

*HOW TO BE A STUDENT: STUDENTS WHO IDENTIFY AS ABORIGINAL AND
THEIR EXPERIENCES MEDIATING IDENTITIES AT UNIVERSITY*

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Abstract

The university habitus is not comprised of neutral structures but carries with it a history of privileging certain ways of doing, learning and being. Students who identify as Aboriginal draw from a number of identities at the University that become more or less relevant depending on the context. In this narrative study, seven students who identify as Aboriginal are interviewed about their experiences at the University of Saskatchewan. As a result of these interviews, a perspective of the university takes shape where Aboriginal culture welcomes and comforts students in a supporting role but does not always seem relevant in an academic context. Connections to others and to oneself can impact a student's engagement in classroom curricula and stereotypes about Aboriginal peoples and grades play an important role in shaping the experiences of students who identify as Aboriginal at university, their definition of success and even their decision to attend university. The "narrative of struggle" can influence students' choices to frame themselves either in relation to a non-Aboriginal reference group or question why Aboriginal educational success is framed in terms of exceptional individual cases rather than as a group norm. While students' experiences at the university vary, their purpose for attending university is closely connected to their identities both now and their hopes for creating a better self in the future.

Key Terms

Aboriginal, First Nations, identities, ASAP, ASC, university, student, culture, structure, agency, curriculum engagement, university experience, ideal self, Indigenous epistemologies, constructionism, narrative.

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How to be a student: Students who identify as Aboriginal and their experiences
mediating identities at university

Students from all backgrounds are confronted with a steep a learning curve when introduced to the ways of knowing and doing of the university. At university, students are not only taught the content of their courses, but the correct way for approaching reality and knowledge within their respective disciplines. These ways of knowing and doing of the university are not culturally neutral. As such, while all students experience a cultural barrier initially, the degree to which culture is a challenge varies for students. Acquiring this cultural knowledge is welcome for some students, whereas for others it could be experienced as an unwanted intrusion to overcome in the pursuit of other goals. Each student has a unique interaction with the university, an interaction that must be further contextualized by the role of the university in the larger society and the goals students pursue in attending university.

The present study explores students who identify as Aboriginal and their experiences in mediating identities at the University of Saskatchewan. In particular, do some Aboriginal participants experience a disconnect resulting from an incongruity between the expectations and ideals of the university and their own self-perceived attributes? How do Aboriginal students mediate the tensions between different ways of knowing, doing and presenting oneself? In what instances is one identity suppressed in favour of another, and for what reasons? Furthermore, can the feelings of distress resulting from disjunction, or difficulties with identity management, be a factor in the high attrition rates of Aboriginal students? It should be noted that exploring the many assumptions that support these questions will also be a key component of this research.

While these questions may be directed towards broad categories such as “Aboriginal students” or “Aboriginal student participants,” it is expected that students’ university experiences will vary based on individual backgrounds. I do not pretend that this research will represent the opinions and experiences of all students who identify as Aboriginal at the university. First of all, because there are so many different ways of being Aboriginal, and so many different reasons¹ for going to university, depending on what students wish to get out of their courses and how they hope to use the knowledge gained. Therefore, while participants self-identify as Aboriginal students, this identity category has little value as a form of concrete homogenous variable. In fact, prior to beginning the research, the only characteristic that I can assume that these students will share is that they self-identify as Aboriginal.

Being Aboriginal is not a homogenous variable associated with any one meaning, but that does not mean it does not have political significance. My motivation to conduct this research is balanced by my reticence in engaging in research with Aboriginal participants because I am not Aboriginal. Research in Aboriginal communities, especially by a Western researcher, is a sensitive, politically charged area where tensions arise due to past research where information was gathered without giving back to the community researched (Jérôme, 2009; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). While gathering information without regards to its benefit to the group studied may have been a generalized practice in social sciences, when practiced on a colonized group by and for the colonizer’s benefit, it serves to further this colonialism (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). Furthermore, the self-determination of Aboriginal peoples through education and the attrition of Aboriginal students is an area of

¹ As Alexitch (2010) noted in her research, it is not the reasons for going to university that differ among students, but rather their priority.

great importance to educators and Aboriginal groups alike (Battiste, Bell & Findlay, 2002; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). Accordingly, I chose to concentrate my interests in culture and identity in the area of Aboriginal education. In line with the concerns noted above, the research should provide something meaningful to the participants or to the Aboriginal student community on campus. Furthermore, this proposal should not be considered a closed contract (Locke, Wyrick Spirduso & Silverman, 1987). It requires a flexible framework to allow for growth and communication with participants. Far from being resolved, the tensions of being a non-Aboriginal researcher working with Aboriginal participants was examined at each stage of the research.

The goal of these next few pages is to propose a method of conducting research on students who identify as Aboriginal and their experiences at the University of Saskatchewan that is meaningful and respectful to these participants. The literature review will elaborate the ideas of authors that have shaped the framework and direction of the research. In the first section of the literature review, the factors, such as historical, social or cultural context, influencing the definition of ethnic identity will be explored. Expanding upon the contextual elements of ethnic identity, performance and active versus passive identity will be elaborated in this section. Following that, the institutional habitus of the university will be explored, as well as self-discrepancy theory and the educational goals of students who identify as Aboriginal. In the methodology section, the explanation of Indigenous epistemologies will lead into a more in-depth explanation of my framework and specific methods for operationalizing the various research influences and interests into something concrete.

Literature Review

Understanding identity

There are many factors that contribute to the shaping of identity in a certain context. In the West, identity is seen as something that an individual has, as though individuals are rocks whose essential character remains the same over time. We attempt, at all costs, to maintain the image of a uniform unit of self created by the intersection of socialization and genetics (Kirmayer, 2007). Like Kirmayer (2007), I would argue, however, that identity is much less concrete. A number of factors contribute to how identity is experienced, all contextual. I would characterise identity as an interaction created and performed in social contexts, rather than a property. Identity, under this lens, is a fluid, social creation. Certain roles or aspects of the self can become salient when they are activated in certain situations; however, they are not separate from one another.

Understanding ethnicity

Ethnicity is another factor that has a profound impact on identity. Ethnicity is difficult to define on its own, but it can be further understood through comparison with the definition of race. According to Van den Berghe (1978), race refers to “a group that is *socially* defined but on the basis of *physical* criteria,” whereas ethnic group is “socially defined on the basis of *cultural* criteria” (emphasis in original, pp. 9-10). Thus, race and ethnicity are both culturally created categories. Despite Van den Berghe’s (1978) definition, ethnic identity is not void of physical criteria as it is intertwined with the concept of race. As Song (2003) writes, the “meanings and images associated with each tend to bleed into the other” (p. 11). For biological markers to be associated with an ethnicity they must be given meaning, which is a socio-cultural process. Ethnicity is tied

to attributes, such as, skin colour, facial features, hair, height as well as a number of other characteristics that are given value arbitrarily. It should be noted that our perception of these attributes is subjective. Ethnicity may be a socially created construct, but that does not necessarily mean that individuals will experience it any less concretely. Like race, ethnicity can be subject to essentialisation when a group is anchored to a limited number of cultural characteristics that define it (Song, 2003).

Understanding culture

Lakes, Lopez and Garro's (2006) conceptualization of culture presents the best understanding of culture for the purpose of this thesis. In this conceptualization, culture is not treated as an object. It is not a homogenous structure that determines unequivocally the behaviour of everyone it touches. It is learned and experienced differently. Also, it is invisible to those who live it daily (Linger, 2005). Instead of culture being a proxy for ethnicity or race and distinguished from definitions of social class or gender, culture attends to the lived experiences of individuals. Culture is what is at stake for participants in the local social world of the interview. As an interview is coconstructed and what is at stake can change for individuals in the context of the interview meaning that culture is also variable in that context (Lakes, Lopez & Garro, 2006).

Aboriginality is an identity that becomes "at stake" through the focus of the interview, the prompting of a question or the story of the participant. Similar to culture, Aboriginality is self-defined for students, meaning that characteristics associated with being Aboriginal are variable or contextual. Becoming attuned to the definitions of culture used in the context of the co-constructed interview becomes one of my main challenges as a researcher.

Individual agency versus social structure

The degree to which individual agency and social structure are accredited with shaping identity has changed over time and national context. Friedman (2009) writes that identity movements are part of a historical process that cycles in relation to the decline and creation of national hegemonies. In the 1970s, in the United States, the decline of American hegemony was accompanied by identity movements, such as the rise of Aboriginal identity movements, regionalism and divisions based on other cultural criteria such as language, religion and history. Generally, in this process, the expansion of the hegemony of the nation-state is accompanied by a centralisation of identity around a national identity. In Hawaii, Aboriginal Hawaiians found themselves relegated to the lower socio-economic statuses in their own country. Their method of adaptation was to integrate into society by marrying outside the Hawaiian community, by forgetting the Hawaiian language and learning English, and by adopting other assimilationist practices (Friedman, 2009).

The degree of agency and structure also changes by society. Paredes (2007) takes a new perspective on agency and ethnicity. Paredes (2007) writes about the fluidity of identity and ethnicity in Peru. In Peru, extreme prejudice exists against Aboriginal peoples. As a result of this prejudice, Paredes (2007) hypothesised that ethnic identity would be weak because people would attempt to hide characteristics associated with Indigenous Cholos peoples. She remarks, however, that there was actually a strong sense of ethnic identity, especially among Cholos peoples. While peoples' self-identification remained strong, the subjective interpretation of ethnic attributes changed based on contextual factors. In other words, ethnic identity remained strong while the

characteristics used to describe this identity changed. Paredes (2007) gives the example of skin colour as one trait used to categorize individuals into ethnic groups in society. In a survey on skin colour, Paredes (2007) used a scale from one to seven where “one” was Indigenous colour and “seven” was White. In the three locations studied across the country, self-perceptions about skin colour varied based on the perceptions of one’s social position in relation to other ethnic groups living in the same area. Paredes (2007) described a woman who, in an interview, considered herself to be white in her own neighbourhood, but described herself as “light-skinned” and her colleagues white when she worked in a well-off district of San Isidro. Paredes’ (2007) research highlights the contextual nature of ethnic traits, which are formed in relation to reference groups. This fluid use of White ethnicity is indicative of White privilege. Only when a group is considered privileged are they defined as White.

Today, in Euroamerican societies, the identity defined by the obligation and duties of social structure has been replaced by the identity characterised by personal agency and expression (Woodward, 2002). It is the unique mix of the Lockian “Sovereign individual” enmeshed with Descartes’ Cartesian subject and Smith’s “individual entrepreneur of liberal-economics,” that has created the form of identity central to today’s Euroamerican worldview. In accordance with this worldview, the individual is conscious, rational, sovereign, unique, and responsible for shaping and managing the presentation of oneself to the world (Woodward, 2002).

Performing identity

“It is probably no mere historical accident that the word person, in its first meaning, is a mask. It is rather a recognition of the

fact that everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role...It is in these roles that we know each other, it is in these roles that we know ourselves” (Goffman, 1959, p. 19).

Performance is a useful metaphor to understand the agentic action of the individual when combined with the structure of culture. In the book: *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1959) examines identity using the metaphor of the actor performing focusing on how people behave in social situations and how they attempt to guide and control the impressions others form of them. For instance, if performing for a teacher, a student will attempt to play up his or her studiousness. Amongst friends, and depending on the context, the student role can be relaxed or not be present at all (Read, Archer & Leathwood, 2003; Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2009).

Song (2003) further supports ethnic agency in her book “Choosing Ethnic Identity” when she writes, “Ethnicity can be activated in particular times and situations by material and other interests” (p. 7). Furthermore, according to Nagel (1999), “Since ethnicity changes situationally, the individual carries a portfolio of ethnic identities that are more or less salient in various situations and vis-à-vis various audiences. As audiences change, the socially-defined array of ethnic choices open to the individual changes” (p. 59).

Nevertheless, this individual agency is not boundless. Woodward (2002) notes that certain identity performances become more salient depending on the context. Thus, when the social actor obtains a new social role, he or she tends to find that there are already social expectations established regarding this role. As Goffman notes (1959), “A

status, a position, a social place is not a material thing, to be possessed and then displayed; it is a pattern of appropriate conduct, coherent, embellished and well articulated” (p. 75). In order to simplify the system of identification and treatment we tend to categorize individuals into broad categories based on past experience and stereotypical thinking in order to predict their behaviour and determine what type of performance they expect from us.

Goffman (1959) notes, “To *be* a given kind of person, then, is not merely to possess the required attributes, but also to sustain the standards of conduct and appearance that one’s social grouping attaches thereto” (Emphasis in original, p. 75). Ethnic identity is experienced more or less malleably, it would seem, depending on one’s position in society. Adopting a more critical realist lens in which it is understood that structures exist independently of our own perception of them, we must ask ourselves, who creates and enforces the standards of conduct for ethnic groups that are then internalized by members of these groups (Haverkamp & Young, 2007)? Of course, it should be noted that these standards of conduct could also be created and enforced by the group itself.

Re-examining the experience of agency in identity with respect to social position

The degree of agency that individuals experience changes according to social position in Canadian society. While the tendency now is to highlight individual agency, and the fluidity inherent in identity as a socially constructed entity, that does not mean that identity cannot be experienced as a stable entity. Authors such as Goffman (1959) and Woodward (2002) can be used to examine the interaction between the micro and macro, that is, individual agency and cultural structures. If ethnic identity is a social

creation then it can also be transformed socially. That does not mean that ethnic identity is necessarily experienced as a malleable construct by all: easily shaped by one person in a particular context. Identity is a construct of great importance to the individual as it gives a sense of personal location and is rooted to the shadow of the past (Song, 2003). It is what anchors a person to strong historical, political and social forces. People are willing to die for a particular identity. As a result, for some, and in certain contexts, some identities can be experienced as a grounded, fixated state (Woodward, 2002).

Goffman (1959) highlights the unified, fixated aspect of identity when he explains that people attempt to portray the role they are playing at any one moment as the most essential role that they have (Goffman, 1959). As a result, while it is not necessarily a conscious action, when we are playing a role we attempt to avoid contradictions in the way this role is performed. We subsume other aspects of the self in order to present a unified front in our performance.

Further evidence of the use, and even benefit of essentialised identities has, furthermore, been elaborated by Gagné (2005) and Woodward (2002). Gagné (2005) writes that the essentialisation of identity and the search for an authentic self is part of a larger process of decolonization and self-determination of Aboriginal peoples. Woodward (2002) explains that uncertainty or threat towards an identity leads individuals to “lay claim to essentialist truths in their search for security and stability” (p. xii).

One obvious consequence of the structurally determined experience of ethnicity is that certain individuals (mostly based on their position in society) feel that they lack the freedom to self-identify. Song (2003) notes that individuals may have an ethnic identity applied to them that does not necessarily match the identity they have assigned

themselves. The identities connected to individuals are not necessarily under their control. Ethnic identification is strongly rooted in membership to groups, used as ethnic references. Individual choice is constrained by this membership, and for minorities, is formed against the “backdrop of ethnic and racial labeling by the dominant society” (p. 2). Song (2003) specifies that minority groups are not without the ability to “exercise ethnic options” and that creating a dichotomy between minority and dominant ethnic groups in society may be too polarizing (p.15). She notes, nonetheless, that it may be more difficult to “deny the structuring force of dominant racial discourses and stereotypes as they are applied to many ethnic minority groups and individuals” (p. 15).

Members of the dominant society have much more freedom in experiencing their ethnic identity. White ethnic identity, as White is the major dominant group in Canada, (meaning that the major institutions in Canada reflect a White ethnic habitus in their ways of doing and their structures), is passive as it can be invoked when individuals wish. For instance, an individual may generally label herself using national terms but on St. Patrick’s Day she might highlight her Irish heritage as a ticket to partake in the celebrations. Members of the dominant group have “individualistic symbolic ethnic identities” and can easily use dominant racial and ethnic discourses to present themselves as having complex, changing and individual identities (Waters, 1996, p. 201). This may be connected to the American optimism and individualist notion of freedom that “new selves can be invented, and [...] new identities can be crafted (Yi & Shorter-Gooden, 1999). On the other hand, members of minority groups tend to experience their identities actively as a central part of their everyday lives because these identities are shaped by experiences of discrimination and can be experienced as “socially enforced and imposed

racial identit[ies]” (Waters, 1996, p. 201). Waters (1996) notes, “all ethnicities are not equal; all are not symbolic, costless, and voluntary” (p. 201).

Minority individuals have a “socially enforced and imposed racial identity” (p. 15). Thus minority individuals’ identities are constrained by the imposed stereotypes of dominant members of society. When we play the student role, we connect it to the idea we have of what an ideal student is, and attempt to portray it as our only role. For students who identify as Aboriginal, however, is it ever possible to play one role when, based on certain cultural or phenotypical markers, they have been socially enforced to adhere to the behaviour that others expect of an Aboriginal person? Can they ever only be a student or must they always be an Aboriginal student? When they are constantly bombarded with one role while playing another how easy is it to balance the two? How easy is it to maintain consistency and avoid contradictions in their roles?

Identity and the institutional habitus

One of the main goals of the current study is to examine how individuals interact with the institutional habitus of an organization in order to choose a particular identity to perform. One particular site where the interaction between individual and institutional habitus is performed is at the university. Access to education is often described through the meritocratic lens. Meritocracy is the ideal of a highly individualized and capitalist society where individuals achieve high status in society based solely on merit. In the meritocratic ideal, the only official barrier to access and remain in school is effort and motivation. Nonetheless, the university is parceled with an institutional culture that represents a barrier for many students.

Battiste, Bell and Findlay (2002) note, “The broad and entrenched assumption of most postsecondary curricula is that Eurocentric knowledge represents the neutral and necessary story for ‘all’ of us” (p. 83). The academic institution is imbued with certain ways of thinking and acting that are dominant within a particular academic institution. This is called the institutional habitus. Institutional habitus, like a form of institutional culture, can be described as learned dispositions, skills and ways of acting that are mediated through an organization. Institutional habitus includes the ontological and epistemological perspectives that a given university values and promotes. The habitus is taken for granted but has a long organisational history (Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2009).

The institutional habitus of academia is geared more towards “traditional students,” in other words, white, male, upper and middle-class students who are just leaving high school (Read, Archer & Leathwood, 2003). This does not mean, however, that recruiting more non-traditional students changes the cultural climate of the university, since the cultural academic structures remain a barrier to these students. Students who are not familiar with this institutional habitus must overcome a cultural barrier while they attempt to compete academically. Furthermore, since this cultural barrier is unknown or ignored by those for whom it seems natural, students who are not familiar are often left to navigate the currents of the academic culture on their own (Aikenhead & Huntley, 1999).

To complicate matters, academic culture is not accessed or experienced uniformly by all students (Read, Archer & Leathwood, 2003). Students’ sense of belonging and their motivation for remaining in school are strongly influenced by a complex interaction between their home and university social support systems (Guiffrida, 2006). For instance,

feeling a sense of membership at the university combined with positive interactions with students of diverse backgrounds contributes to more positive academic outcomes (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Locks, Hurtado, Bowman & Oseguera, 2008; Pike & Kuh, 2006). If the student is unable to reconcile obligations and values of home with those of the university then he or she is less likely to remain in university (Huffman, 2001).

Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2009) studied the institutional habitus of a university in the United Kingdom in relation to student's social class to see how students' identities were modified, transformed or reinforced by the experience of going to university. The authors noted that the degree to which students felt they belonged at the university depended on the habitus of the institution and the students' investment in the institution. They found that students would often choose to attend universities where they felt a sense of belonging. The key element that influenced the extent to which students' identities were shaped by the institution (that is, the extent to which they adopted the "learner identity") was whether they lived at home, on campus or in university accommodations. When students had to concentrate on jobs or families, they were only partially invested in their "learner identities." Therefore, the academic identity of these students was more aptly characterised by continuity rather than change (Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2009).

As mentioned in the introduction, individual students interact with the university, and especially the knowledge of the university, in certain ways based on their motivations for going to university. Some students may find it adaptive to interact with the university culture in a utilitarian manner. In a capitalist economy, if knowledge cannot be measured or quantified, then it has little value (Hewitt, 2000). A university degree is required for access to so many career posts in Canada. Freire (1972) understands this utilitarian form

of learning as a form of domestication. He notes, “to substitute monologue, slogans, and communiqués for dialogue is to attempt to liberate the oppressed with the instruments of domestication” (p. 65). Drawing on the works of Simone de Beauvoir, Freire (1972) notes that the interest of the oppressors lies in changing the consciousness of individuals, not the situation that oppresses them so that they may be more easily dominated. That is not to say that education of any form for any group of students is not a form of indoctrination (just as any type of socialization can be perceived this way), but that different forms of education have different purposes. When education is domesticated, the paper degree is more important than the education it represents.

Cultural disjunction and the self-discrepancy hypothesis

There is a difference between the way individuals prefer to see themselves and present themselves to others and the way they feel they must present themselves. In the following section, discrepancy will be explored through the lens of several researchers that frame discrepancy in multiple ways; for instance, culturally or as a property of incompatible beliefs. The main theory that will be used to frame disjunction in this research will be Higgins’ (1987) self-discrepancy theory. For the purposes of this research; however, it will be modified slightly to incorporate elements of Huffman’s (2001) cultural discontinuity hypothesis, Benet-Martínez and Haritatos’ (2005) examination of bicultural identity integration (BII) and Phinney’s (1992) notion of identity achievement.

Higgins’ (1987) self-discrepancy theory is often used to study self-concept. Higgins (1987) proposes that holding incompatible beliefs creates feelings of discomfort, and the degree of discomfort depends on the magnitude and accessibility of the

discrepancy. Unlike other models of belief incompatibility, self-discrepancy theory specifies the types of discrepancies responsible for producing different feelings of discomfort. In Higgins' (1987) model, there are six types of self-state representations: actual/own, actual/other, ideal/own, ideal/other, ought/own, and ought/other. The actual/own, and occasionally the actual/other, self-state representation is known as a person's self-concept. The four other self-state representations are known as self-guides, or the standards against which the self-concept is measured. According to Higgins (1987) the self-concept can be combined with the self-guide to create four different situations of self-discrepancy.

In the first situation (actual/own versus ideal/own), the discrepancy is that the individual's actual attributes (or how he or she perceives these attributes) do not match up to the ideal the individual envisions. In the second situation (actual/own versus ideal/other), the individual does not think he or she measures up to being the person a significant other thinks he or she should be. In the third situation (actual/own versus ought/other), the individual does not think he or she has the attributes a significant other considers his or her obligation or duty to possess. In the final situation (actual/own versus ought/own), the discrepancy is that the individual does not consider him or herself to possess the attributes that he or she thinks she ought to possess. Of course, as mentioned before, there are varying degrees of magnitude associated with each of these four discrepancies.

Several other authors have used Higgins' (1987) theory as a base, but have modified it slightly. Ferguson, Hafen and Laursen (2010), considered it problematic that Higgins' (1987) model only measured discrepancies in one direction. That is, towards

positive ideals and less positive actual selves. The authors studied adolescent identity disjunction and noted that distress is experienced not only when individuals do not live up to their ideals, but also when they surpass these ideals. The authors noted that surpassing ideals can produce demotivation and confusion in adolescents. Furguson, Hafen and Laursen (2010), furthermore, adopted a descriptive rather than an evaluative test that focused on the salience of various domains to the adolescent rather than his or her competence in these domains. Using the “Identity Pie” method developed by Derfuson and Dubow (2007), the participant divides a pie into slices assigning them to either the ideal or the actual self to represent the salience of each of these domains in his or her life. If participants choose to accord more slices to the ideal than the actual self, that signifies that the “domain is not as salient to their current self-view as they would like, or vice versa, indicating that the domain is more salient to the current self-view than they would ideally prefer” (Furguson, Hafen & Laursen, 2010, p. 1487). Students who identify as Aboriginal at university may find that their student identity is more or less salient to their current self-view than they would like. On the other hand, they may find that some of their identities (or aspects of these identities) are at odds with how they feel they must present themselves as a student at university (for instance, their employee identity, mother or wife identity, Aboriginal identity or class identity).

Another model used to conceptualize the disjunction between individual and institutional identity is Huffman’s (2001) cultural discontinuity hypothesis. Huffman (2001) examined the disjunction of Aboriginal student identity and the university culture by categorizing students’ reactions to university culture into four “cultural masks” and relating them to student levels of university attrition. The masks represent the “process by

which a person comes to construct a personal ethnic identity” (Huffman, 2001, p. 5). He labeled these “cultural masks”, as: assimilated students, marginal students, estranged students and transcultural students. Each mask represents a different experience or way of being at the university. Assimilated students are those students that, as one student noted, “more or less accepted the values of non-Indians over Indians” (p. 12). Marginal students were like assimilated students, but desired more identification with “traditional American Indian culture” (p. 9). Huffman (2001) described estranged students as the “culturally traditional American Indian students who experienced intense alienation while in college and, subsequently, fared poorly academically” (p. 1). These students perceived the university to be an attempt to assimilate them. Transcultural students are students that Huffman (2001) notes are culturally traditional but who “overcame acute alienation and generally experienced successful college careers” (p. 1). These students used their ethnic identity as a source of strength and as an anchor while they were able to interact “within and between cultures as demanded by the situation” (p. 17). Huffman’s (2001) cultural discontinuity hypothesis purports that the disjunction between the expectations of Aboriginal peoples and the university places many students who identify as Aboriginal at a disadvantage when they first come to university.

Deloria (1999) writes “Education in the English-American context resembles indoctrination more than it does other forms of teaching, because it insists on implanting a particular body of knowledge and a specific view of the world that often does not correspond to the life experiences that people have or might be expected to encounter” (p. 138). To a degree, of course, each educational system has a certain way of doing things that students are expected to follow. Students not used or to or willing participants in

learning a certain body of knowledge or specific view of the world may experience that educational system as indoctrination. Huffman (2001) writes that most students are estranged from the university at the beginning of their academic careers. Of course, this perspective must be contextualized by students' motivation for going to university, their own personal background, beliefs and their interaction with and perception of the university's cultural orientation(s). Evidently, university is not students' first encounter with the Western world. It is likely that several students will have already spent 13 years of their life in Western-style schools. That does not mean that education at the university level is no longer an arena of cultural strife, or that the contention over education is unique at university. It is rather that the institutionalised culture that created problems for some students who identify as Aboriginal in earlier educational experiences is extended to the university and takes root in a slightly different form, to cause a new breed of problems there.

Huffman (2001) notes that it is not necessary for students to become assimilated by the university in order to be academically successful. In fact, it may even negatively impact academic success. Huffman (2001) writes that transcultural students are often at an advantage because they can draw on resources from both cultures to be successful at university. For example, one woman cited in Huffman (2001) explained, "It is important to me to keep my Indian values and more or less put up with the non-Indian values because it is not for the non-Indian society that I am trying to get a degree for" (p. 137). Similarly, Chavira and Phinney (1991) write that embracing one's own ethnic identity may be associated with higher self-esteem and an ability to deal with discrimination.

One final model for examining the interaction of individual and institutional identities focuses on how cultural distance or dissociation contributes to experiences of discomfort. Benet-Martínez and Haritatos (2005) wrote about concepts similar to cultural discrepancy when they examined variations in bicultural identity integration (BII), which is made up of two causal constructs: cultural distance and cultural conflict. Each comprise a different aspect of the biculturalism phenomenon and explain why individuals can experience biculturalism so differently. Cultural distance pertains to the individual's perception that her two cultures do not overlap, are dissociated or are distant from one another. Cultural conflict pertains to feelings of prejudice, or rejection from one or both of these cultures. Bicultural identity integration is the degree to which bicultural individuals feel that their two identities are compatible and integrated or oppositional and difficult to integrate. High BII represents a high integration or a perception of compatibility between the two cultures and low BII, a low integration.

It is important to note that the notion of disjointed identities is not incompatible with the concept of multiple, fluid identities. While using BII it is still understood that individuals have a multiplicity of identities and roles that become salient in certain social contexts. The question becomes, which identity becomes salient in the context, and is it accompanied by feelings of distance, dissociation or discomfort in relation to another identity. Benet-Martínez and Haritatos (2005) writes that the integration of two cultures is not a uniform or linear process; similarly, Phinney (1992) notes that ethnic identity is not static. Phinney (1992) uses the term "identity achievement" to refer to a secure sense of self rather than a fixated or final version of the self. Furthermore, Benet-Martínez and Haritatos (2005) note that bicultural individuals engage in something called "cultural

frame switching,” which means adopting a different cultural lens as the situation demands, similar to Goffman’s (1959) conception of the different roles that people perform. Thus a secure identity refers to the ability to integrate different cultural orientations without a feeling of internal conflict. On the other hand, cultural distance or conflict can lead to individuals feeling that “biculturalism is a dichotomy” (quotation from participant, p. 1041).

Huffman’s (2001) transcultural participants speak of separating both their Aboriginal identities and the school’s culture in order to be successful in continuing their education.

A Turtle Mountain reservation student explained:

“There was [sic] feelings and family and culture, there was [sic] ways of doing things. When I learned to separate the two and learn that this is the way you do it at work, this is the way you do it at home, and you conduct your family affairs this way, then that’s good. I think the turning point came when I decided to separate the two...Then I resolved my “Indianness” and the way the system works. (p. 21)”

A woman from the Pine Ridge (South Dakota) reservation also spoke on this:

“When we go to school we live a non-Indian way but we still keep our values...I could put my Indian values aside just long enough to learn what it is I want to learn but that doesn’t mean I’m going to forget them. I think that is how strong they are with me.” (p. 22).

Keeping in mind Benet-Martínez and Haritatos' (2005) theory of cultural distance, these students explain that their way to cope at university is by separating their two identities (how difficult this is, and how successful students are at separating the two are other questions). That does not mean that all students find this approach successful in their own lives. Deloria (1999) notes: "Education today trains professionals, but it does not produce people. It is, indeed, not expected to produce personality growth in spite of elaborate and poetic claims made by some educators" (p. 138). He writes that "the separation of knowledge into professional expertise and personal growth, is an insurmountable barrier for many Indian students" at university (Deloria, 1999, p. 139). Furthermore, Deloria (1999) notes that in traditional Indian societies emphasis is on personal growth before professional accreditation. Maintaining cultural distance with the goal of adopting a utilitarian approach to university education may not prove to be adaptive for all students who identify as Aboriginal. An adaptive approach needs to be considered in the context of students' reasons for attending university and their ways of interacting with and experiencing the university.

The Current Study

The present study examines the ways in which students who identify as Aboriginal shape and perform their identities at university. Considering that, according to Woodward (2002), the emphasis on structural or agentic elements of identity can shift depending on time period, culture and individual position in society, the way identity is conceptualized in the current study requires elaboration, as does culture. Culture, in this study, broadly includes "Any and all potentially salient ethnographic, demographic, status, or affiliation identities" (Pedersen, 1999, p. 3). As culture is what is at stake for

individuals in their local social world, culture can include identities that are traditionally defined by socio-economic status, affiliations to particular secondary schools or community influences. Individuals, furthermore, are not limited to one culture, but shift cultural lenses based on the situation (Lakes, Lopez & Garro, 2006). The university's culture(s) as an external reality is therefore unimportant as the focus is on *how* students perceive the university's ways of doing things, and from that perception, don an identity they choose to perform at university. Accessing self-defined notions of culture are also restricted to local social contexts. In this research then, culture exists within the methods, measures, and interview contexts of the research. It materializes in words, in sentence structures, in the identities students chose to speak from and in the experiences shared in the context of the interviews.

Aboriginality, for instance, was not defined in advance of the research as a pre-determined definition would prompt students who self-identified as Aboriginal to perform the characteristics that I deemed essential to Aboriginality in their interviews. I would have to know, furthermore, the results of the research in order to determine what characteristics of Aboriginality are salient or become essential in the context of the university in order to define Aboriginality in the first place. Recognizing the identities that are performed in the context of the interview then becomes difficult, as there are no pre-determined categories to draw on. Identities, like culture cannot be accessed outside the methods of the research. I must instead be attuned to how we each position ourselves and each other and in the context of the interview, as well as what is being said in order to recognize the identities that have been adopted in that moment (Riessman, 2008).

The study draws on self-discrepancy theory to frame the possible discrepancy between students' individual identities and the identities they feel they must perform at university as well as the consequences of any discrepancies (i.e. isolation, attrition, reduced motivation) (Higgins, 1987). This theory has been applied to body concept, self-concept related to ethnicity and to aging individuals. Based on an examination of the literature, however, using this theory in the setting of a qualitative, participatory study seems to be quite rare.

Self-discrepancy is the theory of choice for this research because all students will experience a discrepancy upon their arrival at university. Read, Archer and Leathwood (2003) write that the culture of the university is geared towards "traditional students," that is, white, middle and upper-class males. The "traditional student" is an ideal-type that no one student will emulate; instead, the further a student feels she is from the "traditional student" the greater the magnitude of discrepancy. In other words, if the "traditional student" identity is salient at a university then students who identify as Aboriginal as well as other perceived non-traditional students will experience a discrepancy of greater magnitude than "traditional students" (Read, Archer & Leathwood, 2003). Self-discrepancy theory provides a lens through which to analyse and understand the university experiences of students identify as Aboriginal. If this discrepancy exists, another related element of this research will be to understand how self-identified students experience and mediate this discrepancy. Based on Huffman (2001) and Deloria's (1999) conclusions, I believe students who identify as Aboriginal, like all students, will tend to become disenchanted with the university and will stop their studies when they feel like they do not belong, for any number of reasons.

In this study, self-discrepancy is understood to be a descriptive rather than an evaluative measure because I am interested in the salience of academics in the students' lives rather than their competence at adopting the student role (Fergusson, Hafen & Laursen, 2010). It is understood that students will evaluate their competence at adopting their own student ideals on an individual basis, but it is not the job of the researcher to do so. Heidrich (1999) noted that self-discrepancy can be interpreted as a measure of well-being. He wrote, "How individuals interpret, give meaning to, or make sense of their life experiences is a powerful determinant of their psychological well-being and, in fact, is more important than the experience itself in determining well-being." (p. 119). Using the Fergusson, Hafen and Laursen (2010) model, the ideal self does not necessarily have to represent a positive unattainability measured against a more disappointing actual self. Becoming the "ideal student," as it is subjectively defined and can be framed as the ideal a student has made for herself or the ideal she feels is imposed upon her. The ideal student may not be a rewarding experience for all. The Fergusson, Hafen and Laursen (2010) model is preferable to that of Higgins' (1987) for the current study.

Despite my understanding of disjunction and culture, there are several problems with the assumption in this study that: (1) there is a disjunction between students and the university, and (2) that this disjunction is necessarily cultural. Higgins (1987) did not mention culture in his understanding of self-discrepancy, focusing instead on other aspects of identity. Authors like Huffman (2001) have previously concluded that the disjunction experienced by students who identify as Aboriginal at university is cultural. By repeating this framework, however, I could be perpetrating a misunderstanding. First, explaining that a phenomenon is the result of culture is a way to explain something

without actually explaining anything. It can, for instance, be understood in everyday life as a proxy for ethnicity (Lott, 2009). Framing a disjunction at university in terms of culture seems to place blame on the student who self-identifies as Aboriginal and his ways of doing things at university for any difficulties experienced at the university. Examining cultural disjunctions at the university furthermore implies that attending university is when students who identify as Aboriginal first interact with a Western educational system. The intent of examining cultural disjunction in this research is not to perpetrate the assumption that one group is confronted for the first time with another group's way of doing things at the university and cannot contend. Instead, the focus is on how an individual interacts with and incorporates (or has incorporated) varying cultural trends in her self-identity at the university and how this impacts her educational trajectory.

While the definition of culture used in this research is flexible and self-defined, culture itself is not a neutral term, but comes packed with meaning about what is and what is not cultural—meanings that I may not have wished to infer when I asked a question. Questions were designed to encourage students to speak about their experience of the university on their own terms. The disjunction I picture may not have been cultural and students may not even experience a disjunction. Using this pre-supposed framework (while supported by previous research in the field) places unnecessary structures and meanings on the students' experiences—forcing students to shape their experiences to comply with these structures. Interview questions were designed to remain as open as possible without explicitly using disjunction or culture as a guiding framework. During the analysis, I introduced students to different concepts I pulled out and to the self-

discrepancy theory, to see if they thought it was a suitable framework for their own experiences.

In this study, interviews consisted of three sections. During the first two sections, students were invited to share their motivations for going to university and their experiences at the university. During the second part of the interview, students were asked questions that specifically query students' understandings of their student role and their identity management on campus. During the final section of the interview, participants were also invited to conduct a form of analysis to examine if they felt there was a disjunction, and if so, what they thought was its cause. The answer to these questions were, in part, analysed by how students spoke about their identity. In other words, how conscious were students of the separation in their identities when they described themselves? Was one aspect of the self subsumed in favour of another, and in what context?

Method

Indigenous Epistemology

An important part of method for qualitative research involves reflexivity- or an examination of my own biases. As a qualitative researcher, I am considered the instrument of my research and my interests, background and biases need to be elaborated for their role in shaping the research. It is important to note, therefore, that the main reason I am embarking on this research is to receive my Master's degree. But my rationale for choosing this research subject, in particular is related to a long held interest in identity and culture. Ways of knowing about and looking at the world, which are key components of culture and self-identity interest me because I enjoy adopting different

perspectives that allow me to see the world in a new way, especially those perspectives that reveal cultural structures beneath the fabric of everyday life.

Not only do I play the researcher role in this study, but I am also a student interacting with the university culture and experiencing discrepancies of my own at the university. Nonetheless, my social position (ethnicity, socio-economic status, etc.) influences my experiences and informs my choice of epistemology and research methods. Consequently, my constructionist orientation may not be the best fit for conveying the experiences of students who, for instance, might not share my perspective on ethnicity. Since I began this research, I have explored many different epistemologies, self-positions, and conceptualizations of ethnicity. I have been trained, nonetheless, to use certain techniques and perspectives in my research. It would be difficult to manage the tensions between a research perspective that comes to me naturally, because of my own experiences and training, while recognizing that certain aspects of this perspective are limiting (Haverkamp & Young, 2007). As a result, I kept elements of my constructionist epistemology while also making use of a collection of tools and understandings offered by a number of Indigenous epistemologies.

Indigenous epistemologies that conceptualize knowledge as a joint-construction, formed in the context of certain types of relationships, are a good fit for this research as they draw a link between my methods and my understanding of identity as a joint-construction. That does not mean that the students I interview would best understand themselves or their ways of knowing through Indigenous epistemologies any more than they would in the constructionist paradigm.

