was what I believed society expected of me. I was colonized heart and soul. I allowed myself to be a victim well into my adult years.... That racial inferiority and low self-esteem I felt as a child transferred over to my adult life, particularly into my relationships and my work life, including how I raised my children. The forces that shaped and molded me as a child intensified as an adult. I guess this was colonization and internalized racism in action (Louise Chippeway).

All Indian children in Nova Scotia were supposed to go to the residential school. They were forced to go. There were a lot of children whose parents, like mine, were focussing on education only to find that it was not that type of institution (Elsie Basque).

Because you are just a little tot when you first realize that you cannot speak your language and then and especially when you are being punished because you say a few words in your language. And it is very sad, but we can't stop at that. We have to continue on as people and as role models. So the children and the people behind us, they are watching. They are watching and they see what we are doing. It was sad to see my parents realizing that their language was dying. Nobody was speaking it hardly, just them and when they were gone, we have to do the best we can. And you don't realize that at first. You realize it after a while (Rose Morris).

That is one of the things I feel this is really important as well. Learning about the ceremonies, the culture, the Native language is fairly important in being a Native person. I hear some people, how they talk. I can sense in them that in a way, there is some disconnection when they don't have that. I find that when they are starting to learn more about the cultures as well, they pick up

the language and I find they start to be more of a complete being when they start picking up the Native language (Tecla Neganegijig).

One of the most difficult things that I have had to overcome in my university and work careers has been the lasting influence of the residential school. I still have apprehension around authority figures and sleep disorders. As children, we were removed from both societies and not trained to cope in either. I was told for 11 years that I would never amount to anything, that my culture, history were despicable, that I would never earn any kind of worldly success and, if I did, I would lose favour with God (Shirley Sterling).

Another thing would be to not have southern teachers coming and saying this is the right way to do things, this is appropriate, this is proper. They are coming up from 2,000 miles away with different values. I guess they don't realize what they are saying is, "forget where you are and what you are being taught at home but only remember what you are being taught at school because that is better." I don't know if I can call it "lifestyle imposing" (Inuit woman from Nunavut).

Schooling took most of my culture (Inuit woman).

In these words, we can see the relationships between healing, safety, discrimination and education as critical themes. Many Native children did not feel safe in schools. They felt discrimination because of policies of assimilation in both government and religious institutions. The negative intergenerational effects of residential schools are well documented. And the stories keep coming. However, it is extremely important to note the importance of healing from the corruption of Aboriginal traditional values, to create a stable relationship between Aboriginal women and policy makers. For example:

- How can Aboriginal women trust if they do not feel safe?
- How can they gain knowledge if they believe that schooling or education has taken away their culture?
- How can they feel respect for colonizing authorities including band councils that still do not respond to their requests for strong anti-discrimination policies? And how can they receive the respect of governing institutions at all levels if they are not truly seen by them in their strength, in their intelligence, in their values, as keepers of the moral character in Aboriginal communities; in essence, in their traditional social and political roles?
- How can they achieve balance when hegemonic influences still inhibit the possibility of coherence through inadequate policies that do not guarantee access to culture, education and work?

Limitations

Other critical themes of governance, diversity and work are also related to the core values. The four core values are often implied in statements from women in our study.

Working for government required major shifts in my life and values. Everything that I stood for as a Native person, culturally, linguistically and racially was challenged, questioned and sometimes undermined. I felt I almost had to give up who I was as a Native person to work in government (Louise Chippeway).

I had to look for flexible education and work experiences and environments where if I had to leave for two days or a week or two weeks, it would be OK. So I was lucky enough to see that balance too in perspective, and that's one of the things, I guess, that led me to choose to just leave a structured work environment and work at home and do contract work.... I think about it in a number of workplaces...like government and corporations, where there needs to be flexibility to allow for women and to recognize that women have additional responsibilities besides working for money in terms of paid employment (Cynthia Bear Bird).

I used to work at a bank and to say that you need two days off because you have a ceremony to go to, for instance, fasting in the fall, fasting for four days so I need a Friday and a Monday off and then you need a day in preparations. So it is like one week off. How do you explain that to an employer without going into this big long detail of actually explaining the importance of it in a way that they could grasp in a nutshell? It is impossible. There is a communication breakdown almost instantaneously.... And I chose to go on the fast and left the job. It was more important to me. It is really important to me to be a balanced person and be the best person I can, not only for my family, but for the community in general (Kim Wheatley).

