Emerging Whole From Native-Canadian Relations:
Mixed Ancestry Narratives

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Abstract

After hundreds of years of contact, the relationships between the people of Native Nations and the Canadian Nation are still filled with turmoil. This is common knowledge. What isn’t well known, are the personal consequences for children who have Native and non-Native ancestors. This thesis is written with the assistance of eight people of mixed ancestry, who share their experiences, ideas, strategies and dreams, to help others who are dealing with similar issues. This thesis has been organized around the dominant themes and commonalities that have emerged out of eight interviews, into four sections: CONTEXT, CHALLENGES, STRATEGIES & GIFTS. The context that mixed ancestry individuals are born into is complex. Euro-Canadian designs on Native lands and resources resulted in policies that had, and continue to have, a devastating effect on Native people. Legal manipulations of Native identity, in particular, have resulted in the emergence of hierarchies of belonging. Such hierarchies are maintained by enduring stereotypes of “Indianness” and “Whiteness”. For some mixed ancestry individuals, negotiating the polarized hierarchies of Native and Canadian societies can result in feelings of being split, and the need to harmonize aspects of the self, with varying social environments. Various strategies are used to deal with such issues, internally and externally. Ultimately, through choices, strategies and transformations, it is possible to transcend the challenges of mixed ancestry, and to lead more fulfilling lives. My hope is that this thesis will be of assistance to people of mixed ancestry and to those trying to understand the complexities of Native-Canadian relations, at least to the point of inspiring more discussions and research.
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Creator, Great Mother, Helping Ancestors and Spirits, to you I owe the greatest gratitude, for my life and health, and the wonderful opportunities, people and teachings that have come my way. Gitche Migwetch.
Who am I?

Aanii. My name is Dawn Marsden. I belong to the Mississaugas of Scugog First Nation and I am an off-reserve, Anishnaabe French Status Indian. I would like to share a small amount of detail about myself, since I believe it will provide a portrait of who I am as a writer, and hint at why I might comment the way I do. My father was born at Longford Mills, just a stone’s throw away from his mother’s reserve, now called Minjikaning First Nation. After several years of residential school, my father automatically became a non-Indian when he joined the Canadian Armed Forces. We regained our Indian status in the ‘80’s, after the proclamation of Bill C-31. My mother, recently rumoured to be Metis, was born in The Pas, a small northern French community in Manitoba. I spent my childhood years in Manitoba on a military base, with my parents, five siblings, cats and dogs. In 1968, my father relocated us to the west coast of British Columbia, where I grew up in a small town. After high school graduation, I spent eight years trying my hand at various odd jobs.

My curiosity satisfied, and tired of $5 dollar per hour jobs, I followed my interest in health and became a Public Health Inspector. Though the job was lucrative, the bureaucratic red tape pushed me to further my education. I obtained a double major in Anthropology and Environmental Studies at the University of Victoria, with a focus on Native issues. My interest in Native issues derived from my need to find out what it meant to be Native. The same burning curiosity led me to meet my Native relatives, from whom I had been isolated in British Columbia. Hearing more stories about my relations, I wanted to find out more about who my ancestors were, where they came from and what forces influenced them to make the decisions they did. Orally, my family knowledge goes back only about three generations on both sides,
with little facts being added every year to fill out the picture. For an understanding of the longer history of my family, I turned to books, records and documents written in English. In short, my family has over two hundred years of personal relations between, primarily, people of the Ojibway Nation, and French colonists.

**What am I writing about?**

As the title might suggest, I am continuing my study of what it means to be of mixed Native and non-Native ancestry. Throughout my undergraduate years I spent a lot of time with Native people, volunteering and attending a lot of Native events. Some of the greatest relief in my life was finding and talking to others with similar mixed ancestry backgrounds. Being of Native mixed ancestry juxtaposes ones identity and interests smack into the middle of the current and historical issues of Native-White relations. This may not seem important if you are mostly Native or mostly “White”; the advice often given by Native people is “you’re either Native or you’re not”. By non-Natives, the corollary is “you don’t look Native” or “you could pass for white if you...” which is supposed to mean that therefore, you don’t have to act or be aligned to Native people. It’s a matter of choice and allegiance, but it’s definitely not so simple.

The biggest issues that have come up for me and several others that I have talked to, had to do with legitimacy as a Native person, which includes legal definitions of Indianness, loss of Native culture through genocidal policies, issues of belonging, familial disintegration or dysfunction, racism and identity crises. The first two chapters, CONTEXT and CHALLENGES, will focus on a discussion of these issues, by looking at lived experiences. I consider these chapters to be a necessary foundation for understanding the importance of this kind of research.
After years of introspection and angst over these issues, I have come to a place where I also want to focus on positive change. I want to provide a useful reference for people working with issues of mixed ancestry. I know that many people of mixed ancestry survive these issues and go on to lead satisfying lives; but some do not. Are these issues really complex? What do they mean to people? If they really are personally detrimental issues, how do people get on with their lives, in spite of them? What about the future? The last two chapters, STRATEGIES and GIFTS, will focus on how some people of mixed ancestry create, maintain or promote a sense of wholeness in the face of being in the middle of Native-White relations.

Who am I writing for?

I am writing for anyone who will listen. I am a paper-evangelist who is seeking emancipation of mixed ancestry individuals from their experiences of pain, shame and feelings of fraudulence. I want to reach those who either are of mixed ancestry or who are working with issues of mixed ancestry. I want to provide a speck of light for young people who are dealing with these issues early, and for older people who are still struggling. I want to reach those who make the policies and the theories that influence them.

Why?

Mixed ancestry issues are not just personal issues with personal fixes; they are much, much more. Canadian society has and continues to foster divide and conquer policies with respect to Aboriginal peoples. If you’re Native, living on a reserve, you may be entitled to “this”
benefit, if you’re off reserve, non-status, you may be entitled to “that” benefit. The reality is that Native people are still suffering from the consequences of oppressive colonization. Divide and conquer Native peoples, not only their Nations; not only their communities; not only their families, but also their individuals, and you can have their land and resources (Adams, 1995). That’s the real issue. Colonization has been taking on more insidious tactics (than outright warfare) to gain Aboriginal lands and resources, for centuries. These have been called: the Indian Act, the Enfranchisement Act, Civilization, Progress, Assimilation, Education, Canadian Citizenship, the Canadian Mozaic, Child Welfare, the Multiculturalism Act, Aboriginal Self-Government, Justice, the Media, and a host of others. Legally, in the British way, Aboriginal Nations, territories, lands and resources have been recognized via the Canadian Constitution and Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Frideres, 1998). Native people have been promised innumerable times to be given reserved lands, hunting and fishing rights, money as reimbursement, medical services, education services, housing and more. What has been deliberately forgotten, is that these promises were made in exchange for use of land and resources belonging to Aboriginal peoples (Canada, 1992). Never-mind that most of these promises have never been fulfilled, or are now being silently eroded. Canada is primarily a colony on Native land.

The most destructive paperwork issued from the minds of men has been the utilitarian, legally restricted definition of human beings with respect to their cultural groupings (Frideres, 1998). The most heinous propaganda has been the rationalization of human rights abuses against such groups of people, in the name of Peace and Good Government for All. The experience of Aboriginal people in Canada is just one example of the colonization going on all over the world. My hypothesis is that if we can acknowledge the complexities and consequences of legal
definitions of Aboriginal identity, then we can begin to heal as a country of many Nations, or even as a world with diverse peoples. At the same time, I see mixed ancestry individuals as being in a unique position to broker such understanding by virtue of being “in both camps” ancestrally. Many mixed ancestry individuals take years to come to a good sense of who they are, because it takes figuring out Native-White relations. Perhaps if we all spare some more time to figure out Native-White relations earlier, we can work towards a more fulfilling future for all of us. Understanding the context, experiences, strategies and gifts of mixed ancestry is a good, intense start.

What's already been done?

I have searched through numerous libraries, community agencies and web sites, and have chatted with on-line newsgroups and various academics and students. A bibliography of some of these findings has been attached. Most of the work on issues of mixed ancestry has been done primarily in the United States. As a result, most of the books and articles focus on issues that pertain primarily to people of African American and Hispanic American descent. In Canada, relevant books and articles focus primarily on Native issues in general. Resources dealing specifically with issues of being of both Native and non-Native ancestry are suspiciously small in number, in both Canada and the United States. One of the conclusions of this thesis is that the minimalization of Native mixed ancestry issues is directly connected to the need to maintain rigid boundaries between Native Nations and the Canadian Nation.

One of the exceptions to the dearth in resources has been The Royal Commission Report on Aboriginal Peoples (1996), which includes many articles on the context and experiences of
mixed ancestry individuals, primarily of Metis and urban groups. Many of the books dealing with identity politics, notably *Clash of Identities* (1996), edited by James Littleton, and ‘Race’, *Culture & Difference* (1992), edited by James Donald and Ali Rattansi, speak about some of the issues raised in this thesis, primarily from post-structural, post-colonial and anti-racist approaches. Native mixed ancestry has been addressed in a few literary works dealing with issues of mixed ancestry, including Drew Hayden Taylor’s humorous, *Funny, You Don’t Look Like One* (1998), Marilyn Dumont’s *A Really Good Brown Girl* (1996), Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed* (1973), Beatrice Culleton’s *April Raintree* (1984), William Penn’s *As We Are Now* (1997), and Carol Camper’s *Miscegenation Blues* (1995). The largest body of research on identity, self-concepts and issues of ethnicity, has been done in the areas of psychology, counseling and sociology; although, even here, there is little specific mention of Native mixed ancestry issues. I am particularly attached to R. Clance’s *Imposter Phenomena* (1985), which deals with feelings of fraudulence, their antecedents and resolution. Fraudulence is a common feeling for people of mixed ancestry. I believe this work is a good model for addressing mixed ancestry issues therapeutically, although to apply it to mixed ancestry, the theory about antecedents will have to be modified. Michael Garrett, in “Two People”: *An American Indian Narrative of Bicultural Identity*” (1996), applies Acculturation and Bicultural Identity Development models to the narrative of an American Indian Elder and draws out themes and conclusions that are similar to those that have emerged in this thesis. My difficulty with this work is that I, and similar others, would be identified as “marginal” people developing into “biculturally competent” people; it’s as if mixed ancestry people who are not fluent in all of their ancestral cultures are somehow “less than” those who are. Through the on-line Aboriginal education newsgroup *Voices*, I have heard of two works in progress that deal specifically with
issues of mixed ancestry, based at Ontario Universities. In BC, research on the effects of Bill C-31 on women has been undertaken at the community level. With this thesis, I hope to increase discussion in an area that is seriously lacking in attention.