In the Indigenous paradigm, knowledge is fundamentally relational and is shared with all of creation: “Aboriginal epistemology is grounded in the self, the spirit, the unknown” (Ermine, 1995, p. 108). One of the main differences between Indigenous and positivist paradigms is that a positivist or post-positivist paradigm treats knowledge as an object that can be gained, lost or owned by an individual (Wilson, 2001). While constructionism is similar to Indigenous epistemologies, the latter highlights to a greater degree the importance of relationships. According to the Indigenous research paradigm, the emphasis is not on a reality, but the relationship the researcher has with this reality. The same is true for ideas and concepts. For example, *sofa* translated into Cree means “someplace where you sit” (Wilson, p. 177). The sofa is less an object than a relationship in this definition.

Indigenous methodology requires relational accountability. In other words, when knowledge is divorced from the relationship between participant and researcher it becomes an object exposed to appropriation. The validity and reliability of the research lies in the process and the relationships of the research more than the research product. In other words, the emphasis is on process over product and the research product should not be separated from an understanding of its process. One of the main questions researchers have to ask themselves is if they have fulfilled his or her obligations as part of the research relationship (Wilson, 2001). A fundamental aspect of the researcher-participant relationship is trust (Zolner, 2003). For those using an Indigenous paradigm, research is not so much about gaining knowledge from others, but about “mixing information, gathering, sharing, and analysis [...] It involves coming to an agreement about a mutually

understood idea” (Wilson, 2001, p. 178-179). Indigenous research is conducted for the benefit of the participant and, more importantly, his or her community (Wilson, 2001).

Due to the focus on relationships, the goal of impartiality or objectivity for Indigenous research is inappropriate. These goals are derived from a research paradigm where knowledge is an object presumed to be separate from the researcher. When knowledge is dependent on relationships and context, then these criteria for research are not desirable, “Indigenous research requires a context that is consciously considered and purposefully incorporated into the research by the researcher” (Weber-Pillwax, 2001, p. 166). Therefore, it is not about eliminating context and researcher effects, but realizing what role they play in shaping the research product.

Recruitment

In order to recruit students for this research, I used purposive sampling. Undergraduate students from the College of Arts and Sciences were interviewed because this college has the greatest variety of programs combined with the largest number of students who identify as Aboriginal of any other undergraduate program (University of Saskatchewan, 2012b).

Purposive sampling was used to contact three students in their first and second year of study from the College of Arts and Sciences who were not in the Aboriginal Student Achievement Program (ASAP), and four students who were in ASAP. All students who expressed an interest in the research followed through with the interview. The ASAP is based on learning communities, in which groups of students are enrolled in the same two or three classes in a given discipline. The program is designed to provide more academic, financial and life-skills support to students and aims to improve students’

retention rates past their first year of university (University of Saskatchewan, 2012a). The experiences of these students were chosen to compare to the experiences of first and second year students in the College of Arts and Sciences who do not have the same supports.

In October of the second year, after receiving ethics consent, the first posters were placed around the high traffic areas of the Arts Tower, in the tunnels, the ASC and the Aboriginal Student Achievement office, as well as in the Department of Psychology. Posters were replaced in the Arts Tunnel (a very high traffic area for students) on two other occasions: (1) in January when posters were expanded to include Kirk Hall, and (2) in June during the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA) conference.

E-mails were sent out to a variety of professors to either make an announcement about the research in their class or allow me to make a five-minute presentation at the beginning of their class. In addition to posters and class presentations, there was an online blog that gave more information the research and the researcher (e-mail address included in the poster), and I created an online bulletin for the PAWS website. I also attended several events in order to make personal connections with students, including spending time in the Aboriginal Students' Centre. Furthermore, e-mails were sent to participants to encourage them to tell other students about the research.

Participants

Seven First Nations students participated in the research, five women and two men. Three students were in their second year of study and four students were in their first year of study; although two students in the ASAP program felt that they were in year

1.5 as they had started and stopped university previously. Four of the students were enrolled in the ASAP program and three were enrolled in other programs in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University. While the students had connections to First Nations reserves in Saskatchewan and British Columbia, most of them lived in Saskatoon prior to attending university. One student lived in a city in Alberta prior to coming to Saskatoon for university. One student had moved to Saskatoon for university with the intention that her husband and children would follow. Instead, her decision to continue at university precipitated a divorce. Only one student attended a First Nations operated high school. One student attended a Catholic high school, and one of the students mentioned that there was a high population of Aboriginal students at his school. Another student attended a public high school in Saskatoon that featured many First Nations events on its website. Students were Dene, Cree, Dakota and Tahltan.

Only one of the students started university directly after high school. Two students had attended other universities before enrolling at the University of Saskatchewan. Two students had taken classes through SIAST. Two students started university due to job dissatisfaction. One student worked and attended night classes prior to attending university full-time. Another student had worked several jobs before going to university. In all, four of the five women were mothers, but neither of the men mentioned being fathers. While age was not asked, most of the students appeared or stated outright that they were in their mid to late twenties.

Procedure

In keeping with both Indigenous and constructionist epistemologies, the interview was treated as a process of knowledge creation between researcher and participant. As the interview is a site of joint-construction, objectivity is not a desirable researcher trait.

Embracing my subjectivity, however, does not mean being oblivious to the ways in which I may shape the conversation. For the most part, I wished to avoid leading opinions in a particular direction, without first being led in that direction by the participant while also understanding that the interview was a conversation where my opinions, both vocalized and not, could not occasionally help but be heard by the participant.

Four interviews took place in November, two more in February and one in September the following year. Prior to the interview, participants were sent five of the main questions in order to think about them prior to the interview. The participants were to be interviewed for an hour, although some lasted longer than others. The longest interview was approximately three hours and the shortest was under 25 minutes. During the interview, the questions were not hidden from the participants. Before the interview questions began, time was taken to establish a rapport with the participant. Generally, this involved something as simple as walking to get a coffee in the university and then heading to the interview location (such as my office). As the office may be considered my space with my things, giving the student a choice of location from a number of options (places with few distractions and little audio interference) was one manner to reduce the power differential between researcher and participant. Five students chose to do the interview at my office and two students chose alternate locations (i.e., Place Riel and on a bench outside the Arts Building)

These small details were important. The more confidence the student had in me, the more likely I thought it would be that we would have a conversation about meaningful events, rather than a superficial exchange about what the student thought I wanted to hear. Of course, avoiding a superficial conversation was not entirely within my control. In Zolner's (2003) research, she noted that the perspective the participant adopted tended to rely on: "(1) what [she] had asked to discuss with the person, (2) the manner in which [she] initiated the conversation, (3) the level of acculturation and mainstream colonization of both people in the conversation, and (4) the ability of both people to put aside their mainstream training and speak from, as well as, hear a First Nations perspective" (Zolner, 2003, p. 108). She also noted that "[her] mainstream training and the manner in which [she] broached discussion brought out discussion in a mainstream way" (Zolner, 2003, p. 108). These are examples of the types of elements I was conscious of when I examined how both the participant and I shaped the conversation.

Measures

The interview consisted of three parts. In the first part of the interview, general, non-threatening questions were asked, for example: "What brought you to university?" and "How would you describe your impressions of being a student at the university so far?" These questions served to get more information on students' backgrounds, their goals and if they felt the university was living up to their expectations.

The second part of the interview delved into the participants' understanding of their student role and their identity management on campus, using questions inspired by Bizman and Yinon's (2004) research on Israelis' social self-discrepancies from their own

and other standpoints. This understanding included the expectations people (including themselves) had of them, and the parts of themselves that they felt they needed to hide or highlight in order to fit in on campus. This also included how comfortable the students were with their student role. Examples of questions asked in this section are: “How would you describe the ideal university student?” and “In the past year, has there been a time where you felt like you needed to hide or highlight parts of yourself?” Also, questions, such as: “Do you think Aboriginal students have a harder time being a student on campus than non-Aboriginal students?” and “Are there places on campus you feel more comfortable than others?” were designed to get at a discrepancy in students’ experiences at the university, and tie identity management and feelings of belonging or discrimination to physical locations on campus.

The third part of the interview was less structured, and was approached as a form of joint analysis of the narrative the participant and I created together. This part of the interview served to promote participation in the research, as it was inspired by models of Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Young, 1999). As Tuhiwai Smith (1999) writes, “the responsibility of researchers and academics is not simply to share surface information (pamphlet knowledge) but to share the theories and analyses which inform the way knowledge and information are constructed and represented” (p. 16).

Participating in the analysis was therefore an important stage in the research process as it involved a form of debriefing where I shared my chosen research framework and results, in one case, with the students involved. It provided the participant with the opportunity to take a more active role in the research. It also allowed me to check my interpretations against the students’ interpretations of their own experiences. This attempt was more or

less successful depending on the level of connection I had made with the student, and the student's engagement. Interviews, such as Rhianne and Laura's where the interview tended to follow a question and response style, were not as long and lacked the connection of the other interviews.

Narrative Analysis

During the third stage of the interview process, as well as in my own analysis, narrative was used as a conceptual framework to help interpret the findings. Narrative analysis is a "mixed genre" based on the premise that people make sense of their lives through stories. Narrative analysis is a method that integrates "systematic analysis of narrated experience with literary deconstruction and hermeneutic analysis of meaning" (Josselson, 2011, p. 224). It attempts to make sense of individuals' lived experience in textual form and it assumes that storytelling is not simply a manner of conveying meaning but that the action of telling a story actually constructs meaning. As such, the narratives are understood as contextually situated constructions.

The narrative is an ideal combination with Indigenous epistemologies as both the method and epistemologies interpret the role of the researcher similarly and recognize the contextual and constructed nature of knowledge. In other words, both consider that research is about "mixing information, gathering, sharing, and [...] coming to an agreement about a mutually understood idea" (Wilson, 2001, p. 178-179). Narrative analysis is a useful tool when the interview is conceptualized as a site of knowledge creation and sharing because the research product can be treated as a story told by two storytellers (Josselson, 2011). As Neuman (2006) notes, narratives "[blend] description, empathetic understanding, and interpretation" (p. 475).

Narratives act as an active constructor of identity and meaning in which the researcher becomes an integral player in the story, inseparable from the process and data of the research (Neuman, 2006). As the researcher, I become part of the story, yet, as Clifford and Marcus (1986) note, I also become the author of culture. My job as the author was to delicately weave together students' narratives to create connections in meaning while maintaining individual voices. Andrews (2007) cautions, however, that real listening requires the "abandonment of the self in a quest to enter the world of another; and it takes time."

The version of narrative analysis used in this particular study is called *dialogic/performance narrative analysis*. This form of analysis fits well with my understanding of identity as something performed within a certain context. As such, using a dialogic/performance narrative analysis I was interested not only in what was said but to whom something was said, where it was said, how it was said and why it was said (Riessman, 2008). In the interview, and prior to it (i.e., how I introduced myself during recruitment), it is understood that both the participant and I were shaping the roles that we were to play during the interaction. At times in the interview, I became a struggling student searching for meaning at the university, at other times I was shaped as the White researcher or even the White outsider, as a result of how the participant and I actively constructed ourselves in relation to what we were saying and how we saw each other in the conversation. I wished to avoid being characterised as "the White researcher" or "outsider" feeling it would hinder my connection with the participant, but occasionally participants saw me this way (even with a good connection) and I had to react to how they placed me in the interview. At times, I accepted the roles participants assigned me,

as I was more interested in the information communicated by these designations. At other times, I tried to assert my role as a student at the university to highlight our similarities. The participants were at times students, First Nations advocates, single mothers and future doctors. In each case, what we said was framed by who we were during the interview (Riessman, 2008).

In using dialogic/performance narrative analysis, the researcher is encouraged to attend to the local context of the dialogue, but also the larger political, societal and historical context (Riessman, 2008). This is due to the understanding that words are not neutral carriers of meaning, and that our seemingly individual discourses are shaped and coloured by structures of class, gender, race and ethnicity (Riessman, 2008).

While interpretation is essential to analysis, Temple (1997) explains the limits of interpretation in narrative research when she writes that there are constraints “placed on the reading of a text by the need to make sense of it on its own terms, and thus while there may be many versions of the ‘truth’ of a text, each must be made possible by something within the text, by its logic, syntax and structuring resources” (p. 609). In order to pay attention to each of these operations and my interpretations, several readings of the text, accompanied by notes on my thoughts, feelings and any confusion, were required (Brown, 1998).

The process of narrative analysis.

Starting in January of the second year, the transcripts were written up by me and by two assistants. Transcripts were typed verbatim, including the pauses, hesitations (e.g., “uhms”), laughter, false starts and repetitions of both speakers. Occasionally, the phonetic

spelling of a word that was particular to a certain speaker was included to convey their voice. These paraverbal notations can be seen in Table 1.

Transcripts were edited prior to analysis and then the transcript was read line-by-line. A section of the transcript was portioned off, usually that seemed to represent a coherent idea or group of ideas, after which I wrote reflexive notes, important phrases, connections to other transcripts and themes, interpretation of word choice and meaning.

These notes were then synthesised, or coded according to the inductive categories (including ideas, phrasing, themes, or word choice) that emerged and listed in another document. These categories were then grouped together by similarity and expanded upon using quotations drawn from the transcript so the nuance of each individual interview was not lost. Two interviews were written up in full using a hypothetical explanatory framework and accompanied by the explanatory framework in list format (using this format it is easier to compare ideas with other interviews). The process of writing up the hypothetical analytical framework of the first two interviews was lengthy and was not needed to compare interviews at that stage in the process. Fleshing out the interviews was saved for the final analysis wherein the responses of all the interviews were combined.

Finally, I made a list of the central themes (central because they were repeated across interviews) with variations on the themes for each of the interviews in order to compare and contrast. This document was then expanded to include all the main themes from each interview and the themes were then organized into groupings. From this process, I created the organizational framework for the seven interviews. I then returned to the analyzed transcripts of each interview to search for quotations that supported this framework.

The final analysis is organized by theme but the analytical bones have been filled out to include excerpts of the transcripts. This is important as it brings the students' individual voices back to the research with their own nuances where they may have become amalgamated with my own during the analysis process. The transcript excerpts included in the results section have been edited for ease of reading. For instance, some of the prompts for students to continue ("Mmhmm" and "yeah"), extraneous comments, as well as "I-I" or "like you know," were removed when they became too repetitive and detracted from the overall meaning of the transcript rather than adding to its meaning. The whole analysis was characterized by an iterative process between what I thought was meant and what the students actually said. In this process, I used the synthesis of the transcript to compare and make connections using my own voice, and the expansion of the transcript served to check these connections and ensure that they were supported by what students actually said.

Results

The results will be presented in two sections: (1) establishing rapport and background characteristics, (2) narrative themes. In the first part, I will introduce the seven participants; it should be noted that pseudonyms have been used in order to protect the identity of the participants. In these introductions, I will present characteristics unique to the student, and a little bit about what it was like to interview the student, giving particular attention to my sense of the connection I made with the participant. The choice to include this section is based on the importance of relationships and context in indigenous epistemologies. The analysis in the proceeding section does not stand on its own, but in a context made up of the interview location, the general feeling of the

interview, and the relationships between the participant and me. The relationships and context shape the conclusions that can be drawn.

The second section of the analysis includes the excerpts of the transcripts organized by categories that have been established inductively from the participants' transcripts. A model will be used in the results section to serve as a visual depiction of the connections made between the narrative themes described in the analysis section.

Table 1

Narrative Notations

....	-Placed between excerpts, this indicates that there has been a lapse of time (and parts of the interview have been cut out) between two excerpts from the same interview.
....	-Placed between words in the same sentence, this indicates a hesitation
Haha	-Laughter
(p)	-A pause
K	-Stands for Kaitlyn, the interviewer
B	-In the first interview, B, is for Brent. Each interview employs the first letter of the participant's pseudonym to indicate when that individual is speaking.
(inaudible)	-Could not hear what was said
[]	-Words in square parentheses are a best estimate of what was heard
[]	-Used to fill in missing words or information
-	-A short hyphen at the end of a word is used to indicate that the narrator was cut off mid-sentence.

Establishing Rapport with Participants

In this section, each participant will be described briefly, as well as the interview itself, so that a sense of the context in which the interviews were conducted can be conveyed for the results and discussion sections.

Brent

Brent spoke of his pride in his ability to speak Cree. When it was possible, in the past, he wore his hair long in the traditional manner. Brent acts as a role model to his friends and family. He is one of the only men to attend university in his family. In addition, he considers himself a role model in terms of his financial stability. Brent is a support for others in his family and his circle of friends whether it is spiritually or just being a positive impact in their lives. Brent is using a university education to transition to a better job. On the other hand, he is on academic probation and while he is trying to bring up his grades, if he does not, he is making preparations to return to work.

My first interview was with Brent, and I was somewhat nervous to meet with him. When we first met near the Tim Hortons on campus, I was worried that it would be difficult to meet since it was between classes and there was a crowd of people milling around. I was relieved that he approached me. On our way to get a beverage at the Arts Buffeteria, we bonded over our love of anthropology and Thai cuisine. His use of the microwave for the interview took the formal edge off the interview and made it feel like two students talking casually on a lunch break. Brent's ease in speaking about himself and answering questions made us both feel comfortable.

Rhianne

Rhianne's decision to attend university is due to her previous job experience. Her trajectory to university is characterized by a disruption in her high school education. She was "kicked out" of grade 11, but her dissatisfaction with her jobs encouraged her to continue with her education. Now, Rhianne is hoping to work in the law enforcement field and to that extent is pursuing courses in justice.

The interview with Rhianne took place outside the travel office on the upper floor of Place Riel, the only interview to take place outside the office. Rhianne seemed friendly at first but shy. She remained shy throughout the interview, and I found it difficult to make a connection with her. She sat on the edge of her chair, straight like a rod and rarely touched her hot chocolate. I spent more time than I should have trying to make her feel comfortable, meaning I spoke more than was necessary in an interview. Despite my attempts to get Rhianne to speak more, once she answered the questions she simply did not have much to say after she made her point.

Nick

I found Nick friendly and easy to talk to as he infused his rather candid answers with a little bit of humour. Nick comes from a large family and is the first male in his family to go to university. He spent his first year at another university in another province where his main focus was on extra curricular activities offered through the university, but transferred to the University of Saskatchewan without friends and family in order to follow more academic pursuits. He hopes to pursue medicine in order to help others "in a way that they can't typically help themselves." Helping others is an important value for

Nick, which seems to be supported by his family's religious values. Joining clubs and going to the Aboriginal Students' Centre helped Nick make friends easily.

Unsure of going to university directly after high school, his parents told him it was not an option, as Nick says, "My mom is all about education." Friends back home were also on a path to university. Nick describes himself as different from other students who identify as Aboriginal because he feels he does not typically look Aboriginal and says he was not raised the same way.

Annabel

Education and identity are key issues of interest to Annabel, and she easily engaged with many of the questions of the research, while also asking a few of her own. As a student, she felt it was her responsibility to become a part of this research. Her interest in the research and my interest in what she had to say caused the interview to extend for several hours.

Annabel strikes me as analytical and as a strong advocate. Annabel is conscious of the stereotypes of others and actively works to break the stereotypes others have of Aboriginal peoples. Annabel sees herself as a proud traditional First Nations' woman, who is interested in bringing together traditional and Western medicine.

Theresa

Theresa is a first year student with a bubbly and engaging personality. I first met Theresa during one of the regular events at the Aboriginal Students' Centre. Theresa is the first student I met prior to the interview. Our first conversation served as a base to our interview and allowed me to adjust my interview questions so that they would be relevant

to her story. Theresa and I also met up on other occasions after the interview, which allow me to believe that I have established a good connection with her.