Another difficulty was finding good child care. Parents desperately need to know their children are safe: psychologically, physically, spiritually and parents need respite (Shirley Sterling).

I make just enough to get by. From the outside, it may not look like I have much, but I'm very happy with my life. As difficult as it is for Aboriginal peoples in this country, I would not trade the treasure of my cultural heritage for anything. Actually, I think I'm rich (Shirley Sterling).

Workplaces are run as they would be in the south so therefore a lot of the time they are set to fail.... Things could be done differently, but those questions are never asked. Things are just done as they would be done in the south (Aboriginal woman from Nunavut).

There's an awful lot of junk in the Indian Act, the membership codes that were being established by communities and I think that we need to be more positive in our policies, to be more inclusive as opposed to exclusive, because the more we are inclusive we build those bridges between one another as opposed to trying to establish small islands with no connection to one another and, therefore, isolated and unsupported. And that's not what life is really about. You need to have those connections, you need to have those supports in place, and the more of those connections and supports and positive things that are there, the more successful any person, nation or country can be. If I had my way, my Indian rights and my access to land would be portable.... None of this stuff about it has to be all here, within this boundary line. It moves. And, therefore, the prosperity of the First Nations people could improve, and the ghettos that were established when all of these reserves were established hundreds of years ago, could be done away with (Sandra Monette).

In the literature review of this study, Haike Muller presents a critique of the *Indian Act*, as it relates to barriers to the successes for Aboriginal women. This critique includes Bill C-31. *The Report of the Royal Commission for Aboriginal Peoples* also provides an analysis of similar issues. In fact, the critique of the *Indian Act*, and its continuing colonizing effects has been one of the foundations of Aboriginal discourse for quite a while. The women in our study joined the many voices supporting reform.

Freedom

In the analysis of the findings, the striking feature of the data is the tension between asking the government for support and the desire to be independent and self-governing. This is one of the most profound dilemmas of the human condition for marginalized peoples of all kinds. This tension is reflected in the critical themes and in the policies asking for support on the one hand and the policies asking for autonomy on the other. This is the current state of affairs for Aboriginal people — the struggle to make it gracefully through a transition period, imagining that soon, we will be able to manage our own lives and relinquish the fiduciary relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the Government of Canada established long ago.

Aboriginal peoples are preparing for this inevitable state of self-determination. The requests for support, demonstrated in the policy recommendations in this report are indicators that Aboriginal women want the respect necessary to function in a self-determined way. And they want the government to keep its fiduciary responsibility long enough to allow them to obtain the knowledge and skills necessary to function in a healthy and productive way, one which is free from the many negative effects of our history of colonization.

Every recommendation in the *Report on the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* indicates a desire for respect and trust, independence and autonomy. The strength of the commitment to achieve this autonomy is reflected in the opening statement to the chapter on “Women’s Perspectives” (RCAP 1996b: 1st para.).

Our people will not heal and rise toward becoming self-governing and strong people both in spirit and vision until the women rise and give direction and support to our leaders. That time is now. The women are now actively participating in insuring the empowerment of their people. Life is a daily struggle as women, as mothers, as sisters, as aunties and grandmothers. We are responsible for the children of today and those of tomorrow. It is with pure kindness and our respect for life that allows us to gladly take up this responsibility to nurture the children, to teach of what we know, from what we have learned through trial and error.

This statement from Nongom Ikkwe, an Aboriginal women's organization in Manitoba opened the organization's submission to the Commission. The statement is similar to the words of one of the participants in this study, as she re-interpreted the teachings of an elder.

When women heal, the family will heal and when the family heals, the community will heal and when the community heals, the nation will heal
(Margaret Lavallee, Red Willow Lodge, Anola, Manitoba).

In the conclusion of the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (1996, Vol. 5), it is also stated: "The best way to present the concerns of Aboriginal women is to let them speak directly in their own words. Where appropriate, we made recommendations to address these concerns."