How is this project relevant?

Why I’m doing this kind of research, discussed above, relates strongly to how relevant it is. Public exploration of mixed ancestry context, experience, strategies and gifts makes mixed ancestry people and related issues more visible. It provides and promotes acknowledgment of the causes and consequences of Native-White relations, which is a good foundation for any action for positive change in Canadian society. The Canadian education system, in general, requires such in-depth inquiry, to inform the policies, curriculum and services that affect Native people, especially mixed ancestry individuals, and to inform future participants in Canadian society about some of the challenges, consequences, strategies and gifts that Native-White relations can create. This thesis can provide a model for analyzing aspects of intercultural conflict and conflict resolution, by promoting collaborative critical phenomenological, ethnographic analysis of collections of narratives within larger narratives/discourses (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

How did I do the study?

My inclination is toward efficient, concise, simple, personal and wholistic forms of research. My background is in public health, cultural anthropology and scientific method. I am
a person of Native mixed ancestry. Accordingly, I chose to do short, 1 to 2 hour interviews, addressing a limited number of open ended questions, with opportunities for feedback and suggestions during the writing of this thesis. The research proposal was approved by my thesis committee and by the UBC Ethics Review Committee. These are the questions that I asked:

1. As a person of both Native and non-Native ancestry, how do you identify yourself?
2. What are, or have been, the challenges to how you identify yourself?
3. How have you created or maintained a sense of wholeness in the face of such challenges?
4. If you could give advice to young people struggling with these challenges, what would you say?

The last question was added during the first interview, as it seemed necessary for the collection of information relevant to creating a useful resource. Upon written consent, I conducted audiotaped interviews at the contributor’s homes for a duration of an hour and a half. To prevent disruption of the interviews, and to give my attention to a more wholistic memory of the discussions that took place, I did not take notes during or after the interviews; I find that what I remember contextually is often the most important to my current learning process.

I transcribed the interviews, and then derived an outline from what I intuited as the primary themes and commonalities arising from the interviews. I checked these intuitions by paying attention to the importance of the themes to the participants, and the number of re-occurrences of those themes throughout all of the interviews. Each revision was checked with the participants to ensure that their words were being used appropriately. Some quotes were
relevant to more than one section. When re-organizing them, I had to decide which were the
most appropriate sections to include them in. You readers can make your own relational leaps of
understanding as you make your way through this thesis. Books, documents and records, written
in English have been used to corroborate some of the statements regarding historical events, for
those who may question the truth of such claims. The experiences and meanings attributed them
will have to be accepted as the personally unique truths they are.

One of the most important decisions I made, regarding the writing of this thesis, had to
do with the incorporation of the contributor’s narratives. I decided to stay away from
interpreting, because I did not want to demean the powerful words that were spoken. Instead, I
chose to comment on the ideas and issues that people’s words inspired in me. As such, the
teachings contributed to this research project have been placed along side my own experiences
and comments, within the framework derived from the interviews.

In the writing of this type of thesis, organizational problems are encountered when
discussing the past, present and future within the same sections, and when discussing issues from
my perspective as a person that is affected by some, but not all of the issues present (see
“Impressionist Tales” in Van Maanen, 1988). These problems are important to note throughout
the reading of this thesis as they are related to the subject of being of mixed ancestry, undertaken
by this thesis. When writing about Native people or the treatment of them in the past, present or
future, I tend to distance my self with the use of “they”, or “them”; this is a reflection of how
distant the issues being described are, to my personal experience. I have not experienced
everything that all Native people have, but some I identify more with, through my experiences or
those of my family or friends. There may even be occasions when I am identifying with being of
non-Native descent. In these cases I include myself in my writing by using “we”, or “us”.

Occasionally I will include the reader in this thesis, by using “you” or “one” or similar pronouns. The same shifting is seen in the terminology that I use. For example, I will use the term “Indian” when I am discussing documentation or time periods that uses such terminology and also when the attitudes being discussed relate to those issues or time periods. The difficult task, for both you and I, is to shift and change with the context being represented. Perhaps this experience will help you to understand a little more about the schisms and confusion that being of mixed ancestry can create.

*Who was involved, and how?*

I am privileged to have met and gotten to know the people who have contributed to this research project. My initial desire to pursue a Master’s degree in this subject area arose from my discussion of mixed ancestry issues with mixed ancestry acquaintances and with members of the Victoria Native Friendship Centre mixed ancestry group. In our discussions, there was an agreement that issues that people of mixed ancestry face, have been deliberately and consequently made invisible; they have not been adequately acknowledged by either Native or non-Native people, in general. We agreed that it’s time for these these issues to be addressed.

I started to discuss my interest in researching the issues that were raised in our discussions with old acquaintances and anyone who cared to listen. Some Native relatives were satisfied that I was continuing my education, but were not that interested in the academic details; they were really not interested in having their opinions recorded. Such a response by Native people not involved in the academic world, and by people who have historically been abused by such research, is not surprising. What is surprising is that many mixed ancestry people who
heard of my research interests expressed their interest in being part of this research project. There must be many important stories that need telling, so much so that fears of appropriation or misrepresentation have become secondary. After my research proposal was approved, I approached eight people who had expressed the keenest interest, and invited them to participate. They agreed, without reservations. Five of them were women, three were men. The ages ranged from twenty-one to seventy-three. The ancestral backgrounds included Salish, Cree, Ojibway, Mohawk, Scottish, French and English. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of the contributors, to prevent repercussions from either Native or non-Native peoples who may wish the challenges of mixed ancestry to remain invisible.

The voices of those mixed ancestry individuals who were raised submerged within Native culture alone are absent, as are the voices of those who were raised in the Metis culture. I speculate that this is a common phenomenon with opportunistic, snowball research methods (Miles & Huberman, 1994) when combined with collecting narratives; that is, word-of-mouth tends to secure participation by individuals with similar points of view.

The most important factor about the people who have contributed to this thesis is that they are human beings deserving of respect for who they are and for the wisdom that they have offered to share. This thesis would not have been created without their generous participation. The fact that I became friends with them all and had long talks with all of them before the audiotaped interviews has ensured that the information and experiences shared with us in this thesis are deep. This is a privilege akin to being invited into a person’s home for a special dinner. The words that are shared here belong to those who spoke them and it is my duty and yours not to disrespect them in any way, as if they were the words of your gracious host. Gitche Migwetch.
Section One: CONTEXT

Being concurrently Native and non-Native is concretely incompatible. Native and non-Native peoples in Canada have been polarized around the inter-related issues of land, resources and culture, since the first colonists arrived (Schmalz, 1991). To control and coerce the transfer of lands and resources, the Canadian government has set out to diminish Native solidarity by dividing Native people into discrete groups, often with arbitrary boundaries that do not reflect traditional groupings, and by attacking the cultural foundation that sustains Native ways of being. The resultant genocidal and assimilative policies have wrought much havoc on the lives of Native people, and mixed ancestry individuals in particular (Canada, 1996).

At one time, Native people were considered sub-human and undeserving of the rights of Canadian citizenry, within their own land (Schmalz, 1991). They could not vote, become soldiers, become educated, drink publicly or privately, and they could not leave their reserve lands without passes. With the British North America Act of 1867, and the Indian Act of 1876 (and subsequent amendments), Native people were considered wards of the state and hence incapable of making decisions regarding their lands, resources, justice, education, health and the raising of their children. With the destruction of Native subsistence strategies through the fur trade and colony encroachment of hunting, fishing, gathering and agricultural grounds, many Native people were forced to rely on the goods and dollars promised in trade for use of traditional lands (Schmalz, 1991). It is a historical fact that many, if not most of the treaty agreements, were not fulfilled. Many references, including those at the end of this thesis will corroborate this fraudulence. The reliance on nothing, or limited and poor quality goods often leads to extreme poverty, starvation, poor health, et cetera, which in turn leads to all kinds of
social and economic problems.

It is not coincidental that at the same time that the quality of life for Native people was disintegrating, an Act was passed, the [dis-] Enfranchisement Act. Native people were offered citizenship as Canadians, with all the associated rights and privileges, if they would give up their status as Indians and leave their lands and families for “a better life” in the towns and cities of the Canadian colonies (Frideres, 1998).