Theresa had been in university for a little over a month at the time of our interview. She had been to university off and on in her twenties, previously taking classes through another university, but this time she felt ready to complete her degree. Theresa also works at maintaining a balance between her student role and being a single mother to her young children.

Theresa maintains a positive outlook on life with the support of God, who she calls her rock. Theresa feels secure in her future knowing that things happen for a reason. Theresa is thrilled to just be at university, as she is “better *today*” than she was as a young child, and maintains that it can only get better at university.

Laura

Laura and I had spent a few days trying to set up the right time to meet with each other. Other circumstances arose that left a short window for us to complete the interview. We also ran into a group other individuals on our way to the meeting place. Needless to say, the routine of meeting and getting a cup of coffee was disturbed during this meeting and I felt somewhat off. Laura and I had difficulty connecting with each other despite the fact that I felt we had a lot in common.

During the interview Laura seemed quiet but friendly and she acknowledged that she was more outgoing at home. Several of the things Laura said are troubling. She seems to have trouble making connections at school and had been going through a difficult time at home, which had affected her grades in the previous semester. As she separates her school and home selves, she also wishes to keep her difficulties from the university.

Despite the challenges of being a single mother to her children and attending school, Laura remains determined and positive about her educational experience. Her long-term goal is to become an outreach worker, but short-term goals are fuzzy as her status as a student next year depends on her current grades.

Emily

Emily and I met late in September after I had finished the first draft of the thesis, and it had been months since my last interview. I was happy to meet with another student. Emily and I decided to meet outside to enjoy some of the last rays of summer, had a long interview and seemed to get along well. At a few places in the interview I had to refrain from sharing my findings as they were supported by what she was saying.

Emily considers herself to be between her first and second year at university. Her first year on campus was somewhat difficult because of personal concerns that led her to take some time off school, despite her feelings that it would be best to stay on campus.

Emily feels at home at the university and would be happy enough to never leave the campus. At the same time, she feels that it is important to balance school and fun. During her first year she felt that she could not be herself and has now settled in since she knows being a student does not mean compromising her identity. Emily has a strong interest in politics and in the law. She is not afraid to stick up for what she believes in in classrooms and would like to do the same for her people through political associations in the future. It was only at the end of the interview, while conducting the demographic questions that Emily and I realized that we had briefly met before at the ASC the previous school year.

Narrative Themes

In all, eight main narrative themes were drawn out of the analysis. The first one is “identities (student, Aboriginal, etc.),” which is a theme about the identities students draw on at the university and that connects in one way or another to all the other themes. The second theme is “purpose of education” which relates to students’ reasons for going to university. Following is “belonging/separation” which focuses on the spaces on campus that are characterized by both belonging and separation for students who identify as Aboriginal. “Curriculum engagement” connects to the identities theme where students learn more when they can connect with what they are learning. “Agency and structure” is about the way students engage with structures (grades in particular) on campus. Grades are a structure that shape students’ decisions to go to university, to stay in university, their experience of university, their proximity to the ideal student, and ultimately (through academic probation) their identity as students. The “narrative of struggle” is a theme that is unique in many ways to students who identify as Aboriginal as the narrative can have an important impact on their identification with Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal students. The ideal student is the seventh theme and refers to ideas students have about what characteristics a student should ideally embody. Finally, the eighth theme, discrepancy, is present in all themes where there is a distance between the identity a student presents and the identity that she feels she should be presenting in a particular context.

Theme 1: Core identities, separate identities and fluid identities

This research began with one definition of identity that evolved as I listened to students speak about their own experiences at the University. I started with a definition of

identity very similar to that of Peña-Talameantes' (2013) who uses the term "identity configuration" in order to describe "the salience of various identities within a particular context and an individual's presentation of self to others within that context" (p. 269). In such a context, these identities are self-defined but as Giddens (1991) notes, an identity "cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing 'story' about the self" (p. 54). Contrary to this orientation, I noted in several interviews that the participants seemed to reject the idea of them "hiding," "highlighting" or "performing" parts of themselves, perhaps because there is an element of inauthenticity implied by these word choices. It seemed that students were more inclined towards the conceptualization of a stable, core self that is brought into all the roles a person plays. If students adhere to the notion of a core, or true self then they would be disinclined to describe themselves using these words. In the "core self" version of identity, the roles students play are not as central to the self as this core identity. Nonetheless, a simple role for one person may be an integral component in another person's core identity.

Rhianne recognized that she played different roles in different contexts but rejected that she experienced a disconnect when she was at home or at school.

K: Do you feel like you can be yourself at university? Or do you feel like you have to put on a role-or a mask when you come here.

R: No, I feel like I can be myself haha. (p) Yeah. I'm not really talkative in class haha so I just listen and watch people... talk.

In this exchange, Rhianne feels like she can be herself at school. Her laugh seemed to indicate that she was uncomfortable with the question, and perhaps the

implication that she would be inauthentic at school. She explains how she is being herself because she is watching other people talk. Rhianne positions herself as an audience member when she says she listens and watches other people talk. She seems to be defining “being herself” in reference to being a member of the audience, and by extension to not playing a role.

There is a tension between being yourself at university and acting differently in different contexts. The following excerpt shows that while Rhianne negates “a disconnect,” she does not deny playing different roles and presenting the appropriate behaviours she feels are needed to play the student role:

Yes, ‘cause, when I’m not at school (p) I party a lot haha, and I try not to come to school hung over or like still drunk haha or anything. At school I try to be (p) responsible haha

Furthermore, Rhianne sees a benefit to separating her roles:

It just makes me focus on something else. Because when I wasn’t a student, I was just doing whatever, and not focusing on anything for my future... Just helps me, like, guide myself haha what I want to do with the rest of my life?

There seems to be a difference for Rhianne between separating her roles, experienced as something functional, and a disconnect that has connotations of conflict for the self. Rhianne notes of her roles: “It just makes me focus on something else” as though being a student is a release from her roles as daughter and sister. And even more importantly, her student role is what connects her to her future, or acts as a path for her future. She can switch gears from her daughter and sister responsibilities by being a

student. While her school roles and home roles are separated, Rhianne does not experience a disconnect in these roles.

Similarly to Rhianne, Laura separates her roles, but sees all her roles as “making up me” and seems to reject the idea that acting differently means being a different self in different contexts. Laura takes responsibility for how she experiences the university.

I don't put on a *role* or anything I just, I am myself, if people *want* to- to get to *know* me or not then I guess that's up to them and I can't really take it personal if they don't really want to know me.

Rhianne indicates the different ways that she separates her life between home and school. Her friends are at home, whereas the university is a place populated by strangers. She separates her behaviours as well, drinking, partying remains separate from the responsible, studious, punctual student she tries to be at the university. Home is where Rhianne sheds the student skin and relaxes and she agrees with my characterization of home as a difficult place to study.

Laura also does not know anyone at the university, but it does not seem like she has strong connections at home either. Laura spoke about difficulties with her family that made her attendance at university difficult in the first semester and negatively affected her grades:

L-It's just disagreements with family members. And ah, unhealthy relationships that was affecting my studies. I found it really hard to reach out to ask somebody for help because I wasn't sure. ... I don't want the school to know what my problems are, I guess.

While both students separate and distance parts of their selves, they do not see a disconnect or a conflict between their school and home selves. There is a “me” at university and a “me” at home, and while the roles are different, each role is as much an authentic me as the other. While, in this conception of identity there does not seem to be a disconnect between parts of these students selves, there does seem to be a disconnect with other students. Perhaps, by keeping a strict separation between the roles they play, both students only have their student selves to draw on in order to make connections with the other students at the university.

For Annabel, being a First Nation’s woman is an integral part of her core self that affects all the roles that she plays and Annabel highlights this identity whenever possible.

It's not like I'm *playing a role*. It's not that what I do as a student is different from what I do as employee but whatever I do and whatever role I play I'm *always* Aboriginal, I'm always First Nations.

For Annabel, being Aboriginal is something that she was born with and it means being different from others. Annabel incorporates being Aboriginal or First Nations into her core sense of self that is incorporated into all the roles that she plays. None of the students framed Aboriginality as a simple role that they play. In the core self version of identity, being Aboriginal would be part of being a mother, being a student, being a sister, or being a son.

Similarly, Emily sees her First Nations’ identity firmly rooted as part of her core self. She notes:

I’m really proud to be Aboriginal. I’m really glad that I was born First Nations that I am First Nations and that when I think about myself *now*,

back then and in the future, I *always* see myself as an Aboriginal woman, constantly.

Furthermore, Emily does not consider changing herself to suit others or the situation as being true to herself. Protecting her difference is how Emily maintains her authentic self.

Like I'm not trying to maintain that difference. I want to *be* that person because sometimes I find myself changing to who I'm around. Like, if I go home, I feel like I'm losing who I really am because I have to be this way just to make *them* feel comfortable, like I just want to be comfortable being me and doing what *I* want to do. So I guess my first role would be like myself. I just want to *be me* at the end of the day.

Nick, on the other hand, embraces a fluid identity a little bit more than the other students. He believes that Aboriginal peoples have a rigid identity (they are the same in every situation) and feels that his own identity is similar to non-Aboriginal students who he considers to have a more fluid identity. He frames this way of being in the world as more adaptable.

And I grew up in the city, and so all those together, I just feel that brought up as (p) as a non-Aboriginal..student. And so I knew what was expected of me. I knew how to act in some situations and I would show-present myself differently to different people. Aboriginal people, they're usually the same in every situation, for the most part. I mean, besides instances where involves professionalism or, some level of it.

Nick believes that an ability to adapt to different situations speaks to your character. As opposed to rejecting the way individuals change when interacting with different students as fake or belying an authentic self, he sees it as “natural.” When I shared my perspective on identity where individuals have different roles and present different parts of themselves in different situations, Nick had the following to say:

I think that you do change in different situations? (p). But I think that speaks to your character of how your adaptability is? To be able to interact with different people, and sort of, um. Just how adaptable you can be? But there’s always like a piece of you that’s the same? In every situation where people could notice, or should notice?

When pressed to consider the idea of a core self, Nick is similar to the other students in seeing that there is a piece of the self, a thread that ties peoples’ role performances together.

Theme 2: Purpose of education: Education for domestication and transformation.

Education for a better life

Attending the university signifies many things to students. While identity is important in order to engage in learning, university is not necessarily the place where students should go to find themselves, according to Annabel and Theresa. Theresa’s idea of an ideal student is one that is ready for university. While Theresa had attended university during a period in her twenties that she called “rock bottom,” her experience then and now differ greatly. Being ready is what separates Theresa’s current university experience from her previous experience when she did not complete her degree. Theresa notes that the significance of not being ready previously meant that she was wasting time:

“I was wasting...*time*. I was wasting the professor’s time. I was wasting *my* time.”

Theresa further describes the feeling of being ready in the following excerpt:

Back then, I was doing it, but I think I was just going through the motions to *keep* whoever happy, our education coordinator, I don’t know....Now, it’s “I’m going to do this, I’m going to do that, I’m *going* to do well in my academics,” you know, it’s *all* a feeling, *you know*, I know now that I’m ready, and I’m gonna do this.

Before feeling ready for university, Theresa had to work on herself, to follow her “healing path” with God’s help and the help of a book she cited frequently in the interview. University was not what helped Theresa back from “rock bottom” but it is part of her feeling that she is “better *today* than I was even as an innocent four year old should be.” Attending university before being ready meant, for Theresa, that she was wasting time.

Annabel made sure she was ready for her education prior to attending university. After high school, she did not feel ready to attend and spent time acquiring the skills she felt she needed to be successful at university. For her, university is not a place where students should come to find themselves, especially if the curriculum is too rigid to allow individuals to learn from their own perspectives.

You see the university student that’s been there for *years* and they still haven’t picked a major ‘cause they’re still trying to find themselves. Just to me, I think it’s just a waste. If you don’t know what you’re doing then just *stop* going to school, *travel*, do some things, work, try different jobs. I mean, all those things will contribute to who you eventually will *realize*

who you are. You're not going to have an epiphany while you're in school, *I think* because university is just like, like we *said*, it's so “this is the way of thinking” and how are you going to find yourself in that way of thinking if it's already *categorized*.

Annabel is speaking to the importance of being able to engage with the curriculum at an individual level. Annabel, furthermore, feels her perspective is more respected by her professors and her peers because she has already found herself:

Even if it's not the same as *your* opinion well, “That's what she knows and that's who she is and what she believes in,” and respect will follow.

Annabel does not see the point of getting an education without knowing who you are and without being ready. Even if Annabel were to try to find herself at university, she would have difficulty as her identity is configured using questions that do not have answers that can be easily found at university.

“*Who* are you?” That's one of the questions that is so important... When I say, “Who are you?” “Where are you from?” “Who is your family?” “What's your Indian name?” Things like that. If you can't answer those then you need to start finding out who you are.

It may be possible for students whose identities are configured, like Annabel's, around place and family to find themselves on campus by reframing their identities and connections to others in an educational context. In other words, place, for these students, is the university and their family is the academic family. The identity that can be found at the university, therefore, is very much an academic identity. Theresa explains how she sees the university as a family by reading me a sentence of her acceptance letter:

“We are pleased you will become of vital part of the University of Saskatchewan family.” So that’s that kind of stuck in a little mind trap. So that’s why I now associate it with *a family*. Because were all students, and were all here for the same reasons to get educated and, uh, to succeed! So yeah, that were all doing the same thing and we’re all in the same, the same...circle, same building, if you wanna do it that way. It feels like we’re still a family even though we don’t know each other.

When I asked Emily to describe her impressions of being a student at the university so far it became evident that she does not agree with the idea that the university is not for finding the self but for furthering professional development.

Sometimes it’s like, they’re just training us to think a certain way, haha.
.... It’s like, oh, we’re just being trained to make society keep going, you know? We’re going to be the next generation of lawyers, doctors, nurses, whatever. And then in the next few years someone else is going to come along and *they’re* going to be where we were
....

K -How would you like to see it? Like if you had an ideal university what would you.

E -I would leave my *mark* somewhere. I want to make people know that I was here. Haha, you know? I want to be remembered for doing something great.

Emily wants to use the university to “leave [her] mark” somewhere. If the university’s role is to reproduce the professions that already exist in society, then it does

not serve her needs as it does not support her development as a person. For Emily, going to university is not related to getting a good job to support her family or to fulfill the expectations that others, especially her family, have for her. Emily says that it took her father a while to see the importance of a university education. She says that coming from a working family, education that does not lead directly to a job is considered superfluous:

Having an education is the luxury. You know? To him it wasn't important as it was to go out and get a job and have money now. You need money now to feed your family, and everything.

For Emily, a university education is not about getting the job and getting the money now, it is about her proving to herself that she can do it.

Almost all the participants framed the university positively in their interviews. While earlier Emily spoke about feeling like she didn't belong on the reserve because she was ahead of the other students, she speaks about her feeling of belonging at the university.

It just feels great. I had a really good year this past year and actually it made me want to come back to school. This is where I feel comfortable. This is my *zone* right now. I *feel good* here. I like learning. I like being taught things. You know, I like knowing that I'm going to school working towards something.

Emily has not always felt like she belonged at university; however, especially considering the disconnect between her own student identity and her idea of the ideal student who is of a certain age, has certain clothes and lives on campus. In the following excerpt I asked if Emily felt she had to put on a role at the university. The excerpt shows

how Emily only started feeling like herself on campus when she was able to resolve the tension between who she felt she had to be on campus and how she really saw herself:

I'm not going to lie, the first year I felt like I had to fake it....Like I wanted to fit in with everybody else so I just began maybe acting like them in a sense? Like, trying to talk like them even and *be* the way they are. I didn't like school for a while there because it was making me feel like I wasn't myself, that I wasn't being myself. And then I realized like "*Why* am I trying to be this person?" Just be yourself *and* go to school do it *both* at the same time. You don't *have* to be this perfect student, you don't have to be this perfect (p) person. You can still have yourself, your needs and your everything. Even like culture and tradition. Like all that stuff you can have it all and still be a student and go to school, you don't have to *compromise* anything.

The ability to be herself at university is especially important for Emily as her main purpose of going to university is about shaping herself as a person. Again, as demonstrated by Emily's love of being a student, there was an overwhelming sense from students' transcripts that going to university played a very positive role in their lives. While being a student took time away from other roles the students played, in the end, being a student added to these roles. Most of the mothers, for instance, mentioned how their children pushed them to continue their education so they could be good role models and encourage their children to get a good education.

Rhianne and Laura also note how they feel positively about education. Rhianne simply states when I ask about a disconnect:

I don't think there's a disconnect and home and then when I'm at school.

I like school.

Laura notes that she has "been wanting to come to university for a few years" but finds the daily act of being a single parent to three young children as well as a student difficult. Despite her struggle, however, she is determined to achieve her goals at university:

It's kind of just. I'm getting by, but it's just kind of a struggle some days.

It's overwhelming. But I don't know....I'm so determined though. There's so many *obstacles* that I have to overcome, but I'm *doing it*. But I'm not going to let them bring me down. And I'm going to keep striving to, (inaudible). Striving for my goals?

Theresa does not see the university in terms how it limits her and helps her, she only sees it as a positive. If something hinders her it is because she has not tried hard enough to seek a solution, or because it is meant to be. Theresa's experience at university is largely shaped by her perception that she is following a path that has been chosen by God. When talking about the Wayne Dyer book she read, she said:

"Let go and let God," that's one of the big, the little phrase that meant so much when I was reading that book and it truly is, when you let God into the scene, you just let go because it's gonna be taken care of. That means no stress, hey?

For Theresa, university is unquestionably a good thing. She says that the university is "not a place where you're gonna go backwards. You're always gonna go forward. It's a positive thing and that's how I felt. I felt good even stepping foot, even

though I didn't have a clue where I was going or where my first class was, I still felt good. I felt so good to be here.”

Theresa also says, in response to my question about expectations,

The university's just there. It's everything that you put out that you're gonna get out of it. So I feel like if there's something that's not being met it's because I haven't searched for it.

For Theresa, the university is a tool that can only make things better. At university, things can only get better. If Theresa has an expectation that is not met it is because she has not looked hard enough for it. The only real structure that determines Theresa's experience is God, the university is “just there,” she puts in the positivity that she wants to take out of it.

Brent is perhaps the only student who does not see the university in such a positive light. Brent is preparing to return to the job market and he notes when we speak of his academic probation:

We still have to like get certain grades. I'm on probation and if I don't get in, I don't get funded

K: And so what does that mean? What are you going to do?

B: I'm discontinued by the university if I don't get those grades. I'm discontinued funding immediately. So now I'm going to XXXXXX, as soon as we're done school. To like get ready, in case I don't pass.

Evidently the students I spoke to have differing opinions on the purpose of university. Almost all students felt positively about their decision to go to university, or overcame feelings of disconnect in order to arrive at positive feelings at the university.

The university is a symbol of not only becoming more educated, but to make a better life for oneself, or as Emily says “working towards something” whether it be a career or a form of self-transformation.

Theme 3: Belonging and separation: Spaces of belonging on campus

Students often spoke of the ASC and ASAP as places of support, comfort and welcoming. These are places on campus where students feel a sense of belonging. Described as giving a sense of unity, togetherness, family or welcoming, these are the spaces where students recognize the presence of Aboriginal culture. It seems, however, that these spaces of belonging act in a supporting role to academia where Aboriginal culture is not always construed as relevant. Emily, Annabel and Rhianne perceive ASAP as a place of belonging but also of separation, reinforcing the idea of separate spaces for Aboriginal culture on campus.