If the work of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples is considered policy, then there are many aspects of this work that can be used. The Royal Commission states:

The living conditions of many Aboriginal women are marked by continuing discrimination, exclusion and powerlessness....(RCAP 1996b: ch2, s. 8).

Aboriginal women have often been excluded — from their home communities, from decision-making, and from having a say in their future and their children's future. Their determination to change this situation — to be included in these areas and more — is the powerful message we received (RCAP 1996b: ch 2, s. 9).

And significantly, considering the first level of analysis of the study — core values — the Royal Commission stated:

Aboriginal women are the guardians of the values, cultures and traditions of their peoples. They have a vital role in facilitating healing in families and communities" (RCAP 1996b: ch. 2, s. 9).

The primary policy recommendation of this study puts leadership for the future in the hands of the Aboriginal women themselves, placing them in the authority roles necessary for positive social change.

The secondary policies all address issues of racism, discrimination, support and healing through education, just treatment in the workplace, reform of governance systems, culturally appropriate educational policies, cultural policies in the workplace and reform of current policies.

As well, core values of respect, trust, knowledge and balance are all represented in the policy recommendations of this report. The critical themes of healing, safety, governance, discrimination, diversity, education and work are also represented.

The levels of interpretation and analysis are woven together in the stories of the women that express the living existence, the day-to-day experiences which bring meaning to the abstract representations of our professional research team.

Personal Stories

We have heard the phrase “the personal is political” often, in conjunction with women’s stories (Ward 1996). So often, in the literature of Aboriginal scholars, we have heard that the stories must remain at the centre of our discourse (Bishop 1996; Smith 1999).

And the stories have remained the centre of this study. Paulo Freire (Freire et al.1998), who is often mentioned in decolonizing discourses, recommended that when a people have been oppressed historically, the grass-roots conversations are key in shifting the pattern of oppression. Through these conversations, oppressed people can come to a shared understanding of their dilemmas, become educated to take social action, and begin to take responsibility and control of their lives.

The women in this study, in essence, are saying: **Give us back the fullness of our lives. And give us the important tools to create policies which will safeguard our children so never again will they experience losing their cultures.**

We can only imagine what Aboriginal women can accomplish for the society if they do not have the barriers described in this study. And we can imagine what the societies might be like today with Aboriginal values at the core of decision-making processes. This is what our research has to say: **Give the authority to Aboriginal women in each community to create their own policies. And support them in their efforts by establishing community-based workshops, which empower the women to take this control.**

We have to get rid of policies that are controlling and replace these with the policies that empower (Barbara Bruce).

All the secondary recommendations support the primary policy recommendation. They include reform or elimination of the *Indian Act*, which discriminates against women and reinforces the domination of male leadership. The *Indian Act*, in itself, could be considered a corrupt policy, if one takes into consideration, the traditional forms of governance, in Aboriginal communities, which invested women with social and political position. Again, the values can be compromised in such a system.

They also suggest anti-discrimination policies, child care, educating personnel in cultural sensitivity, encouraging appropriate Aboriginal pedagogy and curriculum, supporting the revitalization of Aboriginal languages, the active participation of the Assembly of First Nations and the reform of the *Employment Equity Act*.

The analysis of findings in this report is in concert with the assertions of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967). The dilemma of how to address theory, culture and society is complex. At the foundation, we might ask: How do we make a decent society? This is the concern of policy makers. And make a society we do. All of us make a society. We all play a part in creating the society in which we live, or “the societies” in which we live. The Aboriginal women in this study want to take their place in the making of society, especially on issues which affect their own lives, the lives of their children, the lives of Aboriginal peoples.

The noted scholar of culture and society, Michel Maffesoli (1996: 163) wrote:

Modernity’s strength lay in having situated everything in the framework of History and historical development.... But what was once a strength has inevitably become a weakness. Indeed, History deprived histories of their place; it relativized experience. And these once-repressed experiences are resurfacing today with a vengeance. Their modulations are of all types, but with the common thread of favouring empiricism and proxemics. This is forcing us to reorient our analyses, to focus our scrutiny on “the most extreme concrete” (W. Benjamin) that is everyday life. The complexity of everyday life, ‘the first culture’, deserves special attention.