For those Native people that found ways to survive, further coercion was added to influence the giving up of Native status, rights and privileges. The children of Native people were taken from parents, often forcibly and under the penalty of imprisonment, to be educated at schools which were run with the cooperation of the churches, the government, the RCMP, industries, institutions and the local non-Native peoples (Nuu-cha-nulth Tribal Council, 1996). All of these groups benefited from the forced labour and abuse of little children. Some day-schools were added, to enable the cheaper education of Indian children, near their families (Barman et al, 1986-7). The primary objective of these schools was to assimilate future generations of Native people into the non-Native society, through violent personal and cultural erosion, also known as assimilation (Nuu-cha-nulth Tribal Council, 1996). If you take the “Indian” out of the Indians, then the retention of lands through population based arguments is up for debate. If by legal definition there are no Native people on Native territories, then the land can be absorbed, squatter’s fashion, into the Canadian societal entity. Native people were not allowed, for most of the last two centuries, to be educated beyond grade eight or beyond industrial or domestic skills; this ensured that there were few Native people with the academic skills necessary for emancipation of Native Nations through abstract means. Native people have often been at a disadvantage when resorting to Euro-Canadian courts or negotiations, because
many of the processes, criteria and philosophies are foreign to Native Nations. When Native people do acquire the legal and bureaucratic skills to enter into Canadian processes, it is sometimes referred to as fighting paper with paper, or using Canadian legal system against itself.

Faced by the imposition of losing their children and restrictions on their quality of life, opportunities for education, work and travel, many Native people chose to give up their Indian Status and rights to Native land and Treaty rights. Wouldn’t you? It was also law that any Native woman marrying a non-Native man became a non-Indian; this ensured that the estates of non-Native men were not inherited by Native people (Adams, 1995). The marriage of Native men to non-Native women was not considered a serious threat, since such relationships were considered unlikely. In addition, the assets that might have been lost through women were considered minimal, since assets were controlled by men, in the imported European systems. Native men marrying non-Native women did not lose their Indian Status. Whole generations of Native people today are, by legal definition, not considered Native because they either gave up their Indian identity, or automatically lost their identity in their choices, or their parents choices to create viable livelihoods. Though Bill C-31 (Frideres, 1998) was created to return status to these disenfranchised Natives, including myself, continuing social and economic poverty has ensured that Native people are further divided, by fights for personal livelihood through personal manipulation of limited land and resources. The in-fighting techniques, or hierarchies of belonging as I call them, are based on the imposed concepts of blood quantum and upon the perceived possession (of self or others) of cultural knowledge.

Cultural knowledge may seem to be a good basis for discrimination and distribution of land and resources until we remember that the Canadian government was counting on disruption of Native solidarity through cultural genocide. Assimilative legislation and policies may have
been extremely destructive, but they did not completely eliminate people’s identity as Native. As we know, children pick up the values and habits of their parents at a very early age (Santrock, 1993). Many people who left the reserve or who were educated at residential schools retained some sense of their "Nativeness" and allegiance to their original communities, through the values and habits passed on during childhood. Efforts over the last 30 years, or so, of many organizations and individuals, have stimulated a revitalization, a revaluing of Native lifeways by people on and off reserves. The shame or detriment that led people to hide their Nativeness, is being opened up to healing, hope and a renewed sense of pride in being Native. It’s okay for all those Natives, and their issues, to come out of the proverbial closet now.

Blood quantum is the establishment of Indian status by counting Native ancestors. Although Canadian registration of Status Indians does not use this terminology, it does use the process. The more Native ancestors you have, the more Native “blood” you have, the more Native you are, right? By using blood quantum to determine Nativeness, you open a whole divisive can of worms. Percentages and fractions of blood or ancestry have been used by government for so long, to divide Native peoples, that the technique has often been adopted by Native people themselves to delineate legitimacy and justify consequent policies for access to land and resources (Boyko, 1995). While most people recognize that there is more to Nativeness than blood quantum or status definitions, just what Nativeness or Indianness is, is hotly under debate, for the same divide and conquer reasons mentioned before. Ever heard the racist comment “Indians can never agree on anything”? There may be a grain of truth, but it has more to do with the tactics of the Canadian government than it does with Native people’s interpersonal skills.

The consequent paring down of Aboriginal rights, by population, has resulted in a
division of Native individuals, communities and Nations by determination and enforcement of
blood-quantum and cultural ("traditional") identities. Mixed ancestry individuals have been
coerced, alongside other Natives, to identify themselves as citizens of Canada. The varying
physical attributes of mixed ancestry individuals have had a great influence on our ability to
"blend in". The more caucasian, or "white" someone looks, the more they can pass the
Canadian gauntlet, the more privileged they are. The easier it is to "pass" the more pressure
there is to adopt a "Canadian identity": from those Native people who are pushing such people
out, and from those non-Natives who are "saving" such people for their own good. The
influence of appearance is complicated by how Canadian, or how "White" or how non-Native
someone acts. By the terms "white" and "White", I am referring firstly to fair skin colour, and
secondly in the Native sense, to people who have maintained oppressive colonizing attitudes.
Kieth Bass provides a more in-depth treatise of this phenomena in his book called *Portraits of
on the Canadian hierarchies of belonging, and on the Native hierarchies of belonging.
Hierarchies of belonging are themselves contextual, dynamic and dependent upon the point of
view and relationships of the observer. A theoretical example of a Native hierarchy, based on
my own personal experience, is portrayed on the next page (Figure 1). Notice how the Native
hierarchy is intimately associated with Canadian definitions, and with Canadian hierarchies.
Emerging Whole...

Who are you and where're you from?

Traditional Rez Indian Status Brown Non Treaty

Off-Reserve Indian or Not Too White/Not Indian Enough

Wannabe New Age Indian Born-Again Indian Real Indian

Halfbreed Mixed Bloods Hybrid Metis Bill C-31

Assimilated Urban Non-Status White Apple

Turning Indian

Figure 1: Sample of a hierarchy of belonging and how it connects to other hierarchies.
The term "turning Indian" is used in the diagram to show how hierarchies may be linked. If we flip the Native hierarchy upside down, we can add a Canadian hierarchy above it. The polarization between Native and Canadian societies can be portrayed if we note how becoming less Native is sometimes seen as coincident with becoming more "White".

In the rest of this section, I will attempt to create a more in-depth and personal understanding of the context that mixed ancestry people have been born from, and into. This will entail an integration of the historical statements presented previously, personal comments of the contributors to this thesis about living within such a context, and my personal take on the relationship between history and mixed ancestry experience.

**Legal Identities & Historical Relations**

*Shiatox* – And my Dad would tell us we weren’t Indian. But he would tell us we were Scottish, because his father was half Scottish, and ah, his own Father had given up his Indian status so that he could own land, and ah, drink, drink with his buddies, and vote. So he said we’re not Indian because we can do all those things. And this was before Status Indians got the vote.

In this narrative we are shown how, three generations ago, families were forced to make the decision not to identify themselves as Indian, to gain the ordinary rights of human beings. It is congruent with the then-current attitudes and legal definitions of Indians as incompetent, wards of the state, and indicative of the ever-present perception of Native people as uncivilized. Those who sought to distance themselves from these attitudes and barriers were offered a legal route to deny their Indianness through the Enfranchisement Act. Between 1876 and 1985, 20,788 Native people officially became Enfranchised (Frideres, 1998). Native people did not get
the vote until 1960, long after other immigrants and women were considered full citizens (Frideres, 1998). Denied an opportunity to participate in the decision making that affected their lives, and denied the ordinary rights of Canadian citizenship, it was prudent to self-identify as non-Indian.

Indian Status was and is a fictitious creation, used to manipulate Native people, to destabilize First Nations, and to co-opt their lands and resources. Most Native people know that Indian Status is fictitious, with extreme political, financial and social consequences. For many, becoming Canadian citizens branded them traitors in the eyes of Native people. Many that chose to distance themselves from official definitions of Indianness, who perhaps chose Enfranchisement, are clear about the limitations of this fiction. We hear again from Shiatox who shares her own family’s awareness of this fact:

Shiatox - I guess one example of our language is related to the whole identity thing, where my father had told us we weren’t Indian. On the other hand he would always say to us that we were Xwelmexw, and that we were real Xwelmexw. And his translation of that was that we were real Indian. But I think he was making a distinction between the Indian of ah, that legal definition, and what a real Indian was. A real person of the people who we come from. So that was a bit confusing there too. Um, but ah, but it did make me understand that ah, to know, to be an Indian in that legal sense, was something to be disdained. And that to be a Xwelmexw, was something to be proud of. Because that was the term that he’d use at home, that he would say that we were. That’s what we were. So, that was, that was a little language um, I guess, what would we call it, a paradigm of understanding, uh, who we were. So when we were home, it was nice to feel real. But when we were outside of home, it was another thing that we were. And there was very clear distinctions. In terms of how you were treated.

At the same time that Native people are aware of the limitations of legal Indian Status, there is a great consciousness that there is much more to Nativeness than simple definitions. We are real people, with long family histories as people of the great Nations of this land. The
“Catch-22” is that to rebuild these Nations culturally, socially and economically, we must often rely on the financial budgets given to us by the Canadian government. These are not hand-outs. Remember how assets were and are now being promised by the Canadian government in exchange for First Nation lands and resources. Historically these assets were held in trust, since Native people were not considered competent, under the Indian Act, to administer their own communities. With the new Canadian Constitution Act of 1982, the Aboriginal rights proclaimed in the Royal Proclamation of 1763 were re-acknowledged. Native people were deemed competent and entitled to self-government. Since then, First Nations have been negotiating the transfer of assets and their administration, with the Canadian governments. In a reluctant paternal way, the Canadian governments have been slow to allow First Nations independence. Many First Nations projects die because government officials are not confident about their potential success. Typically, funding disbursements are short-term, which makes it difficult to do long-term planning and to see long-term results (Frideres, 1998). Some of the reluctance, I believe, comes from a sense that, since Canadian bureaucracy has been in control of the lands, resources and funds for so long, it has rights to some of them. Just think of the money that will be saved by dissolving the Indian Affairs bureaucracy! Media coverage and political lobbying by Canadian citizens and organizations who do not want to acknowledge Aboriginal title and rights, has ensured that any process for self-determination by Native peoples is delayed even further.