For Theresa, the ASC is a place of comfort, family and togetherness, even open to students like me who, in this interaction, she frames as an outsider, emphasising that “even you” can come to the ASC.

Our culture is, is always centered around unity and feeling...a sense of togetherness? And you know like sense of togetherness is usually, family right? That’s another thing that that created that sense of comfort for me.

Theresa gets a thrill from being at the university, to be part of something where all students are “here for the same thing.” She feels a sense of connectedness to others by seeing everyone else as doing the same things together. Theresa defines comfort as:

Being comfortable with the people, *the resources*, everything. Just feeling good. Feeling good about the environment, I guess.

Comfort and success for Theresa go hand in hand. Two indicators of success exist for Theresa at university; however, the success of being comfortable at university and the success of completing a degree.

Theresa's definition of comfort speaks to a sense of self in space connected to her construction of an academic family at university. Her definition of comfort includes not only relationships to people but also to structures in a space. In other words, comfort means being familiar with the tools and resources of the university.

Nick expands on how the ASC is very welcoming when I confide that I do not feel like I belong there. Annabel makes a distinction between different spaces at the university feeling uncomfortable because of different aspects of her identity.

Waiting for my econ class when all the students kind of crowd around and they're all standing there, I feel uncomfortable there. But a lot of the times I don't think it's because I'm Aboriginal? Like, I don't dress like the young crowd does, you know I'm 25 and they're like 19, right...I *feel* that when I'm standing um out by the bus terminal? I find I get it there a lot. I feel uncomfortable because I'm Aboriginal there because it's the *bus*, you know, people come and go from that place? They don't necessarily have to be students, they could be from anywhere so I think it could be easier for somebody to put a stereotype on me because they don't know I'm a student...Places that I'd feel comfortable are sitting out on an empty hallway. I could sit there and read doesn't bother me.

Annabel's sense of discomfort is related to her feeling stereotyped by other people and not being able to control the impressions others make of her with any

tangible symbols. In an empty hallway, there is no need to manage the impressions of others.

Participants' sense of comfort in a space is related to their sense of connection to others in the space and, especially for Annabel, how they feel they are defined by others, as well as how they feel they can define themselves in that space. The ability to draw on certain cultural elements plays a key role in what identities students adopt and how comfortable they are in these identities and spaces. As noted previously, students tended to make a separation between spaces that are designated for Aboriginal cultures and academic spaces. Aboriginal cultures were often delegated to a supporting role, separate from academic structures.

A similar division between cultural and academic identities occurred when students spoke about the ASAP program, an academic program for students who self-identify as Aboriginal. On the one hand, students see the ASAP program as a program that nurtures Aboriginal identities, that supports student success, and that prepares students for future years at university. Furthermore, for some students, ASAP can mean the difference between spending one year at university or finishing their degrees. As Laura notes:

I like the way, you know, I wouldn't have thought coming to university that there would have been programs like this. So, I'm definitely really happy that there is a program for me, you know a place that I can fit in here. Otherwise, I don't think I would be having the experience like this one....I think the program really helped me feel comfortable and the next year that I'll be able to fit in.

Emily adds to the positive review of ASAP:

It's really great, yeah they're helping us *so much*. They're showing us so much on campus and everything. It's great. It makes you *want* to do good. I enrolled myself just for that, just for that purpose so it would make me like *want* to finish things.

Even for students who support ASAP, some note that it is a program that separates students who identify as Aboriginal out from other students and associates them with having poor academic skills. For both Rhianne and Annabel their reaction was that ASAP is a special program for Aboriginal students who need extra help. Rhianne says:

They have a special program for Native students in their first year. I don't know what it's called, but they track your grades, and they put you in grou-like smaller class sizes. It's just for Native students? But I didn't really want to do that. Cause, I just wanted to be in like a normal classroom? Hahah.

Annabel notes:

Just being a *regular student* I wasn't going to go into it, I wasn't . Because I didn't want to be categorized. I didn't want to be put and then, you know, say "OK well we're going to take- you know make this class easy for you " and I thought "I don't want that"

For both Rhianne and Annabel, the choice to go into ASAP is a choice between being able to identify themselves as "normal" students or Aboriginal students who need extra-help. Annabel chose attend the ASAP because she saw it as a space to nourish her First Nations identity. It seems, however, that Annabel's choice to attend the ASAP had

her choosing between being perceived for her “good student” identity or nourishing her “First Nations” identity. The division is not entirely clear cut, however, as Annabel has been able to assert her identity as an A student when she has made personal connections with professors, while in a large class like economics outside the ASAP program, her identity is that of a nameless student. By saying she is known as a number, she frames her self in economics as depersonalized or perhaps even dehumanized.

While lending support to the program, as is evident in her previous excerpts, Emily explains that she also feels that ASAP reinforces the separation of students who identify as Aboriginal in addition to associating being Aboriginal with poor academic skills.

This whole ASAP program it’s great and I like it, I really do I’m not going to say anything bad about it, but it makes me wonder sometimes, ‘cause we don’t want people to single us out, but we single ourselves out like that. You know what I mean? ...Sometimes it feels like they don’t think we’re as- smart or goal oriented as some of them, as the next person. That we’re as focused maybe.

The ASAP program seems to be interpreted simultaneously in terms of a belonging and separation that go hand in hand. The program creates a place of belonging while at the same time highlighting that its students are separate from the rest because their academic performance is poorer. This program is available only to students who identify as Aboriginal, which emphasises the notion that these students will be unique in their struggle to transition to university.

Rhianne treats Aboriginal culture as a phenomenon that takes place outside of class time in her recommendations to the university:

K: If you were a consultant, considering what we've said so far about Aboriginal student identity at the university, what advice would you give the university administrators?

R: Ummmm (p) Just like, have more, events about Aboriginal culture, or like, anything about Aboriginal people? Haha. (p) Like, the powwow's really nice, it's like my favourite to go to.

Conversely, Brent talks about supports in two different contexts. He speaks about the available academic supports, which he separates from cultural supports. When comparing the experiences of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, Brent notes:

B: Ummm, I think it's, very similar, to a degree? But we have more supports, I believe, for us, because of the Aboriginal students' Centre. Because of the cultural components we can engage in?

For Brent, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students' experiences would be the same on campus if it were not for these cultural supports. According to Brent, cultural supports can be found in the ASC and the academic supports are found in another classroom. There is a clear separation between cultural and academic supports.

Most students noted that the ideal student is a student that makes a connection with the professor, but noted that they did not live up to this ideal, and found it especially difficult to do so if they were in a larger class. Annabel expanded on the importance of connecting with professors when she spoke about the important role of the ASAP program:

I know first hand that coming from a reserve and to a different community is big, is huge, and it's hard, it's hard to take it seriously because that's not the way we were taught on the reserve or in these small communities. Especially when you're basically stereotyped the day you walk in the door. So yeah, Aboriginal students need [to] have that relationship with their prof because that's what going to help them in their second, third, fourth years.

Annabel considers it important for her as a First Nations student to make connections with her professors for support, but also to establish a relationship with the professor in order to trust the knowledge they are imparting, especially if students are not familiar with the required ways of learning of a particular classroom. In this way, Annabel incorporates the knowledge of a particular classroom through a First Nations' perspective on support, relationships and the transmission of knowledge, bridging the gap between culture and academics.

Theme 4: Curriculum engagement

Curriculum engagement refers to students' participation in curriculum. The focus of this thesis is the engagement that is a result of students connecting curricula to their personal identities. The ability of students to draw on their previous knowledge and background, affirming cultural and linguistic backgrounds in the process, is a condition of effective learning. The same can be said of the ability of students to invest their identities in learning outcomes (Cummins, 2006). As such, for students for whom being First Nations is part of their core selves it would follow that making space for students to employ more than just the basic "student identity" to draw from would be beneficial for student engagement. Students' engagement in course curriculum is an important first

step, but it is not the only element needed for a student to successfully graduate from university (Morrow & Ackermann, 2012).

For Annabel, being First Nations is a core part of herself, however, she notes in the following excerpt that while she would not necessarily hide her First Nations' identity, it is just not relevant in some classes.

Like econ, for instance. I'm just a student of 300, I'm not really technically hiding myself but I'm not putting it out there for everyone to see because I think it's irrelevant. I don't think that it's necessary. I'm trying to think of other times too, I usually try *not* to hide who I am um like, k, trying to mask it in any way, like, I think that's not being true to yourself.

For Annabel, hiding her identity means not being true to who she was born to be. While being Aboriginal is a central part of her identity, sometimes Annabel notes that in large classes, like economics, while it is not hidden, she finds that her Aboriginal identity is not relevant. When Annabel cannot draw on a central component of her identity, how engaged might she be in that class?

In another part of her interview, Annabel spoke about inserting her First Nations identity into classrooms and the relative ease of connecting it to some classes over others.

In my English class I don't see a lot of, um, this is the class where I see less of an Aboriginal perspective than I do in my other classes? Like biology for instance, like plants and stuff. I think about the plants that we use for healing when I think how did we come about naming it *this* 'cause there are other-we call it other things in our traditional language.

Annabel talks about how she engages with curriculum content differently when she is able to use her own perspective in a flexible format as opposed to when she has to shape herself to “how they want me to be” in a rigid structure where the acceptable knowledge is passed down from on high, like: “this is the knowledge.” She talks about doing better and building more character when she can connect classroom curricula to her own perspective.

When it comes to *psychology* where he's very open, and open to *ideas* and interpretations, it really *builds* your character, but I know that, in the *future*, when I start taking my specific courses that it's not going like that. So I'm trying to change the *way* I accept knowledge. ...I guess it all too depends on the situation when I'm allowed to express how I really feel about things and it's *my* perspective, well, you know, I do well. You know, as opposed to “this is the knowledge,” hahahah.

Of course, as important as it is to some students, ethnic identity is not the only identity students draw on when they make connections to their course curricula. In the following excerpt, Emily talks about how her boredom with her high school course curriculum caused her to stray from her classes.

I always felt different when I was on the reserve. Like I didn't belong there. I don't want to say that I was *too* good for there but I- it just didn't *feel* right to me there- even learning and stuff. I was always like the top of my class, I was always *ahead* of everybody else. Like, it wasn't right? It didn't feel right all the time.

Soon after, Emily quit school and returned to it years later. She notes: “I went back and I finished- they were going to like put me in adult-12, but I didn’t want to do that because it seemed too like simple? Like I wanted my *real* grade 12.” Emily associates difficulty with the authenticity of her education. She makes a connection between the relative ease or difficulty of her curriculum and her sense of belonging. On the reserve, Emily experiences a discrepancy due to her identity as an advanced student, which makes her feel like she does not belong in the reserve school. Emily is the only student who mentioned experiencing discrepancies at two educational institutions; at the university, Emily describes how she felt she had to “mild” herself down in a class full of white students (discussed in more detail later).

Theme 5: Agency and passivity in the face of university structures

Academic curricula is one of the structures at the university that shapes students’ choice of identities and also ways of interacting with the university. Students demonstrated a difference in the way they engaged (either passively or actively) with the structures at the university or framed other students in relation to those structures. At the beginning of his interview, Brent frames himself passively in relation to the rules and standards of the academic institution. This is the exchange that followed:

B: I tried majoring in native studies? and minoring in anthropology? And they just switched it on me. Because I guess you can't major in Native studies here.

K: Really! Isn't there a whole department? for Native studies though?

B: I'm not even totally aware, hahah. I'm like "I don't know"? So I'm just going I think because I like anthropology and I had the highest marks in *all* my classes.

Brent positions himself passively in relation to the status of his program of study: "I tried majoring..." "and they just switched it on me." He uses laughter and to brush off the serious implications of my question. His statement, "Because I guess you can't major in Native studies here," indicates that he positions the university as having the ultimate control and knowing best about his academic trajectory. If his program of study was changed, it was because the university had a legitimate reason instead of having made an error. He indicates his acceptance of this state of affairs by saying that he likes anthropology. Liking and having high marks are therefore important motivators for continuing a course chosen by the university.

Laura and Theresa tend to place a lot of responsibility on themselves for shaping their own experiences at the university. When asked if Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students experience university life differently, Laura says:

Um, I don't really. I don't *think* so. I guess it just depends. I guess it just depends on how we want to experience it. Like for *me*, I can choose to have a good experience or a bad experience but it all reflects back onto to - to how I'm feeling or you know?

Theresa:

I'll call it a process because you now, it's only going to get better. And what I put into it, all the good stuff I put into it, is all the good that's going to come out of it.

The way that students frame themselves in relation to the structures of the university not only indicate how they engage with the university, but how able they feel they are to construct their own identity in the "figured world" of the university (Peña-Talameantes, 2013). Students who are passive are perhaps less apt at negotiating identities and empowering their educational choices in the academic structures of the university.

Emily, on the other hand, is happy that she is finally the author of her own path. She has worked hard to get other peoples' voices out of her head for going to university, and now she wants it to just be about her.

After I got him out of my head [referring to her dad] and my husband out of my head I was like "Hey! it's just [Emily], Hey! you can do whatever you want. You can do this and they can't say nothing and you can do this, nobody will say nothing because it's just *you*, you're doing you."

Emily does not want other people to influence her decisions or experience at the university. Because Emily is aware of her fear of disappointing others, she protects her newfound joy of being and creating her own path at university by not caring about these pressures that could otherwise structure her experiences at the university.

I don't know. I have this attitude where I'm like, I don't give a fuck. Haha. Like I really *don't*, I really don't and when it comes to school I want it to

be the same. For everything else I *don't*, but when it comes to school I'm really scared to disappoint people. But at the same time, I don't *want* to do it for anyone else? I want to do it for myself.

Grades were a central structure that shaped students' experiences at the university. The importance of grades came up several times in students' transcripts. Grades seemed to impact students' decisions to go to university, their ability to stay at university, the experiences students had while they were at university, their proximity to their ideal selves as well as their very ability to continue defining themselves as students. Both Rhianne and Brent see grades as an important factor that shapes a students' ability to have choice over universities and programs.

Brent responds to my question about a decision to attend this university as though he does have a choice about which university he is attending, but that quickly changes.

I got family going to school out here? And I got friends going to school here? I got extended family going to school here? Ummm (p) I don't have a complete math? to go to another province.....So, that's kind of why I'm going to school here? And I'd like to transfer to BC (p). But. they have even higher standards. And I don't have those marks. So. I'm kind of stuck here? Hahaha.

It seems that Brent's decision to come to this university is not entirely his own, but a response to his grades and where they allow him to attend university.

Rhianne also frames herself and other students differently in terms of their choice of program and their grades. While Rhianne has decided to attend university of her own choice, the factors leading up to this decision she presented as being out of her control.

K: What made you decide to come?

R: Um, my parents....I got kicked out of school in grade 11 and my parents made me get a part time job, and I worked at like three different grocery stores and I hated it so

K: All at once?

R: Well no, I switched around. And I hated it so much it made me want to go to school. Heh

Rhianne frames the two negative and related events that pushed her to decide to attend university passively: “I got kicked out” and “my parents made me.” Passively situating herself in these events, she does not acknowledge her role in these events. They happened as though they were beyond her control.

Rhianne, however, is in control of her own university career. Rhianne separates herself from those who use the ASAP program, which she perceives to be an extra-help course, by emphasising that she wanted to be in the “normal program.” Speaking of the ASAP program, Rhianne notes:

Yeah, I don't know, I think they just got more help? I think? The teacher helped them more. And I just wanted to be in a normal class, haha.

Rhianne chose a “normal” class over a class with fewer students where she could perhaps make connections with the other students or get to know the professor, which, for her, is a characteristic of the “perfect” student.

Rhianne's perception of the ASAP program is that it is a program for students who require extra-help. The students in this program are subject to higher surveillance and control than other students. Rhianne describes the students passively in relation to the

structures of the university. She says: “they like track your grades” and “they put you in groups.” Conversely, Rhianne positions herself as an agentic student saying “I didn’t really want to” and “I just wanted to be,” also in the following exchange she states outright her agentic choice:

K: Ummmm, So yeah, what role did.... other people play a role? in your coming to university? or was it.... your own decision purely.

R: It was my own decision. Um, I had people at my school that, like, helped me get in and helped me apply.

It seems that these supporting characters helped Rhianne once she had already made the decision on her own. Later in the interview, Rhianne uses the passive voice to say that students who “don’t have high enough grades” get sent to a transition program.

Nick sees that grades determine his acceptance in a program at university:

My grades were good, but it’s just that they weren’t good enough to be in a high-level biology program? But then I ended up getting accepted. God knows why.

For Laura, grades will determine if she can stay at university for another year, or be funded.

I think it’s-has to do with my funding? Haha. I think-well, I think both the school and the funding. My funding agency. Because if I don’t keep up good grades then how am I going to get funded and how am I going to remain staying...remain as a student here.

Grades are a structure that shapes how much agency students feel themselves to have and their experiences at university, but they are not the only structure. For Brent,

attendance sheets undermine the opportunity for students who identify as Aboriginal to resemble the ideal student, who for him is defined as accountable and responsible. He notes:

Because we're like Aboriginal, we have to do different things to get our funding. We have to opt out of the health and dental plan? On a yearly basis, which is really annoying. We have to send in an attendance sheet. Which is really not appropriate for university

K: No

B: Yeah. Because I'm in university for a reason, and I'm not going to not go to my classes.

The attendance sheet reinforces an assumption that students who identify as Aboriginal will not be accountable or responsible. This assumption takes away Brent's ability to define himself and to bridge the gap between his way of being a student at the university and his idea of the ideal student

Theme 6: The narrative of struggle: Alignment with successful reference groups

Aboriginal stereotypes shape students' perceptions of success, their decision to attend university, it can influence who they identify with as a reference group and it can impact students' experiences at the university. The "narrative of struggle" is similar to a stereotype in that it is a fixed narrative that is applied to and constrains the experience of students who identify as Aboriginal.

In Annabel's interview she mentions her frustration with the typical "narrative of struggle" that seems to be a necessary framework for presenting a success for Aboriginal peoples.

When somebody in non-Aboriginal culture says, “Oh I have my masters” it’s, oh good for you. It’s common! You know I guess in a way I’m *not* annoyed, not sickened, but it’s proof *there* that we’ve been deprived of so much, you know, in terms of our experiences, that when somebody is successful it’s like, “wow, this is so out of the norm”, when it shouldn’t be like that. So yeah, I guess that would be one way. And it wasn’t like, “Oh you know she had this life struggle, to go through university,” it was very “yeah I went to school and I wanted to get my masters, and I got my masters”, ha, you know. And everyone again has their own experience as to why, but I don’t want it to be *irregular* for First Nations.

....

It’s funny too because the people that get that education they always have, like, a story of *struggle* it seems like, you know, it feeds in to what the media wants to feed to their audience, you now.

Annabel sees this “story of struggle” as the normal structure for framing a story of Aboriginal success, as something that perpetrates the perception that it is irregular or abnormal for Aboriginal peoples to have success in education. This “story of struggle” seems to be common when some of the students talk about their mothers, who were often their inspiration to come to university. When speaking of the educational stories of their mothers, these students frame the achievement of a degree in the context of accomplishing many other tasks at the same time. It is as though the degree itself is not the accomplishment; the accomplishment is that the degree was achieved while carrying the burden of so many other responsibilities simultaneously.

Brent:

I guess inspired me to go to university probably would be my Mom. She did five years of university stretched four over five. She had... two kids and in her last year she had five. (p) She watched over three of her cousins. And one was under the age of two. And she worked.

When I'm trying to get my head around Nick's mother doing two masters at the same time, Nick says:

That's kind of like my model. If I'm not working as hard as my mom, then. I'm not working! I mean, she's still a human so.