The histories and the stories must inform us now. Policy makers have a special role to play in responding to this analysis of “everyday lives,” “the first culture,” as Maffesoli suggested, because for Aboriginal peoples, policy makers have the power to determine much of the story, the stories, the next histories of our peoples. And of course, as a self-determining peoples, Aboriginal women must be allowed to determine their own stories and to provide the best historical conditions for the revitalization of Aboriginal societies so the children will have even better stories.

7. CONCLUSION

We would like to emphasize the aspect of “guidelines.” We have attempted to follow the guidelines set out for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and believe we have expressed the fulfillment of these guidelines in the following ways.

- All 140 participants in the study were of Aboriginal ancestry.
- All oral transmissions were honoured as authentic and used as the foundation for the recommendations.
- Multiplicity of age, gender, First Nation, region, religion and physical ability/disability were represented in the 140 participants.
- Researchers challenged previous research by critiquing the literature and by making one primary policy recommendation to empower Aboriginal women to create policies that affect the lives of Aboriginal peoples.
- Liaisons were central in the collaborative process, as were elders and community leaders, at all stages of the research.
- Drafts of the report were circulated to all participants in the study two times in the research process.
- The final report was written in a language that is accessible to most participants in the study.
- Benefits to each community were, and continue to be, paramount for the researchers working on the study.
- The primary recommendation of the report reinforces the guideline to encourage Aboriginal people to manage their own research.

Guidelines Created from Our Study

We formulated guidelines to offer specific suggestions that reflect the core values, critical themes and policy recommendations of this study. We suggest that guidelines be created through workshops for Aboriginal women in specific contexts, with the help of facilitators who have come to be part of the community over an extended period of time.

These guidelines are very general and could be changed into checklists or even rating scales with the same wording. General guidelines can be established around the four values of respect, trust, knowledge and balance. Additional guidelines can be established around the seven critical themes of healing, safety, governance, discrimination, diversity, education/crossing cultures and work. We suggest these themes could be the foundation for workshop

discourse in each setting. As well, other themes that are site specific may emerge from conversations and experiential exercises in the workshops.

Guidelines for Employers or Labour Organizations

1. Ensure there is a safe place where Aboriginal women can gather when they need to engage in cultural practices at work.
2. Ensure that cross-cultural training is mandatory for employees and managers.
3. Consult with Aboriginal women about the design of cross-cultural training on an ongoing basis.
4. Offer appropriate compensation for consultation on cultural training.
5. Develop policies and procedures that are flexible and meet the specific needs of Aboriginal women.
6. Set up a mentoring program.
7. Set up an orientation for Aboriginal women to identify skill training areas, to build confidence at the beginning of a new job and get a program in place at the very beginning.
8. Put programs in place that will reduce isolation for Aboriginal women, such as self-identification.
9. Ensure consistency in interpretation of policies so Aboriginal women do not experience discrimination in the workplace.
10. Ensure that employee assistance programs are culturally appropriate.
11. Include options for flexible work schedules and flexible benefit options for Aboriginal women's families and cultural responsibilities.
12. Make provisions for culturally appropriate training and support for Aboriginal women to assume leadership positions.
13. Negotiate culturally appropriate language in collective agreements.
14. Develop a recruitment policy and strategies to increase the number of Aboriginal women employed in your setting.
15. Guarantee that there are Aboriginal people on selection committees.
16. Ensure that there is an advocate or peacemaker present who is culturally knowledgeable as well as knowledgeable about employment standards when negotiating any work issue.

Guidelines for Educational Institutions

1. Do not single out Aboriginal people when there are questions about Aboriginal issues just because they are Aboriginal.
2. Develop and implement policies for zero tolerance of racism.
3. Develop an active recruitment policy to increase the number of Aboriginal women in the institution.
4. Develop mandatory education about local Aboriginal people, the history of Aboriginal people, from the perspective of Aboriginal people themselves, including knowledge about Aboriginal women.
5. Develop mandatory anti-racism workshops for all personnel as well as students in the institution.
6. Develop culturally appropriate curricula.
7. Incorporate Aboriginal pedagogy and world view, especially from Aboriginal women's perspective.
8. Develop educational programs that are more accessible for Aboriginal women such as distance learning and flexible delivery of courses.
9. Consult with Aboriginal women's groups at the local level to assess local educational needs for Aboriginal women.
10. Encourage a respect for the complex responsibilities of Aboriginal women, particularly those with children.
11. Offer culturally appropriate child-care facilities on campus.
12. Seek information about appropriate protocols from community elders, leaders and Aboriginal women in communities.