During the negotiations for self-government for First Nations, there has been another process taking place within Native communities to make use of the resources returned by the Federal government. Legal definitions of Indianness, Status and non-Status have historically conferred different rights and obligations. Most First Nations are comprised of people with and
without Status. Government transfer of funds for social programs, health and education are often determined by numbers of Status individuals alone (Frideres, 1998). To provide services for individuals without Status, funds are sometimes used from the profits created through Band run economic development projects.

For many communities, legal definitions of Nativeness have been adopted to distribute funds and services, which leads to repercussions in the community. Most First Nations communities, or Bands, are made up primarily of a small number of families, with unofficial organization roughly following traditional patterns. In impoverished conditions, who sits on the imposed council systems often determines which individuals have the greatest access to funds and services. I can hear a roar of angry people as I write this, since it exposes the corruptness of some Native individuals as well as the conditions which have forced the emergence of such corruption. To ensure a more balanced view of Native communities in general, I have to mention that most Native communities are committed to creating healthy self-government. Many bands have pooled their resources to make economic and social development more viable. It's not a new situation, fighting for survival, but my hope is that with true self-government, a return of lands and assets to First Nations, and a renewal of spiritual and cultural values and health, such corruptness will no longer be necessary.

Shiatox - I guess one other challenge is ah, I guess dealing with the issue of status and non-status, I’m non-status right now, and determining how important it is for me to be recognized legally under the Indian Act. Our communities are wrought with issues surrounding this ah, status, non-status issue. For me, I think that ah, becoming a part of my community, by regaining my status, might give me a stronger sense of belonging to the community, because it’s a reference point for the community, this status, non-status issue. So although I’m ah, Sto:lo, and recognized as Sto:lo, the community know who I am and who my family is, I still don’t have the same participation in the community that I might have if I were status. I don’t agree with the Federal Government determining
whether I can be a part of my community or not. The communities are wrestling with the break-apart, the past break up of the communities and ah, how they're going to put it together again: considering the issue of resources and politics and land and all of this. So we've been left in a quagmire of being have-nots trying to have and making sure that the pie isn't ha, ha, cut into, sliced into too many slices. So that's probably another issue that's related to my identity that's a difficult one.

And actually in ah, in our language, in our culture there, there was a class system. And the class system there was four levels. One was the Siem which were the leaders, or the respected persons. And then there were the Smel'ath, they were the worthy people. And there were the S'texem who were the worthless people. And there were the slaves. I can't remember the term for the slaves. But what interested me were the terms for worthy people and for worthless people. And for the worthy, to be a worthy person was to know who you were; and to be a worthless person meant you didn't know who you were. And that struck such a chord in me in terms of growing up and not knowing who I was. And knowing that, and learning that it was a deliberate governmental, it was a deliberate effort of the government to create a people called Indian. And to do away with the people who call themselves their own names. And to be placed in society as a worthless person. And then, so to be a worthless person even in Canadian terms, was ah, associated with not knowing who you were. And to be worthy was somebody who knew their history of their family. So, um, so I, I was amazed at how these terms helped me to understand even what the government had done to us. In, in taking away our understanding of our own identities.

The relationships between Native individuals, as culturally embedded beings, have been strongly affected by Canadian definitions of Indianness. In some communities, like the one described above, as Status confers legitimate access to Band funds disbursed by the Canadian government, it also confers legitimate access to traditional networks and ceremonies, to feelings of belonging to a community.

Not officially belonging to a Native community is often related to historical perceptions of outsiders and insiders. Insiders are those people of a Native community who are intimately related to others through ties of blood, marriage, reciprocity and shared experiences. Outsiders may be accepted conditionally through ties of marriage, reciprocity and shared experiences, but are not truly of the community until they establish ties of blood, through Indian Status, or
through the birth of children from community blood lines. Outsiders, without blood ties are always suspect; they may leave the community, with all their acquired assets and go back to where they came from. Completing research in a Native community is a good example of this. Non-Native researchers and even Native researchers who did not live in the community are always suspected of questionable ethics regarding their relationships with the people of the community. Are the ties of marriage, reciprocity and shared experiences just temporary, and convenient for facilitating the consumption of the Native knowledge holders? How will the community benefit by including such outsiders? How will the community suffer by giving access to such outsiders? The relationships between Native people, their communities and perceived outsiders are complex and complicated by the imposed and adopted legal definitions of Nativeness (aka Indianness).

Roxanne — I'm in an awkward position because I can't claim my right to my father, even though I know who my father is, I can't claim the right to him. And so, it has become phenomenally poor, heh heh, and I just can't be bothered with the politics. So I just don't get into it, other than I acknowledge who my father is and that he was born in Saanich and that I was born there. And you know, because I don't have, at this point anyway, have a legal piece of paper.

One of the most ambiguous taboos is against the intermarriage or interrelationship of Native and non-Native peoples. Arising from the long-standing stereotypes of Natives as subhuman or uncivilized, non-Native peoples have considered such relationships very undesirable. The offspring of such relationships have been considered abominations or mongrels, creatures that express the worst traits of both "races". An exception to this taboo has been the use of intermarriage or interrelationship between Native and non-Native peoples to acquire access to
Native lands and resources. At one time, the French colonizers promoted a policy of taking on "customary wives" by soldiers and traders, to influence better relations with the Indians (Schmalz, 1991). If the French could, forcibly or willingly, create ties of blood to Native Nations, military and trade agreements could be brokered. This policy succeeded as long as it was useful to both Native and non-Native Nations. The irony is that in attempting to exert greater control over Native people through blood ties, Native people were able to exert greater control over non-Natives. Men who married into Native families, and their mixed blood children often stayed and became aligned to their Native communities. Promises of military alignment often turned the tides in the battles between non-Natives, and between Native Nations. Occasionally, men who married in or who were of mixed ancestry were disinherited by European families, like my great ancestor, to prevent a loss of family assets to the "sauvage". Many of these became voyageurs and couriers de bois, who were instrumental in maintaining the trade and military alliances between Native and non-Native communities (see Figure 2). After the consequences of customary wife policies were understood and no longer considered advantageous, the taboo was reset.

In the recent past, as in the example of Roxanne above, relations and the creation of children between Native and non-Native people are often kept secret, to respect the taboo and to maintain illusory family structures, and consequently, access to familial assets and privileges. Obtaining Status is sometimes an official and public acknowledgement of those relations. The rigid, ancestral documentation required by the Department of Indian Affairs is recognized as acceptable proof of Native bloodlines by many Natives. "Real Indian"
acknowledgement may have alternate criteria. For many people of mixed ancestry, and other Natives, who may have become outcast through the choices of their ancestors, it is the only avenue to reestablishing real ties to their original communities. As can be imagined, this is resented by some of those people whose families have remained in the communities, for better or worse. How can you call yourself Indian if you’ve never lived on reserve or in the community? Who have your elders, your teachers or your healers been? How can you ask for some of the assets, lands or privileges if you have no knowledge of the community or the culture? After you left us? The assumption, of course, is that there is no retention of, or affinity with Native values, family ties or lifeways, that there are only utilitarian reasons for seeking reassociation. These charges are often complicated by limited funds, limited housing, limited
services and the related fear that there won’t be enough to go around.

Not all Native people are associated with Native communities, bands or reserves. With Bill C-31, many people regained Indian Status without returning to their communities. Separate funds out of the same Indian Affairs coffer were relegated to providing assets and services to those Native people commonly referred to as “Bill C-31ers”. As mentioned previously, this Bill was enacted to address the inequalities inherent in the Enfranchisement Act, to acknowledge that Native people need not give up their heritage to access the rights and privileges of Canadian citizenship. The most common understanding of Bill C-31ers is that they are the children of women who married out; this meaning often carries with it the same traitorous accusations as with leaving the community of origin. If there is a cold war going on, what can be more traitorous than the creation of more non-Native, potential soldiers, by Native women; especially when there should be the creation of more potential Natives warriors for resistance. Native people eligible for Bill C-31 consideration also includes those educated beyond grade eight, members of the Canadian Armed Forces, professionals or clergy, and Native women who married non-Native men (Frideres, 1998). Bill C-31, by the manipulation of its meaning, is often used to position people in Native hierarchies of belonging. For many reasons, some that we have discussed in the introduction and in this section, some Native people are reluctant to regain their Indian Status. Bugsey, below, talks about some of the thoughts that arise around regaining Indian Status.

**Bugsey** – I guess right in the beginning, back in 1986 when Bill C-31 was passed, the first question was whether or not to apply for status. And of course with status comes a certain amount of privilege. And at first I thought that um, I didn’t feel as if I was worthy, naw, that’s not the right word. I didn’t feel it was intended for me to get status. I felt it was more for people who had a higher blood quantum. I guess, ah, I didn’t want
to be taking something away from someone else when I applied for status. And that was something that went on for quite a long time. Ah, as time passed it was pointed out that I could go back to school and that I could get some funding to go back to school and I had always had a very strong desire to go back to school someday. Well, I even used to say, when I retire I'm going to go back to school, I'm going to go to university, and learn about all the things I want to know about. And so, the realization that I could have that, made it really difficult to say ok, I'm going to go there and do that, because I felt that if I did it, I would take the place of someone else who maybe had a stronger ancestral connection and I felt that I didn't want to take something away from someone else.

Some Native people were coerced to give up their identity as Natives or were automatically redefined by their educational or employment status as non-Native, to ensure a decline in the numbers of Native people entitled to lands, resources and funds held in trust. Is it fair to blame disenfranchised Native people for their disenfranchising?