K-Plus with 11 brothers and sisters, that's like. She must not sleep! Do you think?

N-Um, I get some four in the morning texts. Because she works two jobs too, so she's busy.

While the struggles in both Nick and Brent's stories are framed positively, struggle is still a central and seemingly necessary element of their mothers' educational narratives. Theresa also uses struggle in a positive sense to demonstrate what she has accomplished over the years. Theresa's narrative anchor for her educational story is how she struggled with self-esteem as a child and came from rock-bottom with the help of God to pursue her education at university.

Not only is struggle a seemingly necessary element of some participants' stories, but it highlights students' awareness of an educational disparity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

Brent considers it rare to see an educated family in his community, and he connects Aboriginal students at his high school with lacking the standard grade skills:

B: Some of them will have a grade 12. My *grandma* went back and upgraded? She went to school-and she got her. (p) So it's kind of like my family has a lot of education, which is *really rare*.

.....

K: What's the high school in?

B: XXXXXXXX, It had a high Aboriginal (p) ah, population, so...um, a lot of us didn't have like the standard grade skills, so the teacher upgraded us and then I had really high marks in English

Rhianne, in her own narrative, makes a distinction between educational narratives where Aboriginal students are thought to struggle but non-Aboriginal students are not:

K: Do you think Aboriginal students experience university life differently or the same as non-Aboriginal students-is easier or hard. Differences or similarities.

R: Um, for me it was....just the same I think? haha. I wasn't struggling with anything, but I know like some people do struggle with, because my cousin he had to go to the transition program at Royal West.

One of the outcomes of this 'narrative of struggle' is that some students, like Rhianne, are separating themselves from what they consider the normal Aboriginal educational trajectory because they themselves are not struggling. Rhianne sees her own educational narrative as similar to non-Aboriginal students which indicates that she

maintains the dichotomy where Aboriginal students will struggle but non-Aboriginal students will not.

Nick also separates himself from the Aboriginal student experience at university, seeing Aboriginal students as doing things traditionally. While Nick identifies as Aboriginal, he does not see himself as traditional.

Well me, I'd say I experience ...non-Aboriginal experience. But in general? I think that it is different, they don't experience it in the same way, just because. Um, Aboriginal people have a very traditional way of doing things.

While all the students self-identify as Aboriginal or First Nations for this research, several students believe that their own educational experience is different from other students who identify as Aboriginal because they do not fit into the definition that they have for Aboriginal students. Either they do not see themselves as struggling, or they do not see themselves as traditional and therefore able to adapt better to the university context.

When framing their identities at the university, the participants resist some stereotypes, or fixated narratives about a group of people, while integrating others. Annabel moves away from the stereotypes of Aboriginal peoples as being on welfare or young mothers, but moves towards stereotypes of Aboriginal peoples as healers rather than economists. Nick perceives the cultures of different groups at the university as relatively homogeneous. He resists positioning his own identity as fixed but sees traditional Aboriginal peoples in this light. On the other hand, he uses his perception of small town Saskatchewan students being relatively homogenous in order to integrate and

make friends with them. Stereotypes are used to understand groups at the university and Nick uses these stereotypes to move towards or away from desirable reference groups depending on his purpose.

N-So, I guess, it just changed over time. Because what I've noticed, is since Saskatchewan is such a small city? People that come from the small towns, they sort of bring their lifestyles with them? And so, a lot of them have the same kinds of habits? And so you kind of learn like how to interact with a lot of people, kind of all act the same.

As outlined earlier, Nick separates his trajectory at university from Aboriginal students who he sees as having a fixated identity that is not able to adapt to several situations because they are traditional. On the other hand, he wants to adopt the values he sees other Aboriginal peoples sharing, when it comes to him representing them as an Aboriginal doctor.

Yeah, um, I knew that I was going to have to become um, more, associated with the Aboriginal Student Center, because as an Aboriginal student who was pursuing medicine, I am going to need to have some association as an Aboriginal student. And be familiar with my culture and bring those values to medicine. 'Cause that's what I want to do. ...I don't feel any pressure from it, just because so few people make it that are Aboriginal into medicine anyway. That it's already an accomplishment?

Nick perpetuates the idea of Aboriginal success being uncommon when he states that it is an accomplishment in itself to be able to connect the Aboriginal identity to a

profession that is perceived as highly successful. In the end, Nick identifies with a “successful” reference group but wants to draw on his Aboriginal cultural background and bring being Aboriginal into his definition of success of becoming a doctor. As Emily notes, “Every time like somebody Aboriginal is successful it’s like (whiny voice) ‘oh, they beat the odds’ kind of thing.”

Theme 7: The ideal student

Students’ ways of performing themselves at university are influenced by personal notions of what is an ideal student. Asking questions about students’ ideal student selves, the different roles they play and how the student identity helps and hinders these other identities act to position the student. These questions position the students in relation to the multiple identities they have or feel they should have. In my own undergraduate experience, I treated being a student as a separate and competing role. I was taken aback, therefore, by three students speaking about balance as an important part of being a student or an ideal student. Balance means that in order to become an ideal student, the student role must not take up a larger part of a person’s life and it must incorporate the other roles a person plays.

Brent says, in response to my question about the perfect student:

Studying everyday. Ummm. Reading their books, referencing all the words that they don’t understand. Yeah, just having a balance of friends family, education, studying and exercise and eating right.

It may be because of my comment about how struggling with balance is a huge part of my own student life that Brent has mentioned it later in the excerpt. The exchange

between Brent and I highlights how my conception of an ideal student is different from that of some of the participants.

Nick and Theresa share Brent's conception of balance:

Nick says:

Do you know that diagram where it's like the triangle's like, sleep. Sleep, academics and social? And then, it's like pick two? So, I guess the ideal would be like all three. So, If you could have like equal balance between all three of those.

Theresa says:

It's all about taking time for each role, I think. Taking time for each role and balancing. Try to balance it? Like I said, were not perfect, nobody's perfect and sometimes we don't get that balance sometimes we do and sometimes we're in between balance whatever, as long as you know, you just make time to recognize each, each role needs that nurturing?

While Annabel does not mention balance for an ideal student, it seems to be a large part of her life. She talks about the value of balancing Western and traditional medicines, and balancing perspectives. She also notes when she is talking about the "narrative of struggle" for students who identify as Aboriginal:

To be here. If anything, my only struggle is trying to *balance*, um, but that's something that we all do. *Everybody* balances a school life, a personal life, and a *job*, you know, nothing makes *me* special about what I'm doing.

Two students, on the other hand, do not define ideal in terms of balance. For these students, the student role does not converge with other roles, but is clearly separate and distant from their own student experiences at university. Rhianne's version of the perfect student carries expectations that are nearly impossible for her to fulfil. In this version, the student role expands to take over her life so that that she has no time to be anything but a student.

Just getting good grades, like above 90 hah...studying all the time?

Always at school. Even on the weekends, haha.

Emily's version of the ideal student is similarly impossible for her to fulfill.

Well they'd be 19. Not 28, I'll tell you that. Haha. They'd be 19, fresh out of high school and they'd probably be living in one of the camp-campus residences and. Their freshy clothes and walking around, and yeah.

K -Why is that the ideal student?

E -I don't know. It just seems like it's what you're supposed to do. You know? Society says when you're done high school you go to college, you know? You go straight to college and you *live* those college years.

Later Emily notes in response to my question:

K - How are you similar or different from this student?

E -Well, I'm 28, I'm a mother, I'm a divorced. Haha. I don't live on campus, and I live at home, and it took me a long time to realize what I actually wanted, that I did want to go to university. So, I'm different from them. But I like that.

Emily connects the ideal student to an idea of the “ideal person for society.” She is bored by the chain of events that is supposed to make up a person’s life, yet admits how much it has affected her when she says she wants for her kids to follow this expected chain of events. Theresa called this chain of events the “order of operations” when we first met. Emily says:

I don’t want everything to be so expected. And then at the same time, it’s like I *want that for my kids*. You know? I want them to go to college when they’re done high school. I want them to be able to. I don’t know, to do things *right*. I have that mindset too at the same time. And I want them to be true to themselves first and foremost.

For both Emily and Rhianne, the image of the ideal student seems to come from outside themselves. There is a huge disconnect between the way they experience and see their own student identities and how they define the ideal student. The ideal student, furthermore, is not separate from the ideal person in society. For some, it can only be fulfilled by following the proper “order of operations” in life. For other students who define their identities in terms of balance, the roles that make up this idea of identity are more self-defined. As a result there may be less of a disconnect between their actual and ideal student selves. On the other hand, there remains some disconnect, as Nick and Annabel note that the ability to balance all parts of their lives as a student remains difficult to achieve.

Most students also spoke about the ideal student as a student who was able to make connections with professors. As part of Brent’s definition of the ideal student, he notes:

Um, have a good communication with your professor, if it's needed.

Umm, just be aware of what's going on in like the classes, like, when the tests are. (p) I dunno.

Rhianne's vision of the ideal or perfect student also includes speaking to professors. Nick also added the following to his ideal student:

Um. (long pause) I guess maintaining a good connection with your professors would be really good, because they are a great reference, and I should get on top of that more. But. It looks daunting.

This connection carries both practical elements in terms of references, but also for support, and establishing trust so that students will accept the knowledge professors impart.

Grades can also be a central component in the definition of an ideal student. Annabel rejects the role grades play in the definition of an ideal student, feeling that an ideal student should not be, in part, defined by high grades, but by a student's strength in knowing herself before going to university.

Um there is no, "You need an 80 or a 90, you need to be an A student, you need to suck up to the profs." I don't think I don't think any of that matters. I think the ideal university student has their feet firm in the ground, knows who they are and, you know, chooses to accept or not to accept certain things, has their own voice, their own train of thought, their own opinion, because it's so easy to *follow*.

On the other hand, Annabel asserts that she has "always performed well in school." As grades do not threaten Annabel's presence at the university, she may perceive

that all students have the freedom to choose whether or not they want grades to be an important structure in shaping their experience at the university.

For Laura, the ideal student, while rather self-defined in terms of goals, does not only gain support by seeking out connections but by providing support for others:

Um. To *me* I think. A student who works hard at achieving their *goals* and whether it's attendance or good grades, or you know being a good support for other-*other* students. That's my ideal of a student, a good student.

It should be noted that how we think the student role should be played (the ideal student) is informed not only by a university culture but also culturally informed ideas shaped outside the university of what it means to be a good person and how a person should learn. In other words, the ideal can be approached by supporting others, by making connections with professors, by balancing roles or by forsaking all other roles for the purpose of pursuing an education. Emily and Theresa, furthermore, have a notion of the ideal "order of operations," which indicates that being an undergraduate student should fit somewhere between graduation from high school, marriage and children.

Theme 8: Discrepancy

Discrepancies could be detected in many or all the narrative themes that have been discussed previously. Discrepancy is a notion shaped by Higgin's (1987) self-discrepancy theory and pertains, for the purposes of this research, to a sense of discomfort with one's identity in certain contexts in the university environment.

Discrepancies are not explicitly prevalent in students' narratives, but become evident when students speak of separation, stereotypes or unequal treatment at the university.

Annabel seems to be the most sensitive to the negative stereotypes of Aboriginal peoples

and is particular in how she chooses to frame herself to negate those stereotypes. Annabel is actively combatting discrimination by refuting these stereotypes, which is indubitably a positive act. It does, nonetheless, indicate that she experiences a discrepancy between the way she wants to be framed by others and the way she feels others see her.

For Annabel, being a mother is a big part of her life. She situates events in terms of before and after the birth of her daughter and has previously made choices about jobs and when to attend university based on what she thought would most benefit her daughter. Nonetheless, she is unhappy that she fits the stereotype of the young First Nation's mother.

Being seen as Aboriginal or what have you. I think a lot of Aboriginal students feel coming to university is that they're different, you know, they fit the *stereotype of a young mother* or, they've lived on welfare or *all* the stereotypes that people have and that they either succumb to those stereotypes and then they fail, or they overcome them and succeed right? So I think a lot of Aboriginal students see it as like (p) you kind of stand out, but you're invisible at the same time.

Annabel experiences stereotyping as an action where she has no control over the aspects of her self other people make assumptions about or highlight. As such, her presentation of herself is moot, her self is invisible to others. Annabel says about stereotypes:

I challenge myself to overcome *every* single one of those stereotypes, you know? I can't overcome the fact that I had a kid young-but I'm a good parent and I take care of my child. She's not in the welfare system, I'm not

on welfare, she's housed, clothed, fed and she's getting an education and a *good* education. So yeah, it's like I if I could I would wear a nametag that says *I'm* First Nations.

Annabel fights against the stereotypes that are used to define her, and she often tries to prove them wrong with the way she lives her life. She is frustrated when she lives up to a stereotype or is perceived to live up to a stereotype.

Stereotypes shape the way students experience the university. Annabel talks about being invisible or standing out at the university, as though those are the only two options for students who identify as Aboriginal, making it difficult but all the more necessary to negotiate a third space at the university for Aboriginal identity. Annabel believes that the university is the prime place where this identity can still be carved out, and she does this by disproving the stereotypes that she feels others apply to her. The significance of stereotypes becomes all the more evident when we consider that they can be the reason students choose to attend or not attend university:

I think that there is a lot of negative and positive correlation between experiences and university. My positive is my mother, you know. My negative is, uh, I'm *sick* of being seen as just another Aboriginal person. I want to have an *education*, I want to do things in my community, I don't want to *be* categorised as uneducated, you know, or *any* of that.

As noted previously, stereotypes can also be used by students who identify as Aboriginal to interpret university as “too difficult” or “not for me.”

There are similarities between Annabel and Emily's experiences at university. Emily has also struggled, not with how others saw First Nations peoples, but how she saw her own identity as a First Nations woman.

I didn't like that I was an Indian. I didn't like the idea at all, because when I grew up in the city, they made it seem so bad and I grew up around White people, I started thinking that I was White. You know? Like, it's so *weird* and it- I started to be ashamed of my own *heritage* my own *culture*. [...] After a while I started realizing this is who I am. These are my people, I can't hate my people, and you know I got to get that *mindset* out of my mind and then I just started enjoying the culture and embracing it more? And then, you know, I-I liked it more after that.

Emily was able to resolve this discrepancy between how she saw herself and how others saw her by seeing Aboriginal peoples in a positive light and using this positive regard to develop a strong sense of self. Now, Emily identifies strongly as a First Nations woman and she uses this perspective, drawing on her political science degree, to see discrimination on campus.

The one thing I've noticed on university campus. A lot of people treat Aboriginal students differently. You can *tell*. We're Aboriginal. You can see it. You know, you can tell when you look at us. Some you can't, some look White, haha and *they're* lucky. I think some of them are lucky because they're treated normal....You know even at admin, like (p) they *separate* us. We separate ourselves yes, but they-they take it *further*. They separate us *more*, they make us feel *stupid* sometimes like (sigh)

sometimes I feel like, like I'm being (p). Like (p), I don't know, I can't even like. It's kind of when I'm in administration, I feel like I'm getting help *differently* from other people.

In another situation, Emily was getting an advance on her student loan along with a White student, in the same circumstances, in order to pay for their books at the beginning of the term. Only the White student walked away with her money. Emily describes her reaction:

It doesn't make sense to me, I don't know. It just felt weird. I felt so singled out that day. Sometimes I wonder if it's just me and then these things just happen and then I just take it the wrong way and it probably is sometimes, like I'm not going to lie. It probably is sometimes, but a lot of the times it feels like, *yeah*.

Emily sees that separation, while done with positive intentions to improve the university experiences of students who identify as Aboriginal, can also be accompanied by ideas that reinforce stereotypes about Aboriginal students. For instance, while the goal of ASAP is to help students who identify as Aboriginal, the fact that the program is only geared toward one ethnic group reinforces the sense that it is normative for Aboriginal students to struggle at school.

Emily's disconnect between the way she sees herself and how she feels she had to be as a student contributed to her having a difficult time in her first year. As mentioned earlier, Emily's notion of the ideal student is very different from her own experience as a student in terms of age and living arrangements. The way she sometimes feels she has to

act outside of her ASAP class when surrounded by White students emphasises this disconnect.

I feel different when I'm around other students sometimes? Like I need to *mild* myself down more because they might not like me, or something.

(Deep breath) Or, I *can't* be so *aggressive* maybe, even ah, when I go into certain classes. In the ASAP program you're surrounded by Aboriginal *constantly*. You know? And when you take a class that isn't in ASAP.

Like, I'm taking political studies...It's not an ASAP class. [...] And it's on Wednesday evenings and I'm the only Aboriginal person in there.

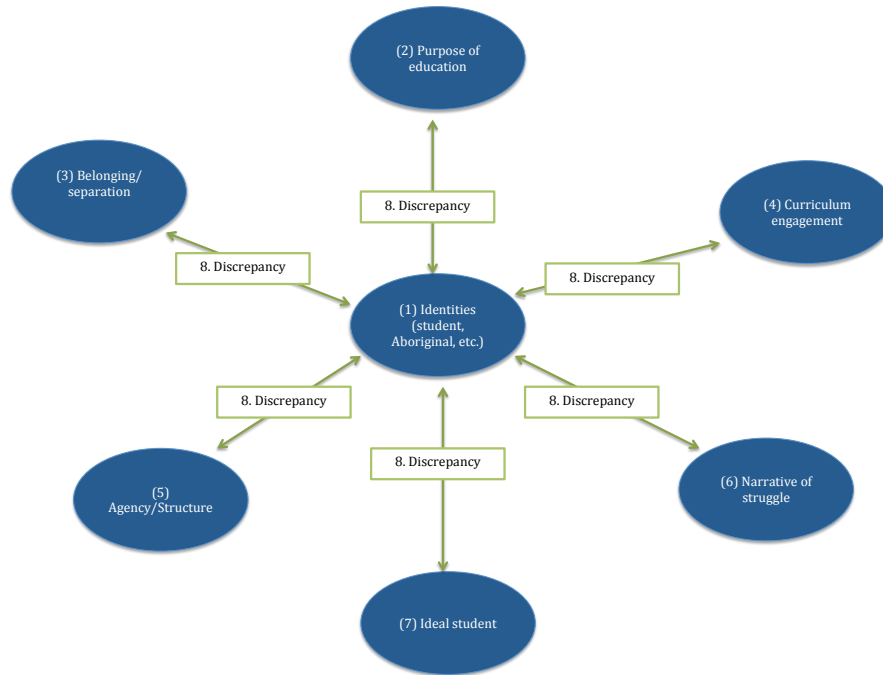
Everybody else is White.

K -So how do you feel in there?

E -(Deep breath) Awkward. Hahaha. Especially when they talk about stuff like Idle No More or First Nation rights and stuff like that. It's like, hmmm, you know, and I don't want to be the one to be like, "Hey don't talk about it like that," you know? But then, I kind of *have* to because I need to stand up for *me* and what *I* believe in. Just because some professor says it's this way doesn't mean it really *is* this way. You know?

The discomfort experienced by discrepancies in identity that are shaped by particular contexts can have drastic results if not resolved. Emily was able to resolve the discrepancy in her first year experience at university when she felt she had to fake it and pretend she was a different person. Otherwise, she would not still be at the university.

Figure 1. *Narrative themes and the connections between them*



Overview of the results

Figure 1 represents the numbered themes that were drawn out of the results section and the relationships between these themes. The narrative themes presented above are not mutually exclusive and as such, many interview excerpts could exist easily in multiple themes. Each of the themes are numbered in order to facilitate their review. For theme one, it should be noted that there is a reciprocal relationship between identities and the themes that interact with identity, as identity is interactive and both shapes experience in a context and is shaped by this context. Again, not only do the themes interact with identities, but through identities, many of the themes interact with each other.