Gaps in Policy Research on Aboriginal Women

- Specific policy language often does not refer to the specific issues of Aboriginal women.
- Technical policy language is not always language people can understand.
- Access to policies is a problem.
- The way legislation is structured (e.g., *Indian Act*), matrimonial property issues and jurisdictional issues do not always match the lives of the people.
- Policies are not in the language of the people (e.g., Inuktitut or Cree, etc.).

- Policies don't reflect the needs and realities of Aboriginal women.
- Policies do not reflect the diversity of Aboriginal women.
- Consultation in policy development is a huge gap.

Other Research Questions

1. How do we reconcile the need for communities to develop their own policies and have control over their own policies with the corruption and lack of accountability and good leadership?
2. How can we actually ensure that women get the information they need about their employment rights and the responsibilities of employers?
3. How do we guarantee that there is implementation of policies, or how do we ensure that interpretation of policy is not used against women?
4. How can we ensure that employers will not take the recommendations or suggestions that Aboriginal women have put forward for changes and re-interpret them in their own way so they do not have to take responsibility?
5. How do we motivate White people in power to become culturally sensitive and to consider cultural sensitivity essential, a priority?
6. How do we deal with the issue of privilege, and how do people give up privilege to make room for Aboriginal women — women and culture in the workplace?
7. How do we ensure that women get into decision-making positions to help form policy which affects the entire community, not only women?
8. How do we educate and train women to take on positions of authority to deal with the conflict?
9. How do we help women believe they have choices?
10. How do we ensure the safety of, and respect for, women who speak out and work for positive change in their communities and challenge the status quo?
11. How do we ensure that women who speak out are not forced to leave their communities and workplaces, because they present a challenge to the systems or to leadership?
12. How do we ensure that government and the private sector will do something about the recommendations and that this is done in the way Aboriginal women want it to be done?
13. How do we appropriately interpret policy to accommodate diversity among the First Nations and in age, status, occupation, geography, experiences, interests, level of health and healing, places of spiritual and cultural development?

Final Statement

As researchers, we have attempted to focus on the stories. Participants spoke eloquently and convincingly about the need for positive change in Canada. We can only hope that this report offers a contribution to the efforts our participants will make in each of their communities to improve the quality of life for Aboriginal people. We also hope we have represented the participants in a way that illuminates the strength, commitment and endurance of Aboriginal women, as well as their need for, and right to, respect, trust, knowledge and balance.

APPENDIX A: CONTACTS FOR THE STUDY*

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**All persons listed here have agreed to include their names and contact numbers in this report.*

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY

The women who participated had the option of giving their names for inclusion in the study, or to have their names remain confidential. The following list is of the women who wished to have their names included in the study.

Participants at the Winnipeg Site

Twenty-eight women participated in the study, eight chose the confidentiality option.

Virginia Arthurson	Rainey Gaywish
Cynthia Bird	Margaret Lavallee
Marcial Bird	Linda McEvoy
Barbara Bruce	Delma McLean
Mae Louise Campbell	Thelma S. Meade
Louise Chippeway	Susie Mercredi
Donna Delaronde	Barbara Nepinak
Doreen Demas	Valerie Olson
Pat Desjarlais	Velma Olson
Janet Fontaine	Diane Scribe

Participants at the Nova Scotia Site

Twenty-nine women participated at the Nova Scotia site; 11 chose the confidentiality option.

Donna Amirault	Rose Purdy
Elsie Charles Basque	Dolores Rhyno
Darlene Coulton	Elizabeth Rhyno
Patricia Doyle-Bedwell	Tina Rhyno
Veronica Freeman	Deborah Robinson
Debra Cloade-Pictou	Lorraine Usher
Jean Labradore	Debra Wentzell
Della Maguire	Wanda Westhauer
Rose Morris	Margaret Whynot

Participants at the Toronto Site

Twenty-one women participated at the Toronto site; eight chose the confidentiality option.