There is another legal definition that needs to be mentioned. Most current documentation referring to Aboriginal people in Canada includes “First Nations, Inuit and Metis”. Inuit refers to the Aboriginal peoples of northern North America. The term “Metis”, meaning half-breed in French, was coined specifically to refer to the French-Indian followers of Louis Riel in the Red River area of Canada and the United States. At the same time and place, there were also “Half-Breeds” of primarily English and Native descent who did not identify with the Metis movement (Frideres, 1998). A very specific Metis culture has arisen out of the Metis movement. While most people of mixed ancestry are welcomed as members of the Metis Nation, there are still political agendas involved, adequate to set up another hierarchy of belonging related to connections to the original Metis cultural and political founders. None of the people in this research project, myself included, identifies as Metis, which is the most common term applied to people of mixed ancestry. People of mixed ancestry are as diverse as the First Nations and Canadian ethnic groups they originated from.
Religion and the Residential School Era

Gabriel - And when I went into St. Clavier’s School in Spanish, I think there was a psychological attack on your very being, what you were, and in that nature. But looking back, I was able to look above that; I don’t know, I just knew there was a double standard. I didn’t know what they were trying to do was to destroy my thinking and self-image. It was wrong. I didn’t suffer any physical harassment; it’s all the emotional, psychological stress that you encountered at the school, on your values and character. The value of yourself: were you as good or were you as bad as the rest of them? Was it true, what stayed in your mind, about being a fourth class type of person? You would never make anything of yourself. Those were challenges to me. If anyone said that to me, it was a direct challenge because I knew that there was a double standard in the school.

I think the biggest thing I learned at school was the standards, the double standards: how the Native people were treated in respect to the accommodations and dining area. A lot of different standards. Because, the reason I knew that, because I worked in the kitchen. We were given the essentials to live. We knew that butter was restricted, we knew what butter was, we made it after school, but all we ever got was lard. There was a very rigid structure being taught: we couldn’t talk when reading, we couldn’t talk until spoken to. From that I can identify what areas were most difficult. But I can’t really say that I found it very difficult.

I think the procedural factors at the residential schools, tried to destroy ones self-image and confidence. The identity crisis set in, creating the doubts that you were strong enough to look at both sides, that you would know why it was happening. But I didn’t actually know what was happening, why the put downs were there. We didn’t volunteer to go there. The irony I could see at the time, the teacher teaching us about good character was abusing the whole structure, the good and the bad I guess. The Nazi Germans were the most skilled, refined and educated people in the military. Then, they were opposite in behaviour, they were the crudest. I think in history this is a comparison, comparing the two extremes. We had two priests that came over from Germany. Our own Native guys used to bug them, kind of like pay back time. However they treated me well. I never had any physical abuse, that I know of. I don’t know why that is. I finished grade eight when I was 13. [How old were you supposed to be when they’d let you go?] I think it was 16. Some guys stayed on until they were 21, started at six years old. I don’t know if they had a place to stay, maybe they were orphans or were unwanted in society, even in their home reserves. I never had any visits. Not having a father and a mother. It was kind of a hard time, at Christmas, not getting any visits, hardly any letters, one a year. Two fellows that were with me from Rama, we stuck together, that was a close friendship. There were other guys that stuck up for each other from other reserves. [I heard you spoke fluent Ojibway]. Yes, at one time. That was part of the discrimination, that people couldn’t speak their language. You could only speak
English. And if you wanted to speak, you had to go out in the fields. You worked in the morning, you'd whisper, you didn't want to get the whip. Oh yes, instant justice, so called. But you knew the rules, you know. But you stretched the rules a bit, if you could get away with it. You were in uniform. You were assigned, I was assigned making trousers and shirts. Everybody wore a uniform in khaki, jodpur type of pants and khaki shirt. So that prepared me for the army quite well. The army was a piece of cake after that experience. Better food, that's for sure.

I guess the biggest obstacle would be no educational basis to where you think you should or could be. We were restricted to grade eight, suppressed to a specific level

The experiences shared by Gabriel, above, remind us that children of mixed ancestry were also targets of assimilation, lest there be any remnants of connection to their Native heritage and culture. The same humanity denying techniques were used to create a double standard, where non-Natives enjoy the fruits of children's hard labour, and where little children were attacked on a very deep level: their sense of self-worth (Miller, 1996). Devoid of self confidence, shamed or beaten for any hints of Native language or culture, and with a maximum of grade eight education, young Native men and women were pushed back into a world where Natives were the "have-nots" and non-Natives were the "haves". In an attempt to regain self-worth, which end of the double standard might a Native person head for, if they could get away with it?

Stealing children and trying to turn them into copies of ideal Canadian citizens was only one factor in the Indian residential school system. The most obvious attribute of residential schools was that they were religious based. Since Europeans first started coming to Turtle Island, commonly known as North America, missionairies have pushed their crosses into the communities of Native people. For many centuries, if not millenia, leaders of the Christian faith have mixed their agendas with those of the states they inhabited. You scratch my back and I'll
scratch yours. It is no coincidence that at the same time that colonizers were dividing up Native
lands and resources, missionairies were dividing up the souls, families and communities of
Native people. French Catholics, English Protestants and their various denominations sent hell
and brimfire upon the heathens of the New World. Gabriel shared with me an incident that I'll
never forget. Can you imagine being the only child not to get a gift at Christmas time, because
you were the only Catholic child? How mean-spirited can a religious leader be? Below, Gabriel
speculates on the meaning of such an experience.

Gabriel - In my instance, I was part French and part Scottish. A discriminatory thing;
you weren't part of the whole issue. Religion, you'd be excluded from the mainstream
religion. In my time, the religious factions between families programmed the children to
disinformation. Perhaps it was a concerted agenda by the church and government to
have only one dominant church in each reserve, the residents would be more malleable.

And same with the religious teaching, or what I understood; I didn't know where I
belonged. Kind of wandering around in purgatory. Unbeknownst to me at the time, the
method of teaching Roman Catholic religion was based on fear and guilt. The
community was Protestant, protestant religion. When my mother died, she made my
grandma promise that she'd raise me Catholic, but she never followed it. It didn't
happen until I went to residential school. You always have doubts because you don't
have any guidance. This is the right religion and this is the right thing to do to make a
decision.

Because of his grandmother's promise to register him as Catholic, Gabriel was sent
hundreds of miles away to the residential school in Spanish, far away from the rest of his family,
avay from other friends who were at other non-Catholic schools.

If legal definitions of Nativeness were the gunpowder, residential schools were the
trigger in coercing Native people to leave their lands, culture and language, towards a "Canadian
Dream" of a better life.
New Citizenry and Blending In

**Rick** – I guess when my Mom married my dad she was sort of... well my Dad was British. And my mom was I guess trying to ah, get away from all the negatives. Sort of stigmas and stereotypes I guess, so... she married him and was kinda like... well, it sorta seemed like she was trying to get away from that kinda stuff and get on. And ah, so, when they got married, my Dad cut his hair and burned his records and sold his firebird and they became born-again Christians. So that ah, I guess my mom was really motivated to do that, you know, she was trying to get away from being a dirty Indian, and ah, you know, she was trying to be good I guess. Um so she was trying to ah, merge, I guess or sort of adapt to western ways I guess. Which you know, I could tell, when we were young, our family was a little bit different than my friends' families and stuff...

Negative stereotypes of Native people, which came forth from the tables of the politicians and the sepulchres of the clergy, have permeated the hearts and minds of Canadian people until the present day (Francis, 1992). Such stereotypes serve as whipping posts to remind those Native people who have left their assimilating schools, and those who live in the impoverished conditions of most of the Native communities, to leave their Nativeness behind. The deception is in the equating of cultural and family breakdown, of poverty, with the inherent nature of Native people. It seems similar again, to the rape victim being branded inherently promiscuous. Should we believe that all non-Native women are promiscuous because some of them have been raped? The horrible irony is that Native women have been branded promiscuous, partially because many of them have been raped (Barman, 1999). We could deliberate about other stereotypes and situations, like criminality, laziness and quietness, but that would be digressing too far. The point I am trying to make is that stereotypes can be strong motivators for removing ones-self from Native communities or Native culture. For some,
continuous repetition can lead to a belief in the stereotypes, sometimes called internalized racism. Whether it’s to escape poor conditions, or to disprove some negative sense of self, the fact is that many Native people have adopted Euro-Canadian ways of life. In the next few pages, Emma talks about the particular influences that her family had to deal with, in the face of Native stereotypes and other historical pressures, to blend in.

**Emma** – I guess another challenge was the fact that my father, after I was 9 or 10 years old, was no longer living with us. So I lost that daily contact with him. I mean, he used to phone me and I’d go visit with him and stuff, but it wasn’t on a daily consistent basis. So I kinda lost that. And my mother... I’d always, maintained sort of ah, a desire to understand, a desire to know more and to have information about um, just anything to do with Indians and Ojibway and always asked too many questions and my Mom would always say, oh it doesn’t matter, you’re only half, just forget about it, ha, ha. So my whole life, that was the message that I got, was, it doesn’t mean anything. And I think in her mind, she was trying to help me to avoid all the negative stereotypes. Like you don’t have to be that, you know, it’s okay, you can succeed and you can be healthy and... I think that she, in her mind, it’s like um, in a way she was quite evolved at the time, that her and my father got married. It was um, you know, just, the idea was, well he could be just as good as any white man. So in a way it was like accepting this person but it was still very racist. It was like, you know if he tries hard enough, and drops his Indian-ness enough, he would be as good as any white man. So, it was evolved to give a person a chance at the time, but it was still very racist ha, ha. And that’s how, how us kids got treated, was all based on that. And it was with good intentions I think; she was trying to protect us from something, and maybe trying to protect herself from something and all kinds of stuff. But I don’t think it was with evil intentions.