Theme 2 demonstrates that the purpose of education is closely related to ideas about the self and personal identity (whether it should be developed before university or used to leave a mark at university) and, more generally, for working towards a better life. All except one of the students were very positive about being at the university and about

what they were doing at the university. Belonging and separation, Theme 3, are related to spaces on campus where students belong as Aboriginal students, but are simultaneously separated from other students in order to belong. These spaces inform students' identification as student or as Aboriginal student. The Aboriginal Students' Centre and the Aboriginal Student Achievement Program are spaces that provide students who identify as Aboriginal with cultural support. These spaces on campus are characterized by being welcoming and providing comfort to students, especially new students who are overwhelmed by the size of the university and have difficulty, at first, finding resources on campus.

Theme 4 focuses on curriculum engagement. Aboriginal culture has not been inserted into academics as it has in spaces of Aboriginal cultural support on campus. While students note that they would not hide aspects of themselves, some question the relevance of being Aboriginal in some of their classes. Classrooms are contexts that can foster some identities while making others seem irrelevant. Students engage in classroom curricula through the identities that are at their disposal and will engage more when they can connect to identities that are more meaningful to them.

Theme 5 examines agency and structure, which also has a reciprocal relationship with identity. Our identities can cause us to feel that we have more or less agency in a certain structure, and these structures themselves shape the identities that we use or that we feel are central to our sense of self. Grades are an example of a structure that plays an important role in shaping a student's experience at university, a student's definition of success and even a student's decision to attend university. The way students speak about their university experience, using passive or active phrasing speaks to how they interact

with these structures. A student who is on probation may feel more constrained by the rules and regulations of the university than a student who has high grades and knows what she wants from the university. These structures (grades, rules and regulations of the university) shape how much agency a student feels she has in shaping her own identity.

The narrative of struggle (Theme 6) has a similar interaction with identity. Some students feel that because they identify as Aboriginal they will struggle in their education, while others decide that they must not be Aboriginal in this context because they do not struggle. In Theme 7, participants draw on their multiple identities to structure ideas of an ideal student. The ideal student is shaped by structures at the university, as well as outside the university. At university, grades are one of the measures that students use to compare themselves to their ideal student selves.

Theme 8, discrepancies, is represented by the arrow in the diagram. In any reciprocal relationship between the narrative themes and the identities that are relevant to these themes, there is the potential for there to be a difference between the way students present themselves at the university and how they feel they should or want to present themselves. Theme 8 connects directly with Theme 1, as discrepancies can occur in any theme where students feel there is a difference between their perceived identities and who they feel they should be in a given situation. In other words, between their identities as they are and how they feel they ought to be in a given context. For instance, the way Annabel actively frames her identity in counterpoint to Aboriginal stereotypes indicates a discrepancy in the way she feels she is defined and how she defines herself. Aboriginal stereotypes both structure identity at the university (Theme 5) and relate to the narrative of struggle for students who identify as Aboriginal (Theme 6). As such, discrepancies

weave themselves in and out of all the themes that have been discussed previously (all themes can have components or be components of discrepancies, depending on the focus). Examining discrepancies on their own allows us to examine the feelings of discomfort, distance and separation that are a key part of discrepancies more fully.

Discussion

In this section, the results will be discussed aided by relevant literature and in response to the questions that have been asked previously in the thesis. Following the results and questions, I will discuss how the concern of giving back has been honoured in this research. The limitations and directions for future research will then be discussed, followed by the conclusion.

As noted previously, the model of identities that I started with is not the one with which I leave this research. Each student had his or her own conceptualization of identity that varied from my own, but was also prompted by my questions about roles and the core self. As demonstrated by the central position of “identities” in Figure 1, students’ conceptualization of their identities helped them navigate their place at the university.

The flexible model of identity that I started with was most likely inspired by the American trope that “you can be whoever you want to be” (Kirmayer, 2007). Using this perspective, I believed that each situation provided the opportunity for an individual to play a new person. Despite the shift in focus away from individual agency, I maintain that there is still an interplay between personal agency and the structures of context that shape how a person presents him or herself to others in a single moment. The self that emerges is shaped by a variety of components. For Annabel, the self is shaped by concerns, such as: “Who are you? Where are you from? Who is your family? What's your Indian name?”

At the beginning of this thesis, I asked a question about the separation between student and Aboriginal identities: Can they ever only be students or must they always be Aboriginal students? In asking this question, I positioned the student role as one that would join students in feeling a sense of belonging on campus due to a shared identity. The use of certain modifiers like female lawyer or Aboriginal student can be used to highlight that being female or Aboriginal is a variation on rather than an inherent part of the nouns student or lawyer. In other words, that the word “student” does not connote Aboriginality. “Always being an Aboriginal student,” therefore, I saw as a phrase that distanced students from a wider sense of belonging on campus for their shared student identity, and instead fixed them into finding belonging in ethnic membership.

I also asked if students are constantly bombarded with one role while playing another, and how easy is it to balance the two? How easy is it to maintain consistency and avoid contradictions in their roles? These questions are based on the conception of identity where roles are relatively separate and are not tied together by the notion of a core self that informs how each of the roles are portrayed and experienced. Furthermore, these questions were asked as though students who did not identify as Aboriginal would not have other identities that they are balancing while also being students. While individuals never play just one role, based on Goffman (1959)’s work, for whatever reason (be it political social, etc.), they may want to project that they are only playing one role. When a student is identified as an Aboriginal student, both identities are made salient in the in the performance of self. Not all students experience those roles harmoniously. As Emily noted, “Culture and tradition. Like all that stuff you can have it all and still be a student and go to school, you don’t have to *compromise* anything.”

Emily believed that to be a student at the university she would have to compromise part of her identity. In particular, by making specific mention of culture and tradition, Emily seems to separate First Nations culture and tradition from being a student. Emily experienced conflict between the roles and almost left the university before she found a way to integrate her student identity into her vision of herself. No one is singly defined; however, when two identities are made salient together and the roles and values of each of these identities conflict then that can cause a disjunction that, if not resolved as in Emily's case, can interfere with a student's success at the university.

As noted in the results, the relationship between "Aboriginal" and "student" is complicated. When being Aboriginal is a core part of a person's self, it will be an important component in each of the roles this person plays. In this case, being Aboriginal is an important part of being a student. When classes do not make a space for Aboriginal identities to feel relevant then students will be missing a core identity from which to engage with the classroom curriculum. In this sense, stringing together Aboriginal and student is a source of pride for students, in much the same way as students aim to put the words Aboriginal and doctor or Aboriginal and judge together. While it may emphasize that being Aboriginal and a judge or doctor is unusual, it is this unusualness that makes being able to put the two together a source of pride for students.

"Always being an Aboriginal student" can be positive or negative. It is positive when all spaces on campus allow for the possibility of students to insert their Aboriginal identities. It is negative, however, when it shows that being Aboriginal is not relevant, normal or welcomed in all spaces on campus. There is, however, a certain idea at the university of what culture is and where it belongs. At the university, culture is content

instead of structure.² Where students located Aboriginal culture on campus was just as significant as where students did not locate culture. There is a tendency to believe that academic structures, classrooms for instance, are neutral when they are just as cultural as the content they shape. Aboriginal culture is relegated to certain spaces or contexts but does not pervade the university's more general structures.

Comfort, belonging or welcoming are concepts that have been repeated frequently in the transcripts, which is indicative of their importance for students who identify as Aboriginal. The importance of this sense of comfort or belonging on campus is not something that I considered as a White student who feels belonging in more or less all spaces on campus, perhaps due to the history and academic habitus of the university. This indicates once again how the student identity is not something neutral but is imbedded with the expectations and ideals of the institutional habitus. Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2009) note that the degree to which students feel they belong at the university depends, in part, on students' investment in this institution. The inverse should also be questioned. How much can students who identify as Aboriginal invest in a student identity if they feel belonging in certain spaces more for being Aboriginal than for being students?

While the ASAP may bring together Aboriginal and student better in one space, focusing both on cultural supports and academics, the "good student" identity is secondary as the ASAP is perceived to be a program geared towards students that need extra-help. Thus, the sense of belonging fostered in the program is for being Aboriginal, for struggling but not for being a "normal" student. The separation, in this situation, promotes the idea that students who identify as Aboriginal are not, as Emily states, "as-

² Students who do not "practice" Aboriginality according to the content or practices presented by the university could therefore also experience feelings of cultural disjunction.

smart or goal oriented as some of them, as the next person. That we're as focused maybe." The idea that "good student" and Aboriginal do not go together, but that students who identify as Aboriginal will struggle is reinforced. The result of these perceptions is that some students feel they have to choose between the good student and Aboriginal identities to enter the program.

I presented the results of this research to a small group of students identifying as Aboriginal and international students in the context of a conversation circle about their experiences at the university. After listening to the results, a few students in the ASAP reframed my focus of separation towards connection seeing the ASAP as a program that bridges students, especially those coming from a reserve, into the university. While I believe the separation and belonging of this program exist hand-in-hand, I presented the critical side of the program while the students I spoke to supported the positives. Mallett, Wagner, Burrow, Mello, Worrell and Andretta (2011) note that academic motivation and achievement will decline when a student's feelings of belonging at school are threatened. As noted by Locks, Hurtado and Bowman (2008), sense of belonging affects students' intentions to continue at university. On the other hand, Morrow and Ackermann (2012) note that belonging is not as important to students' personal motivational attitudes for retention at the university. Regardless of the focus, belonging in a space is important but it is only one piece of the academic puzzle and does not constitute in and of itself success regarding student attrition rates.

It should be noted here what is meant by space. Space does not necessarily mean a classroom or a physical location on campus. It goes beyond a physical location to include the connections that can be made with other students in that space. For instance, a space

can be characterized by the presence or lack of presence of other Aboriginal students. This is similar to the Pacific Islander concept of Vā, which is described as the space between people. Vā is the space that connects and nurtures the relationships between people (Saltiban, 2012). This sense of space connects to Kitayama and Markus' (1991) distinction between independent and interdependent selves. The sense of space as something separate relates to an understanding of the self as separate. An understanding where space is connections relates to an interdependent sense of self where the self is framed in connections to others. Saltiban's (2012) Tā-Vā theory of reality in a Pacific Islander worldview can be used to examine the space of the university. Considering how relationships with others became a central idea across interviews, it seems that the connections between people might shape a sense of space for some students at the university. Indeed, spaces of comfort and welcoming or discomfort were less characterized by the space itself, but by the connections between the people who were occupying these spaces.

HeavyRunner and DeCelles (2002) describe the family education model (FEM) as a model that copies the family structure at school in order to increase student retention. The FEM could benefit students like Annabel for whom the answer to “who is your family” is an integral aspect of her personal identity. Furthermore, the FEM framework could easily be adopted by Theresa who finds that conceptualizing students at the university as part of a family is helpful. In the FEM, a sense of family is fostered at home and at the university while “the principles of family support are modeled in all activities, including planning governance and administration” (p. 5). Practically, this can take the form of researchers using this model to understand their own academic heritage, tracing

the lineage of ideas to past researchers. Using the FEM, the self can become more embedded in connections to others at the university.

Vā and FEM are two models that students who have difficulty finding connections with others could use to find a place for themselves at the university. Had Laura, for instance, brought her role as a mother to university, she may have found it easier to connect to other students as a mother, rather than only having the student role at her disposal to connect to other students. Using multiple roles and identities facilitates conversations and connections with others. The connections that a student makes at university can act as a support net. Without Laura's external support she notes that she "probably would not have been here." Connections are resources that support a student in difficult times. Students who separated aspects of themselves had fewer connections on campus and therefore fewer resources at their disposal to aid, for example, with belonging and retention at the university (Morrow & Ackermann, 2012; Mallett et al., 2011).

While making connections seemed difficult for Laura and Rhianne who separated their home and school selves, on the other hand neither student experienced a conflict between the identities she played at home and at school. Looking back at the literature on discrepancies, this finding is similar to Benet-Martínez and Haritatos' (2005) bicultural identity integration (BII), which is made up of two constructs: cultural distance and cultural conflict. Some individuals find it easier to separate cultures when they feel that, for whatever reason, the two cultures are not compatible and cannot be merged. Based on BII, Laura and Rhianne have separated their identities because they do not feel that being a student is a compatible identity that can be merged with who they are at home. While

there is a discrepancy between the two identities it is not as great as it would be if there was a conflict between the two identities.

Making connections with their professors or supporting other students was something that participants attributed to the ideal student. Komarraju, Musulkin and Bhattacharya (2010) note that positive student-professor interactions can increase students' confidence, motivation, achievements and graduation rates. Furthermore, Morrow and Ackermann (2012) note that higher faculty support for students is positively related to students who persist at the university. In other words, students not only look to other students, but to their professors for support in their university careers. Connections with others, like professors, help students feel a sense of belonging at the university.

Making a connection with one's professor may also aid in bridging the culture-academics gap presented in Theme 4, curriculum engagement. While it will not necessarily increase Aboriginal content in the class, a connection may aid a First Nations perspective where knowledge is contextual and relational. As noted by Annabel, furthermore, when students trust a professor, they trust the knowledge shared by this professor. While this perspective on knowledge is part of an Indigenous epistemology, a connection with professors would benefit all students. This way, Indigenous ways of knowing becomes one of the structures in a classroom. If an aspect of Aboriginal cultures is used to shape the *way* students learn, then it becomes part of academic structure, not just the content.

Faircloth's (2012) article, "*Wearing a mask*" vs. *connecting identity with learning*, explored the link between students' perceived identities and their engagement in a ninth grade English class at a high-needs high school in the United States. She notes

that, according to McCarthy and Moje (2002) “all learning [...] can be conceived of as important moments in the process of identity construction and representation” (p. 233). Faircloth (2012) notes that students engaged more when they could connect themselves to what they were learning. Similarly, Kaplan and Flum (2012) note: “Together with others we believe that the goals of education go beyond the objectives of a high GPA, conceptual change, critical thinking, or the acquisition of self-regulation skills” (p. 172). Rather, an important focus of education should be the identity formation of students since learning cannot be separate from students’ own values, goals, social roles and worldviews.

Based on Faircloth’s research, the ability of students to speak from a number of possible identities in the classroom would foster both curriculum engagement and connections with others. Again, classroom contexts are not neutral. Some identities are more expected and nurtured in the figured world of the classroom (Peña-Talameantes, 2013). If the identity that is privileged is not as central or meaningful to the individual, it could impact the extent of his or her engagement in the curriculum. As noted by Taylor and de la Sablonnière (2013), cultural identities are central in that they inform the performance of these more peripheral roles. Being a student is less likely to be part of someone’s core identity than being Aboriginal.

Relationships with others and with the self are paramount for engaged learning to occur in an Indigenous paradigm. As Deloria (1999) notes, in traditional circles, it is thought that personal development should occur before professional accreditation. For some students, therefore, university is not necessarily the place where they go to find themselves; instead, it is important to be ready and know who they are as people first.

Both Theresa and Annabel, for instance, mentioned the importance of knowing the self before attending university. There is, therefore, a contradiction between McCarthy and Moje's (2002) concept that "all learning can be conceived of as important moments in the process of identity construction" (p. 192) and the idea that students should know themselves prior to attending university, as according to McCarthy and Moje (2002), learning will necessarily shape the self. Nonetheless, looking again at theme four in Figure 1, in both conceptions, identities are used as places to speak from and engage with classroom curricula.

Depending on a student's perception of the function of a university education, the university may be primarily for personal development or to pursue career goals (Morrow & Ackermann, 2012). Of course, students go to the university to grow personally, academically and professionally (Morrow & Ackermann, 2012). While these goals may not feed into one another smoothly, there is not necessarily a true dichotomy between choosing one or the other. Once again, as Alexitch (2010) notes, it is not that students will have only one motivation for going to university, but rather will prioritize one reason over another. The focus on growth is why students view the university so positively. Going to university is about, as Emily said "working towards something;" it signifies a better life for students and their children. A higher education can be part of the "order of operations" in an individual's life. There are ideas about when a student is supposed to go to university, according to both Emily and Theresa, to "do things right."

Previously in this paper, I asked the question: "For Aboriginal students, however, is it ever possible to play one role when, based on certain cultural or phenotypical markers, they have been socially enforced to adhere to the behaviour that others expect of

an Aboriginal person?” In fact, as discussed in theme six of figure 1, the narrative of struggle, some of the student participants feel that their educational trajectory approximates that of a non-Aboriginal student more than an Aboriginal student because they are not struggling. Taylor, Debrosse, Cooper and Kachanoff (2013) note that collective identities inform personal identities. Every personal identity, as well as our evaluations of that identity, is formed in relation to our collective identities. As Taylor et al. (2013) notes: “The precedence of collective identity arises because the attributes that comprise an individual’s personal identity are relative. When an individual perceives herself as intelligent she is really saying ‘I perceive myself to be more intelligent than other who make up my reference group’” (p. 144). One participant felt that the narrative of struggle was used to define success. Taylor et al. (2013) write:

As a result of a widespread and negative intersubjective view of Aboriginal peoples by members of the mainstream, which have also become a part of their interobjective worldview, Aboriginal peoples are likely to internalize low collective self-esteem if they do not have a clearly defined cultural identity (p. 149).

Students who do not associate their educational trajectory with struggle assume that their trajectory must not be typical of an Aboriginal student but rather of a non-Aboriginal student. Taylor et al. (2013) continue later in their chapter:

When a group has an unclear cultural identity and carries out a positive behaviour, other groups can simply attribute that behaviour to situational forces and deny that it reflects any desirable group trait. Anything a group accomplishes will be because they were

lucky. Anything they achieve will be because somebody took pity on them. Anything they win will have been unfair (p. 152).

The students who did not adopt an educational narrative of struggle that they would consider to be typical of an Aboriginal reference group distanced themselves from this group. These students aligned themselves with non-Aboriginal peoples, where success stories were normative and not framed against a backdrop of struggle. When Annabel spoke about normalizing educational success, she was speaking to the larger issue of associating desirable traits and positive behaviour to an Aboriginal reference group. When Aboriginal educational success stories continue to be framed against dropout rates and other negative stories then the success is attributed to the individual student as an exceptional event rather than to Aboriginal peoples as a normative fact. In other words, it is evidence of discrimination towards Aboriginal peoples.

The narrative of struggle is a theme full of discrepancies. The way some students separated themselves from the Aboriginal reference group because they were not struggling at school in this theme indicates that they were uncomfortable with the image of themselves as struggling students. To resolve this discomfort, those students separated from a reference group with which they would otherwise connect, as all students were required to self-identify as Aboriginal in this research. Annabel's approach to resolving the self-discrepancy between her experience and the stereotype was completely different. Annabel separated herself from the stereotypes but not the reference group, which continued to inform her definition of herself. In other words, Annabel worked to redefine the stereotypes to show her reference group, Aboriginal peoples, in a more positive light, as opposed to maintaining those ideas about the reference group and redefining herself.

The narrative of struggle was like a stereotype of Aboriginal students. Instead of deconstructing the narrative, however, some students instead seemed to temporarily (in the context of struggling at university) construct themselves as non-Aboriginal.