Bonnie Barter	Thecla Neganegijig
Gaikezheyongai	Alita Sauvé
Shirley Gillis-Kendall	Dorothy Stewart
Peggy Jamieson-Smith	Denise Toulouse
Wenonah Judge	Katherine Walker
Gerri Laford	Kim Wheatley
Star Laford	

Participants at the Vancouver Site

Twenty-one women participated at the Vancouver site; five chose the confidentiality option.

Alannah Young	Bertha Lansdowne
Terri Willi	Lavonne James
Kirsten Williams	Ethel Gardner
Peggy Shannon	Amy Eustergerling
Sheryl Rivers	Tina Dion
Pamela Perreault	Candace Dion
Delhia Nahanee	Julie Baker
Margaret Muehlfarth	Fay Blaney

Participants at the Merritt Site:

Twelve women participated at the Merritt site; four chose the confidentiality option.

Darlene Blankinship	Wendy John
Rhonda Dunn	Angela Sterling
Greg Gottfriedson	Lorna Sterling
Rena Joe	Rona Sterling-Collins

Participants at the Parry Sound Site

Eight women participated in a focus group for the Parry Sound site, and another four women met with the researcher to discuss the project in the initial phase of the work in Parry Sound. None of the women gave their permission to use their names in the study.

Participants at the Ottawa Site

Seven women took part in the site visit in Ottawa; four chose the confidentiality option.

Claudette Commanda Cote	Ardis White
Pamela Sickles	

Participants at the Iqaluit Site

Twelve women took part in the site visit in Iqaluit; two chose the confidentiality option.

Pitsula Akavak	Phoebe Hainnu
Simona Amatsiaq	Eelee Higgins
Naullaq Arnaquq	Alexina Kublu
Eva Arreak	Peesee Pitsiulak
Salomie Awa	Mary Echo Wilman

APPENDIX C: THE RESEARCH KIT

First Nations Women Speak about Diminishing Conflicts between Their Cultural Context and Their Education/Work Context

Bridging the Gap between the Stories about Work and Culture from First Nations Women and Policy Recommendations

The project team has put together this short paper to talk about some of the challenges and opportunities for the project team, the women who participated directly in the project and the communities involved in this work.

The project involves the First Nations women and the communities that are suggesting changes to policy or the creation of new policy to diminish the conflicts women face between their cultural/ traditional lives and responsibilities, and their work/education lives and responsibilities. This task confronts us all with gaps.

The gap between women’s experience and policy: Many women have very little connection to “policy” or “policy development” in their everyday lives. Policies seem to be far removed from the day-to-day experiences of women, and many women see a huge gap between the issues that affect them and the world of policy. Some women are unfamiliar with the work of developing policy and don’t have confidence that they can bridge this gap.

The language gap: The language women use to describe their experiences in their stories is very different than the language of policy. Stories are individual and personal, and create images and feelings. They are easy to understand and use the spoken language from the community. Policies are broad and impersonal, and provide guidelines for action. They are often written in complicated and legal language that would never be spoken. They are often written in English or French, not the language of the people. Regardless of the language they are written in, they almost always need to be “translated” for people to understand.

The accessibility gap: Stories are connected to real people and are told to people who then pass along the knowledge and information. They are usually held in people’s memory and can be easily accessed. Policies are often not accessible to the people. They are written down, often in documents or books that are not in the communities, and may be located in central offices. Written policies sometimes disappear into filing cabinets, or cannot be found when people ask for them.

The gap between what policy states and what happens: Policies are written to provide direction for people and to establish how people will work and live together. It can happen that policies are put in place, but then are not acted upon, or people in power disregard them. At times, there is a large gap between what the policy states and what people do. This is a common situation, and can lead to people losing confidence in developing policy. Sometimes, the people in power apply policy to some people and not to others, and this can create confusion and fear.

Bridging the Gaps

To bridge these gaps, the project team is suggesting that we work with women and communities involved in the project through several steps that will move stories of experience toward policy recommendations.