And then like the town I grew up in was a white working class town. There were very few Native families in the town. So in terms of my community, you know my family was like that, and then the community was the same, more. You know there was a real absence of, of First Nations people in the community and, the few families that there were, were struggling as, you know, the stereotypes. There was lots of alcohol problems, like real public displays of alcoholism and um, poverty and all that kind of stuff. And I’d dated the guys in those families, ha, ha, when I got older, you know? And I don’t know, there just wasn’t a lot of opportunity to have relationships with Indian people in my town. And I, I had great friends though. I mean I had good friends and so I just kinda blended in, and because I’m fair, it was easy for me to do that. And um, yeah, so I just kinda blended in.

**In highschool, a couple times, I tried to challenge teachers who were saying really, what**
I thought was racist things. But I didn’t really have, I had the gut reaction, you know, to know that there was more to it than that, you know that, you know, they just couldn’t take care of the reserves, that’s why they were so messy, you know, incapable ha, ha. And ah, I knew that it was more than the simple view he was giving, but um, he, this history teacher just laughed me into my seat. And I was pretty shy so, it was um, kind of put me into my place. And I kinda gave up on that. I was labelled the, the liberal in the class or something like that ha, ha. So I didn’t really...

And then the other thing was that even though my Dad said to be proud and he would teach me Ojibway words, and um, tell me stuff about the family, and would talk that he was proud... He, he was working so hard to do the, it’s a generational thing I guess, I didn’t see him acting proud in some ways. He was trying really hard to succeed and, and to um, to blend in, to this sort of white corporate, political environment and to me, it didn’t correspond with what he was saying to me. Cause I didn’t see him getting involved culturally or spiritually, or...

Once Native people were given full citizenship via voting rights and relevant notions of equality, it was at least legally possible to gain the privileges of Canadian society. If you just acted “right” or “White”, then perhaps you would be given access to all of the channels to success. Fitting into Canadian society became a strong adaptation for survival. The trade-off, as was suggested by Emma, is that when surrounded by non-Natives, exploring Native culture or spirituality, or meeting with other Native people can be deliberately prevented, met with ridicule or forced into secrecy. Strong racist, social checks ensured that speaking out for Native people was an uncommon event.

Forty years and here we are.

The 1960’s were a time of many Native social and political movements. The American Indian Brotherhood, or Native Indian Brotherhood, was one well-known example. Efforts to
reduce the impoverished conditions, unemployment, and other inequalities in Canadian society were expanding in other groups too; ethnic groups, feminist groups, gay and lesbian movements and others, all rose to push at the oppressive status quo. To address “the Indian problem”, Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau promoted his *White Paper* of 1969, which was effectively an attempt to wipe out the a priori rights of Native people in one strong assimilative swoop. Native people rejected this “White” document and responded with the *Citizens Plus*, also known as the “Red Paper”, which outlined a process of acknowledging the inherent rights of Native Nations (Boyko, 1995).

*Shiatox* – I came back to British Columbia and found out that we were Sto:lo. And then it was through the, by the time the sixties rolled around, it became more prevalent that we should know, what we were. And ah, all of a sudden it was presented to me that I should know stories, legends and that people were asking me if I knew my language and well how come I didn’t know my language. And ah, it was embarrassing because I had no idea what, how it came to be that, heh, heh, heh, you know everything was such a mystery.

The issue of language is with me constantly. I feel, I feel like I’m speaking a foreign language whenever I open my mouth to speak. Even though I speak it very well. And I can speak French and English and Spanish and ah, I guess I feel ah, kind of gipped I guess. You know, not having access to my own language, and these other languages are so accessible in my own land. You know, it kind of makes you understand where we sit in the society that surrounds us. And ah, those terms worthless and worthy (*S'texem & Smel'ā:lh*) show us where our language fits in the society in that sense. So, you know, we’re reminded all the time of our worthless status.

Issues of language and cultural rights rose like a tsunami, with the increasing acknowledgement that there were more than English speaking Euro-Canadians in Canada. Pressured by increasing condemnation by ethnic groups, the need to maintain Liberal control of Canada, and the need to address the concerns of Native people, Trudeau offered up his proposal
for a Multicultural Act, which was passed and is in effect to present day. Unfortunately, while anti-racist work is possible under the guise of celebratory, everybody's-different-but-still-Canadian multiculturalism, it does not recognize the history and distinct status of First Nations.

Under multiculturalism and other political slogans, the principle of "equality" has been perverted into meaning "same treatment", rather than "appropriate treatment". This new meaning doesn't take into account inequalities and established rights for Native people, as the old meaning does. For example, how can children of intergenerational poverty hope to compete fairly with children of intergenerational affluence, where affluence is a prerequisite for competition? In addition, participation or acceptance of multiculturalism by Native people is often seen as another attempt to obscure the political boundaries between First Nations and Canada. If Native people are the "same" as other Canadians, how can they justify differential treatment? Though flawed, I must praise multiculturalism for one thing; it has provided a climate where it is officially wrong not to include the voice of ethnic and other minorities in the Canadian democratic process. While anglocentrism may still thrive privately, its hold on public life is shaken, I hope, for good. For Rick, at least, being educated under multicultural policies seems to have been a good thing.

Rick - I always used to feel a real motivation to ah, fit in, you know, I used to try really hard to fit in with other people at school and stuff. I grew up here on campus... where there was a lot of international students to learn and everything, so, it was very multicultural. So you know, it wasn't like there was really anywhere to, there wasn't really one sorta thing to try to fit in with... they were really emphasizing back then, you know, this multicultural thing. I guess they were still trying to make it work, or whatever. And so that was really good when I was younger.

I wonder how well Native culture and history were represented in his school? He seems
to suggest, “they were still trying to make it work”, that multiculturalism doesn’t really work. I suppose multiculturalism works for those it works for. It doesn’t work for me, for the historical reasons mentioned before, and because it sets up rigid boundaries between groups. You’re not somebody unless you belong to some ethnic group or other. Under this Act, funds are often divided up based on rigid boundaries in identity. Rutarian community center? Okay, here you go. Wigits seniors club? Here you go. Sound familiar? Native community group? Wait your turn with everybody else. While it seems that it’s more okay to emerge as a person of mixed ancestry now in the late 1990’s, than it was before, there are still tensions between Native and non-Native people that pull the allegiances of mixed ancestry individuals, in different directions. Gabriel comments, below, on the effects of current Canadian legislation on some First Nations communities, and alludes to the redefinition of equality that I mentioned previously.

**Gabriel** - I don’t think it’s changed on the reserves. You’re living in a ghetto, not as severe as a concentration camp, but it’s used as a concentration area, where Natives are concentrated for better control. I think [politically] it’s different; now it’s foot-dragging with equality, human rights. There was and still is the environment of discrimination, these notions are handed down verbally through many generations.

Rick and Gabriel are eloquent in their descriptions of some of the issues still raging today.

**Gabriel** - In summary. The concept of failure, poor self-worth, lack of confidence was instilled many generations ago. Constant bombardment on ones psyche, will impel one to eventually believe the untruth. Through deceptive information by the church and state, new media, TV movies, fostered disinformation to destroy the targets of their culture, by assimilation. An agenda of genetic expunging. It is now evidenced that those who attended residential schools were indoctrinated to include their off-spring with the “bound to failure syndrome”. This was not in all cases. The results are evident due to high rates of incarceration, suicides, murders, alcoholics, drug addiction, FAS, AIDs, spousal abuse, sexual crimes...
Rick - And there's also you know, the media and that kind of stuff; you know, you're always being hit with that hard line, you know, the one accepting the media image of Native people, and just trying to ah, live up to their expectations. Their worldview just kinda puts Native people in a weird sort of spot you know, cause, if they're the way they say they are, then, you know that kind of implies that other people are sorta, you know, different, or not as good because they're, you know, modern western civilization, you know, just like in my anthropology textbooks. They're modern western literate civilization and Native peoples are pre-literate. You know, sort of back there still, and I guess that's still around. It still affects me you know, just to see the headlines. You know, even about that Makah whaling, you know the headlines: it's wrong, and talking about slaughtering the whales and stuff like this. You know, they just wanna hunt a whale you know, they're not slaughtering whales with big whaling ships and stuff like that you know. There's a lot of assumptions and attitudes out there, you know. This girl in my class this year, we were doing an argumentative essay on Makah whaling and her perspective was that well, why do these Indians need to hunt whales anyways, they've got government welfare and stuff like that, and they must have lots of money for food, cause look what they're doing, they're going and spending their extra money on drugs and alcohol and booze and stuff like that, ha, ha. And I just couldn't believe it. These are the things, the attitudes that's she's adopted since she's moved to Canada, you know. And these were the things that have been, you know, the way she sees things now. And that's kind of a little bit scary, ha, ha, ha. This is what newcomers, this is the education they're being given, this is the way they're starting to look at things. It sort of seems like they're being stuck in that bad way of looking at things. The Canadian way, yeah. So I put up my hand and asked if she'd ever been on welfare, or on a reserve, and of course she hadn't; she didn't have a clue. The ideas she came up with and what she'd heard and from her own sort of experience I guess. These things are still being perpetuated in a really subtle way, not overtly, sort of portraying, you know, abuses, stereotypes made in the early, violent, nasty way. All this colonization and stuff, the terrible things that happened in residential schools and what not, these sort of constructions were put together back then and they're still very much alive and well in Canadian society. So that's always a challenge to try and not let that stuff affect you very much.