Some students occasionally feel primed for the narrative of struggle by the academic programs that are offered to them. For instance, Emily felt that the education she received on-reserve was not as good as off-reserve, and while she liked the ASAP, she felt like students who identified as Aboriginal were singling themselves out for being not as good as other students in these programs. If students who identify as Aboriginal are associated with “the narrative of struggle” then that makes it less possible for them to associate being Aboriginal with the ideal student (theme seven in figure 1).

A student will struggle with his transition to university in one way or another, as university means adjusting to a new context (Maunder, Cunliffe, Galvin, Mjali & Rogers, 2013). However, the ideal student does not struggle either with being the perfect student, making connections with professors, or balancing multiple roles in her life. Consistently, across the narratives, the ideal student was one that was described in terms of achieving instead of struggling with his goals. Nonetheless, it seemed that the ideal Aboriginal student *was* one that struggled. Annabel expresses her frustration with the idea that an Aboriginal individual is not successful if she does not frame her education in terms of struggle:

[...] We're not being *warriors* for our community, we've had positive reinforcements and that's why we're here. There may be a case where somebody had to overcome a lot to get here, and *those* people are the only

people that seem to be successful, or that are *viewed* in society as being successful, like what about the *other* students that graduated with them?

To lessen their feelings of discomfort related to a discrepancy between actual and ideal, some students who identified as Aboriginal subscribed instead to a notion of the ideal Aboriginal student that would struggle and overcome instead of achieve. Imagining and attempting to become one's own definition of the ideal student is an area rife with disconnects and feelings of discomfort. Looking at the ideal student using Higgins' (1987) self-discrepancy theory therefore has wide applications.

In the results, students seemed to speak mainly of two mutually exclusive forms of the ideal student. The first one is the perfect student, the ideal student that ignores all other roles to make being a student the central and only focus of her life. This finding is similar to what was noted in the literature that, according to Goffman (1959), people present the role that they are playing at any one moment as their most essential role. The other ideal student attribute that came up often, more often in fact than that of perfection, was that of balance. These two forms of the ideal student are mutually exclusive as a student cannot give complete focus to the student role and also hope to achieve a balance between the other roles she plays in her life.

While students that aimed for balance may have had more choice in the roles they chose to balance compared to students who were confronted with the "perfect student" ideal, balance amongst the roles played remained difficult to attain. In fact, the "balanced student" ideal seemed to correspond with Higgins' (1987) actual/own versus ideal/own discrepancy whereas the "perfect student" corresponded more with the actual/own versus ideal/other discrepancy where the ideal student is someone else's creation. Both forms of

the ideal are accompanied by variations of feelings of discomfort. Specifically, an actual/own versus ideal/own discrepancy is characterised by dejection-related emotions stemming from individuals feeling like their own wishes or desires have not been fulfilled. An actual/own versus ideal/other is also related to dejection-related emotions, but this time associated with feeling shame, downcast or feelings of embarrassment (Higgins, 1987).

The ideal student role has to take into account core parts of oneself that will be brought into every role. Emily's image of the ideal student (young, straight out of high school, lives on campus), for instance, was one that was far from her own vision of herself as a student, and was impossible for her to achieve. Being a First Nations woman was a core part of herself, and yet her understanding of the ideal student had nothing to do with being First Nations. Emily's self-discrepancy highlighted the continued existence of an academic habitus geared towards white, middle and upper class male students straight out of high school and the identity discrepancies that were shaped by this habitus.

Goffman (1959) writes, "To be a given kind of person, then, is not merely to possess the required attributes, but also to sustain the standards of conduct and appearance that one's social grouping attaches thereto" (p. 75). To be a student one cannot just pay tuition, but must live up to expectations of what it means to be a student and how to play the student role. Expectations about grades are a large part of this role. One of the ways of comparing oneself against the ideal student is by using grades. Ideas about the ideal student are shaped not only by the institutional academic habitus, however, but are also informed by a culture's ideas of what it means to be a good person and how a person should learn. Annabel rejected the notion of an ideal student shaped by

grades; she felt that the definition of an ideal student should relate to a student's strength in knowing herself before going to university. Annabel's focus on personal growth prior to attending university relates to Deloria's (1999) comments on "the separation of knowledge into professional expertise and personal growth" being a barrier for students who identify as being both Aboriginal and traditional (p. 139).

Annabel's relationship with grades is conceptualized in Figure 1 by the dynamic interaction between identities and one's perceptions of agency in a particular context. Students like Annabel who rejected the role of grades as part of the ideal student rejected the role that grades played in shaping their student identities. By having a strong sense of self before university, Annabel was able to navigate some of the university structures, like grades, that could have been used to shape a sense of self at the university. In this manner, she demonstrated a sense of agency in shaping her identity inside the structures of the university.

Nonetheless, as Annabel had "always performed well in school" she could reject the ability of grades to structure her experience at university. How students positioned themselves in relation to grades demonstrates how they felt they were able to construct their own identity in the "figured world" of the university (Peña-Talameantes, 2013). Annabel demonstrated agency as a student, but her sense of agency was shaped by her situation as a student. As mentioned in the literature review, based on historical, social, psychological and cultural factors, some individuals feel that they have more or less agency than others in a context. In this case, these factors came together to make some students feel like they had a better ability to navigate the structures and be in charge of their own educational trajectory than others.

Grades were important factors that influenced students' decisions to go to university, their ability to stay at the university and even how they experienced the university. It should be noted that grades are a structure that has been put in place by the institution to measure students' performance. Students on the other hand, by interpreting grades as a key to their entrance and their experiences at university, used grades as the measure of how well they performed the student role. Grades, through funding or academic probation concerns, were the reason some students were forced to consider exiting the student role. In this sense, grades contributed to the narrative of struggle for some students who self-identified as Aboriginal.

Higgins' (1987) self-discrepancy theory proposes that incompatible beliefs create feelings of discomfort. It is not a far stretch to extend these incompatible beliefs to ways of being or learning at the university. In the introduction and literature review, several questions were asked regarding students' feelings of incongruity, separation, disjunction or disconnection at the university. For instance, do some Aboriginal students experience an incongruity between the expectations and ideals of the university and their own self-perceived attributes? If students experience a separation between their perceptions of themselves and how they should present themselves at university, how do they mediate the tensions between these two identities? Is one suppressed in favour of the other or is it an advantage to have both? Furthermore, can the feelings of distress resulting from this incongruity be a factor in the high attrition rates of Aboriginal students?

Emily discussed disjunction explicitly by voicing her identity conflicts and how she resolved them; different treatment at the University for Aboriginal students, and the subtle impact of separate programs for students who identify as Aboriginal. Emily

examined situations where she felt she was treated differently by campus administrators and counsellors and could not help but wonder if the difference in treatment was due to her being First Nations. Institutional racism is more difficult to spot than old-fashioned prejudice as it reflects structural biases (Morrison, Morrison, Harriman & Jewell, 2008). Academic structures, for instance, are generally believed to be neutral and established for the benefit of all students. Institutional racism, as such, can leave individuals like Emily feeling singled out and yet at the same time wondering if she is just taking things the wrong way. Perceiving differential treatment by university staff, coupled with a disbelief of one's own perceptions, would understandably be fertile territory for shaping identity discrepancies at the university.

For other participants, disconnects were present in certain definitions of the ideal student, students' practice of separating their selves and even more in students' educational trajectories and their reasons/goals for attending university. The occasional disconnect between students' educational trajectories and their end-goals at university relate to another question asked earlier in the thesis: do Aboriginal students define academic success in terms of graduation or attrition? As noted by Theresa's conception of comfort as success, not all students' definitions of success related to graduation. That does not mean that students did not have multiple definitions of success at university (Morrow & Ackermann, 2012). Theresa was happy to be at university but also considered finishing her degree an important goal. Most students mentioned a career goal that was abstract or otherwise distant in some way to their current educational trajectory. This may be common for students just beginning at university, where their ideas about university are shaped by friends and family and other students and where they find that their

expectations do not always match the reality of the university (Maunder et al., 2013). All students will feel some disconnects for different reasons at the university, which can lead to feelings of discomfort. One disconnect or discrepancy does not seem to be enough to make a student leave university. Especially if, based on the findings of Mallett et al. (2011) and Morrow and Ackermann (2012), the discrepancy does not affect a student's sense of belonging or motivation to persist at university.

The Aboriginal Student Achievement Program (ASAP) is an intervention that aims to diminish the attrition rates of students identified as Aboriginal at the university, which could be the result of a discrepancy in any of the eight themes in Figure 1. The success of such an intervention is debatable as Taylor and de la Sablonnière (2013) discuss the difficulty of designing any interventions for communities that have become dysfunctional, for instance, as a result of colonialism. A dysfunctional culture according to the authors is, "When a culture does not have a clearly defined set of long-term goals and no clearly articulated guidelines and scripts for achieving these goals, every individual member of the group is vulnerable to self-control challenges" (p. 24). For such cases, it is not enough to focus on individual intervention strategies, even if the community has designed the intervention, because the dysfunction is at the level of the normative structure and a collective intervention strategy is necessary.

Despite the attributes of Taylor and de la Sablonnière's (2013) model, their definition of culture does not fit well with the orientation of this research. Individuals subscribe to many cultural models to use as a normative guide. Peña-Talameantes' (2013) description of identity configuration being "the salience of various identities within a particular context and an individual's presentation of self to others within that context" is

a model that fits more with the perspective of this research (p. 269). Nonetheless, it remains relevant to examine the initiatives at the university that are designed to improve self-identified Aboriginal students' drop-out rates and educational attainment.

In Taylor and de la Sablonnière's (2013) model, the ASAP would be considered to be an individual intervention to a collective problem. Designing a program separate from the rest of the student population assumes that the students in this program require the intervention more than the academic structures of the university itself. On one hand, this form of intervention is necessary, as some students are being primed for struggle at the university. Emily says the education seems "to be more degraded, like *easier* on reserves." In such circumstances, there is a discrepancy between the education systems offered to students on-reserves and off-reserves making remedial programs necessary for students to get ahead at university. On the other hand, attrition that is influenced by the level of student engagement and ability to connect identity to curricula is an entrenched university wide problem, especially if engagement differs by student populations. In other words, it is a problem at the level of the university community that requires structural change at this level.

As long as the ways of doing of the university remain the same and its structures do not open up to include students that do not share these ways of doing (either because they do not have the skills, or they have a different approach to learning) then students who identify as Aboriginal will be separated from other students into "remedial" programs. Programs that are geared towards belonging are important to students, especially in the first few years and especially for those coming from reserves, but belonging is not motivation enough for students to remain at university (Morrow &

Ackermann, 2012). Furthermore, these programs could have an impact on how students see themselves, leading to a possible self-fulfilling prophecy. If a student is placed into a program because she is Aboriginal, because she is expected to struggle and do poorly academically, would it be surprising if she were to subsequently do poorly in school (Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004)?

Last but certainly not least, it should be noted that not all of the themes brought out in this research were unique to students who identified as Aboriginal. For instance, the importance of grades and the negotiation of university structures in theme five, or the existence of the ideal student would be characteristic of students more generally. Similarly, framing the university experience passively or actively was not unique to students who identified as Aboriginal. The participants I spoke to were inclined to do either one or the other with no particular pattern emerging. Astin (1999) frames passivity and agency in terms of a “locus of control.” He notes that past research has suggested, “Students’ degree of involvement in learning tasks can be influenced by whether they believe that their behavior is controlled by internal or by external factors” (p. 528). While students’ ways of speaking about the university may have been important indicators of performance, these indicators were not unique to students who identified as Aboriginal.

Other themes, such as the narrative of struggle, however, were common for students who identified as Aboriginal. The narrative of struggle was based on the assumption that because the students identify as Aboriginal, their university experiences would be marked by struggle and failure. The need for belonging also came through in participants stories, which, based on the research by Mallett et al. (2011) and Morrow and Ackermann (2012) was characteristic of minority students at the university. Finding

belonging in the ASC and the ASAP was, of course, unique to students who identified as Aboriginal.

The importance of having the support of family or creating surrogate families for support at university came out in participants' narratives. Theresa mentioned belonging being found in family, so forming connections to others, for her, meant embedding herself in a form of family. Similarly, Annabel expounded on the importance of the support of friends, family and her community for going to university because if not, it would be like "we're trying to do something without legs." If there was not already a family, the Family Education Model (FEM) could have been used to create an academic family by drawing on connections to professors and other students, as well as to theoretical perspectives drawn from scientific "ancestors," to situate their academic selves in an academic family.

Ideas about "the order of operations," in other words where students considered education to ideally fit in their life paths, were not unique to students who identified as Aboriginal. What may have differed for students who identified as Aboriginal was a feeling that they did not comply with this order of operations as well as other students. Emily and Theresa both felt that they did not follow the "order of operations." Theresa wished that she was able to and Emily, while proud of breaking with the order, hoped that her children would follow it. At the University of Saskatchewan, self-identified Aboriginal students tended to be older (40% as opposed to 20% of students who did not identify as Aboriginal were 19 years or older upon entering the university) and/or have children (students who self-identified as Aboriginal were five times more likely to have children than those who did not self-identify) (University of Saskatchewan, 2010). This

means that for many self-identified students, their university degree did not come after their high school education, and did not precede having children or a career. Students who identified as Aboriginal and believed that they did not follow the correct educational order of operations may have felt less like university is “for me” and/or it may have accentuated the narrative of struggle for these students.

Giving Back

Giving back to students during this research was measured by small acts. During the interviews, for instance, I would share information that I knew about services that are available on campus (about WeCar, a car sharing service on campus, or counselling services, for example). I shared stories of my own undergraduate experience that were occasionally relevant to the analysis, but served more to connect with and lend support to the participants to show that they were not alone in their student experiences. I also offered my support as an experienced student who is aware of academic requirements and academic resources on campus. For students who felt alone and without connections to other students, I let them know that I could be that connection. As it may have been difficult to transition from researcher to student relationship, only one of the students seemed to take me up on this offer. As part of giving back, I have shared my research with, not only academic conferences and seminars, but also a small group of students (mostly Aboriginal and international students) interested in discussing their educational experiences and with students at ASC. I plan to share the research in similar forums in the future.

Limitations

The sample population was chosen in order to ensure similarities between the narratives of the participants that would facilitate making comparisons and connections in the analysis of these narratives. This meant, however, that students who fell outside these advertised restrictions and who were interested in the research could not participate. Fewer participants were recruited than anticipated. The benefit of having few participants, nonetheless, is the ability to engage in more in-depth analyses.

Posters and formal presentations were less effective than personal connections to others to recruit participants in this research. When a research poster was placed on a door in the Aboriginal Students' Centre (which may have acted like a personal endorsement), more participants were recruited. In the future, recruitment would be much more fruitful if the research was better aligned with the pre-established structures and connections of on-going programs on campus.

The conversation approach to the interview was important for giving back to students and establishing a trusting connection with them. However, my own comments were generally not useful for analysis and did not always provide a segue for students to speak about their own experiences. Another limitation was my use of the terminology "hide" and "highlight" that carried a connotation of inauthenticity that students generally did not agree with. Students felt strongly about being "true to themselves" but my questions focused on roles and the presentation of multiple selves that seemed to be conveyed as inauthentic instead of agentic or contextual.

Directions for Future Research

This research provides a good base for researchers who intend on pursuing the educational experiences of students who identify as Aboriginal. In the future, it may be fruitful to compare the experiences of several different sample groups. For instance, the comparison of experiences from students who self-identify and do not self-identify as Aboriginal would show how students' perceptions of the other group's experiences match up to these experiences. Furthermore, aspects of student experiences would be less likely to be attributed to students being Aboriginal if other students shared the same experiences. As such, other factors that shape student experience could be further explored.

Future research should examine the experiences and opinions of students who identify as Aboriginal and who have already left the university³. This may, of course, be a difficult group to reach considering the difficulties of recruiting self-identified Aboriginal students attending university. Finally, it would be beneficial to listen to the experiences of students in different colleges at the University such as Engineering or Education as experiences can differ markedly for students pursuing different programs. Student experiences can be shaped, for instance, by different program structures or a decreased number of students who identify as Aboriginal attending the program (University of Saskatchewan, 2012b).

Combining other methods to the interview would also be beneficial. Striving for group participation in the analysis is useful for greater participant involvement and feedback; however, it is a method that is best implemented for samples that consider

³ Annabel also expounded on the importance of gathering this information in her interview. I think it is important to give her credit for her part in this recommendation.

themselves a community. In the current sample, not all students were able to establish a feeling of connection with the campus community. Another possible method would be a longitudinal journal approach where students could track their own experiences at university. This method would have the joint benefit of data collection as well as helping students make sense of their experience at university, especially at first when university is a tumultuous time for all students.

Finally, as the Aboriginal Students' Centre moves into the Gordon Oakes-Red Bear Student Centre, it would be interesting to see if a shift occurs in how students who identify as Aboriginal experience spaces and identities on campus. The prominence of the new building bringing more students into contact with the ASC could act as a bridge between Aboriginal and student individuals on campus. Instead of a space of belonging, which is also separate from the rest of the campus, the new ASC, being more central, could extend this feeling of belonging and comfort to other locations on campus.

Conclusion

As demonstrated previously, Aboriginal culture welcomes and comforts students in a supporting role but does not always seem relevant in an academic context. Connections to others and to oneself impact a students' engagement in classroom curricula and stereotypes about Aboriginal peoples and grades play an important role in shaping the experiences of students who identify as Aboriginal at university, their definition of success and even their decision to attend university. Furthermore, the "narrative of struggle" causes students to either frame themselves in relation to a non-Aboriginal reference group or question why Aboriginal educational success is framed in terms of exceptional individual cases rather than as a group norm. Students' experiences

vary, but their perception that the university is a positive place that puts them on a path towards a better self is prevalent.

This research about the experiences of students who identify as Aboriginal is a stepping-stone towards a better university experience for students. Knowing what students expect of the university aids the university in meeting these expectations. A better understanding of students' experiences at the university could aid the administration in understanding the role of culture, not only in the lives of students, but in the university itself.

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Appendix A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Getting to know you

Introduce myself (family, where from, why I decided to go to university, who was influential in this decision, my impressions)

1. How about you? What brought you to university?
 - a) What role did other people (family, community, teachers) play in your decision to go to university?
 - b) How would you describe your impressions of being a student at the university so far?
 - c) What kinds of expectations do you feel are placed on you by your professors? Yourself? Your family? Your friends?
 - d) Are you comfortable with these expectations? Are there any expectations you would change?

Main interview questions

2. Think of the three most important roles you play in your life. If you could assign a percentage to each, how much would each be a part of your life?
 - a) And your student role? Where does that fit in?
3. How would you describe the ideal university student?
4. How do you think you compare to this ideal university student?
5. In the past year, has there been a time where you felt like you needed to hide or highlight parts of yourself?

- a) Why? What parts?
- b) Are there places on campus you feel more comfortable than others?
- c) Do you think Aboriginal students experience university life differently or the same as non-Aboriginal students?
- d) Do you feel that you can be yourself at university, or do you feel like you have to put on a role when you come here?

Analysis:

- 6. If you were a consultant, considering what you've said so far, what advice would you give to university administrators based on Aboriginal students' identities at university and who they feel they have to become?
 - a) Is there a disconnect between identity in other places and identity at university?
 - b) What is the cause of this disconnect? (privilege, culture, university).

Appendix B

Post-interview:

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What year are you in?

2. What program are you in?

3. Before university, did you live in the city or the country? On or off reserve?

4. What Nation or community do you identify with?

5. Was your high school a provincial, private, or First Nations operated school?

6. Are you working or volunteering while attending school?

7. Do you have children/family you are supporting while going to school, or is your family supporting you?