1. Collect stories from women in eight communities about their experiences with work, education, culture and tradition, to look at what the individual issues of Aboriginal women are.
2. Participants collectively analyze the experiences of women and the issues found in the stories.
3. Participants establish what needs to happen.
4. Participants make recommendations for policy change.

The project will work with women and communities to move stories of experience toward policy recommendations, with a commitment to supporting a link between experience, policy and policy implementation. The project hopes to support women and communities in the development of action plans for the ongoing development of policy and implementation that are relevant to the situations and needs of both women and communities. The areas of policy this project has identified for its work are policies on:

- leadership of Aboriginal women;
- Aboriginal women and work; and
- day-care subsidies and other support systems.

Policy recommendations will address the *Indian Act*, federal and provincial employment policies, and band policies.

The Four Research Questions

1. What have you experienced in attempting to advance your education and find meaningful work?
2. Have you experienced conflict between realizing your work goals and living a “cultural” life? What have they been?
3. What do you recommend in terms of policy changes that would diminish these conflicts?
4. What do you need in a general sense to support coherence between your cultural life and your work life?

Aboriginal Women and Work Project

Status of Women Canada is funding a project about Aboriginal women and work, which is entitled “First Nations* Women Speak About Diminishing Conflicts between Their Cultural Contexts and Their Education/Work Contexts.” (the “Project”). The Authors of the Project are Carolyn Kenny, Haike Muller, Marilyn Struthers and Colleen Purdon (the “Authors”). The Authors intend to interview Aboriginal women in order to collect information on Aboriginal women and work. The information which the Authors collect will then be used in their report (the “Report”), and upon completion, the Report will be distributed to the communities who participate in the Project. It is hoped that the Report will be published and will influence government policy toward Aboriginal women, in particular, improving the conditions under which Aboriginal women work. You have agreed to be interviewed for the Report. In order to use this interview in the Report, the Authors need you to sign the following release.

Release

I agree to be interviewed for the Project. I consent to have this interview taped. I agree that the Authors may include the information that I give during this interview, or any taped version of this interview, in the Report. I understand that I will have the opportunity, upon my request to the Authors, to review the transcript of this interview to check for accuracy prior to any publication of the Report.

I agree that the Authors will own the copyright of the Report and that the Authors or Status of Women Canada may publish the Report, my interview or any transcript, recording or other audio or visual reproduction of my interview.

I agree to keep secret the names and contributions of the other group members during this interview and expect that they will not disclose my name or other personal information outside of the interview.

I understand that, if I sign the Confidentiality Option below, my name will be kept confidential by the Authors and withheld from publication. I understand that there can be no guarantee of anonymity, because even if my identity is not revealed in the Report, someone else might still recognize the information I give.

Name (printed)

Name (signed) Date

Confidentiality Option

My preference is that my name be kept confidential by the Authors and withheld from publication.

Name (printed)

Name (signed) Date

*By First Nations, we mean all status and non-status Aboriginal, Métis, Inuit and Indigenous Peoples of Canada.

Participant Information Package

Status of Women Project

First Nations Women Speak about Diminishing Conflicts between Their Cultural Context and Their Education/Work Context

A Brief Overview of the Project

First Nations Women Speak about Diminishing Conflicts between Their Cultural Context and Their Education/Work Context is a two-year project that has been funded by Status of Women Canada. The work of the project began in October 1997 and the final report will be completed in November 1999.

We are a project team of four women, two Aboriginal women and two White women, and the project has been designed in keeping with the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. We will work with eight Aboriginal communities across Canada using a participatory research approach. Our work is guided by elders and advisors from the west and east of Canada.

The work of the project includes listening with respect to the experiences of Aboriginal women, and making recommendations with input from women to help make our lives and the lives of our children more manageable. The project will work with women and communities to move stories of experience toward policy recommendations at the federal, provincial and band levels. We want to involve women and communities in the development of policy recommendations that will assist Aboriginal women in realizing their vocational goals without undue sacrifices in their cultural experience. We hope our work will create more opportunities for Aboriginal women to have a meaningful place in today's society.

On the next pages, you will find more information about the project team and a description of the vision and principles that guide the project, and the questions that this project will ask.