Sometimes I get really frustrated you know, when I come across some people that are just so self absorbed and they just sorta do their own thing and then, you know they go off to Whistler and go snow-boarding and you know dada dadada and they're just doing their own thing and don't really seem to care much about you know, the fact that they maintain these attitudes and stuff like that. And they're not trying to change them at all. It's funny cause ah, in English we read this thing, this speech by Ovid Mercredi to ah, some staff and students and we had to do some analysis of it but it was all about you know, how he understood, you know, the way that ah, western people really value law and order and stuff like this. And in the end he was just saying well, maybe if you could force yourselves to try and understand us a little bit better then you can work things out, it'd be easier to work things out. It's just like, well, that would be nice, but, there's just, why would they force themselves to understand us, you know. All they have to do is just pay a few million dollars and that'll keep them happy and we can just go on and keep
being the way we are and stuff like that and it was really like, there’s really no real motivation, no genuine desire for them to understand, really. They just seem to be so self absorbed and just you know, they just do their own thing. And just the fact that, I don’t know, it just seems like, a lot of people are suffering under the present conditions you know, the present circumstances and they’re not trying real hard to change them. You know, they’re happy the way they are, they don’t mind going to their 9 to 5. There’s not really much of a benefit, you know, they don’t seem really interested in it at all, they don’t understand it. You know, they just have these bad attitudes that they’ve been given by, you know, the government and whoever else. For the average person, it just doesn’t seem like there’s much motivation there to, there’s no profit in it.

From the media’s perspective, they’re the one’s that are all right and all good, they’re the ones that control what people think and stuff, and they’re always the ones that are, that are portrayed as knowing better, being right; whereas, it’s usually the other people that are always wrong. They never admit to their half of the wrongness you know, I’ve never heard them say, oh yah, well these guys did this and that was bad but we did this too and that was also bad. They never say that, ha, ha. I’ve never heard that anywhere you know. It’d be nice to hear that sometimes, ha ha. There are a few good people that are you know, on the right path but, they often get it wrong and it takes, it’s a really slow process you know. It’s been years and years and years and I don’t even, I’m still just barely beginning to understand it.

The intergenerational effects of residential schools and other forms of Canadian oppression are still with us. Natives and non-Natives are still clashing in their worldviews, Native people and issues are still looked at superficially, stereotypically and insignificantly, and most of the popular media are still guilty of perpetrating such perspectives for political ends. How does this affect people of mixed ancestry? How does the adversarial context of Native-White politics affect some people of mixed ancestry? Read on.
Section Two: CHALLENGES

The experience of being of mixed ancestry varies with one's genetic makeup, the context that one is born into, the events that are encountered over a lifetime and the meaning and responses given to those contexts and events. The commonality between people of Native and "White" mixed ancestry is that the ancestral lines have historically been mostly adversarial in politics. Sort of a Romeo and Juliet story, only with Romeo (Canada) acting as a patronizing, oppressive, utilitarian wooer of reluctant Juliet's (First Nations) assets, lands and resources. Nobody really likes the relationship, but everybody has to deal with it. Now imagine that you are a secret child of this Romeo and Juliet, what kind of challenges do you think you'll have growing up?

Whether you were raised in the Canadian society (by Romeo) or by a First Nations society (by Juliet), or even by both at the same time, has a great effect on your worldview, your beliefs, values and traditions. The experiences of the contributors to this research are rooted in their own complex histories, relationships and events, which we can only guess at, by what has been shared. Some of these people were raised in non-Native cultures, while others were raised partially in Native ways. Some of the contributors came to know of their Native ancestry in their later years, while others knew in their earlier childhood years. Four have official Indian Status, and all but two are university educated. The skin colouring of each of these people has effected and affected the types of experiences encountered. How can you be a real Native, you're white; how can you be a real Canadian, you're brown? Whose side are you on, anyways?

The pushes and pulls of Native-White relations and being of mixed ancestry affects one's whole lifespan to a greater or lesser degree in intensity. It affects the whole being: how you feel
about your appearance, or about your abilities, your values, the decisions you make, your motivations, your politics, how you relate to the world spiritually, and more. Some of the biggest challenges shared by contributors to this research have to do with confusing family relationships and self-concepts, and issues of legitimacy, belonging, allegiance and racism. For many individuals, these are recurrent challenges that can cause mental and emotional paralysis, depression, alienation from self and others, poor self-esteem, feelings of fraudulence or being split, suicidal thoughts and other life impeding or life threatening effects. For some, becoming empowered, feeling confident and going after ones dreams depends heavily on the nature and tally of daily encounters with issues of “true Nativeness”, “true Canadianness” or clashes of the two.

In the writing of this section, my biases towards a synthesis of several social science theories will become evident. The opening sentence in this section is a case in point. I have chosen the terminology and concepts from various courses taken during the last six years of my education. Where appropriate, I will point out the value and relevance of using these terms, with respect to mixed ancestry issues. I will introduce theory here, not to alienate the experiences of the mixed ancestry people involved, but to create a common language for both professionals and individuals working with the issues of this thesis. Many of the terms and concepts have been, or are already being used by other mixed ancestry individuals.

“Identity” is a powerful concept. It has become a common term, which pops up everywhere in both the written and spoken word. It’s used by itself and in many combinations: identity crisis, cultural identity, ethnic identity, personal identity, identity confusion, identity continuity, racial identity, fractured identity, role identity, gender identity, hybrid identity, class identity. Casual definitions have included: its who you are, its who you think you are, its what
you identify with, its your self-concept, and its what you’ve been taught to be.

The word “identity” came into common use in the twentieth century via the work of several important psychologists and sociologists. The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Sociology (Marshall, 1994) describes the emerging usage by referring to the works of Freud, Erikson, James, Mead, Goffman, and Berger. Sigmund Freud first started using the term in his theory of identification, through which “children come to assimilate external persons or objects, usually the superego of the parent”, into the ego. Erik Erikson was one of the first to connect communal culture with the individual by viewing identity as a process located in the core of each (Erikson, 1968). He coined the term “identity crisis” during World War II, in reference to patients who had ‘lost a sense of personal sameness and historical continuity’. Mixed ancestry individuals often experience losses in personal sameness and historical continuity, such as when they shift from a predominately Native context to a predominately non-Native context. Later, Erikson generalized his identity work into a stage of life; youth is presented as a period of crisis of potential identity confusion. Born into the same era, these theories make sense to me. I see childhood as a place where I took on some of the attributes of the people and world around me, as I related to them and incorporated them into myself. I see youth as a time when I started questioning some of those things, as I became aware of incongruencies between what I had taken to heart and observations about the larger world. Formulating who you are and what image you present to the world is a key task given to all of us. The more varied and complex my context is, the more varied and complex will be the task of creating my identity. Erikson has worked for decades on his theory, and acknowledges that the boundaries of the processes of identity formation and identity confusion can be cyclic and extending far into adulthood (Erikson, 1980). I know many people of mixed ancestry, in their thirties and forties, who are still dealing with
issues of identity.

While I may not agree with his theories about the causes and consequences of particular racialized identities, because they are often racist, I think it is important to note Erikson’s idea that identities are racialized. Issues of Native-White relations are with us today, not because there are any such discrete groups, but because we have chosen to polarize the populations they include, to political ends. Hence we have the “you’re either Native or you’re not” ultimatum that is offered to people of mixed ancestry. Given such a choice, overtly or subtly, a person of mixed ancestry is susceptible to periods of identity confusion that are intimately related to internal or external encounters with Native-White politics.

William James and Herbert George Mead, through their sociological work with identity theory, portray the formation of identity, or identification, as the process of naming, and placing ourselves in socially constructed categories, where language plays the central role. The choice of identity labels and categories for mixed ancestry individuals are numerous (remember the hierarchy of belonging, Figure 1). I have certainly gone through such picking and choosing and trying on of labels and categories, each of them has their own allegiances and consequences. In addition to self-imposed labels and categories, there is the acknowledgement by Erving Goffman and Peter Berger, that identity is also ‘socially bestowed, socially sustained and socially transformed’ (Marshall, 1994). We are what we relate to, and what relates to us. Rather than choosing one of the identity theory camps, optimistic or pessimistic, I seek to combine the wisdom of Erikson, the identity theorists and other social scientists. We are beings that emerge with greater and greater confidence, through the fragmenting challenges of self-imposed and socially imposed identities, towards more cohesive, continuous, effective and whole self-concepts.
In this thesis, I interchange the terms “self-concept” and identity” to refer to the multiple aspects of self in relation to the context, experience, strategies and gifts of being of mixed ancestry. I borrow from Mead’s concept of “me”, which is “how a person sees themselves through the eyes of others”, and Morris Rosenberg’s version of self-concept which includes social identities (Marshall, 1994)). Rosenberg defines self-concept as “the totality of the individual’s thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object”. These two definitions may seem similar until we delve deeper into Rosenberg’s dimensions of self, where ones various social identities interact with personal dispositions to create structural selves: the extant self (our picture of what we’re like), the desired self and the presenting self. Each self interacts fluidly, internally and externally, and ideally, wholistically to create a congruent sense of self.

Leon Festinger offers an additional understanding of such evolutions, or transformations, by postulating that we are all striving for harmony and balance (Anonymous, 1998). If there are competing, contradictory or opposing elements of cognition or behaviour, we may be experiencing cognitive dissonance. For example, if I am Native and non-Native in a society that militates against a blend of the two cultures, then how I think or act may be in competition, contradiction or opposition to one of those two cultures and hence to one of my two internalized ancestral identities. Festinger also postulates that we can move towards consonance, or dissonance reduction through changes in behaviour or shifts in attitude.