An Introduction to the Project Team

Carolyn Kenny is the project manager for the team and provides a link with Status of Women Canada for the project. Carolyn is an associate professor at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, focussing on First Nations education. Some of her other work is about the healing aspects of the arts. She has just completed a graduate course in the Haida Gwaii called “The Sense of Art.” Carolyn is of the Choctaw Nation from Mississippi. She has two grown children and now lives in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Haike Muller is a researcher with the project and articling law student working in the areas of family and Native law. She has been an active member of the Native Law Student’s Society at the University of Victoria, and the Native Indian Student’s Union at the University of British Columbia. Haike has worked as a researcher and instructor specializing in Native education and curriculum development and has managed a project to produce a book of First Nations children’s stories. Haike is of the Nlakapamux People, also known as the Thompson Salish of the Interior Salish Nation, She is the mother of a young son and lives in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Marilyn Struthers is a researcher with the project and works as a freelance consultant for women’s organizations, health and social service agencies and First Nations. She has a Master of Adult Education degree and has focussed her work on community and organizational development. Marilyn has many years of experience as a skilled facilitator and consultation researcher, specializing in work that impacts the lives of women and children. She lives in Shallow Lake Ontario with her two children.

Colleen Purdon is a researcher with the project and comes to the work from her background in work with abused women and children. She has many years of experience as an administrator, therapist, educator and community worker in Canada and abroad. Colleen works as a freelance consultant for organizations and on government projects that focus on women and issues that affect their lives, with a special interest in issues that confront rural women. Colleen comes from the Parry Sound area and now lives in Owen Sound with her four children.

The Project Vision

We envision collaborating with Aboriginal women across Canada in research which seeks to advise governments and agencies in formulating policy which will best support Aboriginal women in realizing their work goals while maintaining a full and meaningful cultural life.

We envision involving community members and recording stories of Aboriginal women pertaining to these issues, asking critical questions, involving community leaders and submitting a formal report to Status of Women Canada making specific recommendations based on our findings.

Purpose of the Research

We intend to conduct culturally appropriate research in order to make specific recommendations for new policy or revision of existing policy on national, provincial and local levels, which would assist Aboriginal women to realize their vocational goals without undue sacrifices in their cultural experience.

We will work with band councils, Aboriginal women's groups and community liaisons to develop a co-operative research design in collaboration with *specified* community leaders and liaisons who will be actively involved in both design and implementation in eight sites across Canada.

We hope to assist in the design of an action plan based on research findings in each community for the continuing advocacy of policy change and policy implementation to further Aboriginal women's vocational and cultural goals.

Principles Guiding the Project from Our Elders and Advisors

- First Nations should be involved in analyzing the data.
- It's common courtesy to let band councils know about the project.
- Research subjects go back to research questions again and again.
- Talk without interrupting research subjects.
- Get the women to participate in the development of the methodology and the research itself.
- Provide a social atmosphere and make sure participants are well fed.
- Create an atmosphere of acceptance.
- Men should not be involved.
- Speak to women on a personal basis.

The Central Research Questions

1. What have Aboriginal women experienced in attempting to advance education and find meaningful work?
2. Have Aboriginal women experienced conflict between realizing their work goals and living a "cultural" life? What have these conflicts been?
3. What do Aboriginal women recommend in terms of policy changes that would diminish these conflicts?

4. What do Aboriginal women need in a general sense to support coherence between their cultural life and their work life?

The Project Work: The Research Design

We will conduct our research within the guidelines established by the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and under the advice of Aboriginal elders associated with the project. Representatives from each of the eight groups or communities will work together with researchers to design the research methodology, which will be appropriate within the context of each community.

The Project Work: Criteria for Selection of Eight Groups

Groups will be selected for participation in the study according to the following criteria:

- the personal contact and relationship with the researchers;
- the group perceives a need for this kind of study and a potential benefit for Aboriginal women within their own community and Aboriginal women throughout Canada;
- there is a potential for follow-up development after the study (e.g., continuing advocacy for policy implementation inside or outside the community), continuing education about how policy influences women's lives, establishing networks or support for Aboriginal women;
- the community agrees to identify a community liaison; and
- designated members of the groups particularly the liaison, will work with the researchers in the design, implementation and recommendations of the research.

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