Other than describing the context, I will try not to use assimilation models of identity when discussing the experiences of mixed ancestry individuals. I am personally affronted by the idea that a person may be considered less than, or incompetent, if they choose or have been situated in a context that is not entirely emersed in one culture or another. Such either/or
categories are very limiting. You’re either a real this or that, or an incompetent this or that. I am not emersed in a particular Native culture, or a particular Canadian culture, and I do not consider myself bicultural or incompetent. I, like others who are of mixed ancestries, am a conglomeration of my ancestry’s cultures and more. Such combining is relevant to the complexities and dynamism of both tradition and culture; it reminds us, at a human level, to be wary of looking at tradition or culture as static, stereotypic constructs. Who knows how many different people have contributed to my lineage, to who I am today, or to who you are?

Carl Rogers reminds us that we are human beings, people who are evolving and becoming new with each passing moment (Corey, 1977). Our experiences and choices may influence and change us, but they do not define us. It is such complexity and transformation that I am hoping will come across in this thesis when we consider the moments shared with us by the contributors to this thesis. Abraham Maslow’s “hierarchy of needs” and concepts of self-actualization are important to mention, as models that we can use to look at the experience of mixed ancestry individuals. To be well-functioning individuals, we have to meet our needs for survival, security, love and belonging, esteem and status, and finally, move towards self-actualization (Corey, 1977). Belonging, esteem and status seem to be the primary needs shared in this section. Maslow’s concepts of needs are useful, but we must be careful with imposing any hierarchy as it seems more appropriate to consider that each moment determines the priority of any of these needs. Maslow himself warns us that individuals may revisit each of these stages, with each new change in our lives. The following section will explore the lives of mixed ancestry individuals, which we may make sense of by listening with our hearts, and then maybe by interpreting with our minds, using the concepts and terms described.
Being Small

Gabriel – When I was growing up, I didn’t really have an identity problem. I knew who I was and what everyone told me who I was, there was no real question, when I was on the reserve, and when I went into St. Clavier’s School in Spanish, I think there was a psychological attack on your very being, what you were. There was a very rigid structure being taught. Basically my Uncle raised me like that. Don’t speak unless you’re spoken to, don’t do anything until they tell you to do it. So, basically the structure was there for me to learn self-discipline. My Uncle was an RSM (disciplinarian) Post WW I Militia.

When we are small children, we are more interested in learning concrete operations, like running, making things, copying adult behaviours and following the rules (Santrock, 1993). We don’t often question the order of the universe, or the ethics of our behaviour or treatment. We try to have fun and stay out of trouble. Later, we begin to think more abstractly about what is happening within us and around us, but initially, what we pick up is what is most readily available. In Gabriel’s case, he knew who he was by what people told him he was, and how he should act, by the strict training of his uncle. He didn’t have any issues about his identity until he went to St. Clavier’s residential school, where his self-concept came under attack. If I am not who I thought I was, who am I?

Theresa – Especially when I was younger, I found that others opinions and assumptions of who I was had influenced and confused how I had identified myself. I have been told that I was Indian, White, Metis, and a Half-breed. I’ve also been called names like Wanna-be, Wagon-Burner, Little White Girl and Squaw. It wasn’t until my teenage years that I began to understand who I felt I was. I had to learn how to define myself for the convenience of other people, in order for them to easily categorize and hence, understand me. I don’t care who others think I am anymore, but I still feel a need to identify myself. An influence on how I identified myself was whom I fit in with and who had excepted me. I have felt the pressure from both Indian and White, sometimes I felt unwelcome in both worlds. In Catholic school, I noticed that I was different from most
other kids, I felt different and I had a hard time fitting in.

**Shiatox** – *In the past it was a challenge, particularly in relation to what is an Indian. And being identified by others as an Indian, um brought some ah, mainly negative connotations to the term. People didn’t really want to associate with the Indian part of me. You know, friends, playmates and that kind of thing. Um, but they found solace in knowing that I wasn’t full Indian. They um, would say, oh, it’s okay, you’re not full Indian, so it’s okay, you know, you’re all right, you’re not like them. Ha, ha, ha. And ah, then when they wanted to be mean to me and my siblings, they would call us Indian in a derogatory way.*

The identities imposed by the initially Eurocentric and later Anglocentric and Canadian stereotypes of Native people, are first encountered in childhood and are experienced in a very emotional way. Gabriel, in the 1930’s, when he was a teenager, felt that his being was under constant psychological attack. Theresa had so many labels given to her, that she felt confused.

How do you feel when you are under attack by everyone around you, or by even one person? Identity confusion anyone? What if your responses are constrained or dictated by strict religious regimes, as Gabriel and Rick experienced?

**Rick** – *“I wasn’t allowed to go trick or treating when I was young, cause we don’t worship the devil, ha, ha, kind of thing. You know. Me and my sister were quite ah, strictly disciplined when we were really young you know. Any sorta small thing we did wrong would result in getting spanked, you know. It just seemed like there was a real right way to do things and a wrong way to do things. My older sister, she would really, make it difficult, she was really difficult about um, you know, getting her little dress on and going to church, she didn’t want to do that and you know, oh well, you have to clean up your room and keep it really clean and she didn’t want to do that, she just wanted to read or do whatever she wanted to do, right. And I guess she’d be fighting with my Dad about that and he’d be trying to spank her, ha, ha. She’d be screaming you know, it was really upsetting, you know. And then her and my mom would start fighting with my Dad about that and so you know, on the one hand we’re this great Christian family and the other hand you know. You know there was this kinda tension and friction in the family about this kinda stuff, so sorta seemed a bit weird to me”.*
In a similar way, Rick experienced a contemporary version of Gabriel’s rigid upbringing; he was raised in a very strict, born-again Christian way by his father. His mother, who was Native, generally concurred, but sought to ameliorate such treatment. As we have seen with residential schools, rigid Christianity has often been used as a polar alternative to Native ways of life. You cannot be considered a heathen savage if you are a Christian citizen. The more fundamentally Christian you are, the less pagan you are suspected to be. For many Native people, who wanted better lives for themselves and their children, becoming a “better Christian” than non-Natives was an opportunity to prove themselves as non-stereotypical. Upsetting punishments and tensions caused by opposing ways of raising children are primary avenues for creating the cognitive dissonances mentioned before. How can a person feel whole in such a polarized way of life?

**Emma** – *We used to visit the reserve and I always enjoyed that. It felt good. I liked going there. Then I felt okay. I felt, in my child memory, I felt okay then. Like the women there were really good to me, and it felt comfortable, and I felt like I could do stuff and not feel like someone was going to jump on me and felt, it was a nice time. I always really enjoyed that a lot.*

Emma, and others we will hear from later, find being a child in a Native community a comfortable alternative to the more restrictive settings of being in an ancestrally mixed family trying to fit into a non-Native community. The important thing to note is that the experience of having two culturally different sets of relatives can wreak havoc on ones sense of self or self-concept.
Family Ties

Rick – Well, when we were young, my Dad, you know, we’d always go up and visit the grandparents and, he’d always make sure that we were always, you know, um. We had a pretty close relationship with that side of my family when we were young, my Dad’s side. We didn’t really see my Mom’s side very often. We’d go visit her parents, you know once or twice a year. And they were always brief visits. And there was a big difference between that side of the family and the other side of the family. But ah, after my Dad died, you know, um my Dad’s side of the family, well my Grandparents on that side of the family... never really talked to us, or anything. They were just really cold and, critical and disapproving a lot of the time. So, didn’t really make me wanna try and talk to them or anything like that. I guess my Mom sorta felt the same way. She’d try to talk to them and... she tried to talk to my Grandma about what it was like to lose someone and ah, ha ha, her reply was, wow, just imagine all those women in World War II who lost their husbands, you know, they just kept going kinda thing... Well I guess she was trying to encourage my Mom in her own kinda way, I guess. But, really stiff...

On one occasion there was ah, it was my grandparents birthday or something, and my Mom was up near them on the coast... And ah, you know, it was going to be this great big family birthday dinner kinda thing, all the aunts were coming down. My uncle was going and my Dad’s brother was going with his family and you know my, my other Uncles and Aunts were going and my Mom was told that, oh, she could come but oh, the kids couldn’t come though, you know, we were uninvited, so... I always got along with my Mom’s Mom. My grandpa’s this pretty eccentric kinda character himself. And ah, I guess at the funeral, my Dad’s funeral, all his family were around and my Granny came down to stay with us too, so. We’d always joke and be saying, oh I think it’s time for a cup of tea, isn’t it. So, hah, hah, hah, we’d be making our cups of tea, ha, ha, and joking around. That’s when I sorta started identifying more with them. My uncles and aunts on my Mom’s side of the family would always be like, well, come on by any time you want, you know, don’t even call, the door’s unlocked, just come in and stay as long as you want, kind of thing. It would be no trouble at all.

My cousin... went to Devin where my family’s from... to one of my grandpa’s brother’s or sister’s or something, and... she even had to fandango her way in the door, they weren’t even going to let her in the house. And they said oh well, you can’t stay for dinner, you know. So that’s what it’s like on that side. Pretty harsh. It’s pretty weird, ha ha. It’s really strange. I don’t understand them, I still don’t. You know um, my other uncles and aunts and my Dad’s brothers and sisters you know, they can go and visit them and stuff like that, but we can’t even stay there, you know, just say hi and have a cup of tea. I have two cousins who are black and I don’t think they really feel really ha, ha, close to that side of the family either. My Mom said that they still have that attitude towards you know, Natives and black people. It’s definitely because, well, because we’re Native and because you know, because they treat my black cousins the same way kinda thing you
know? They’re sorta like second class cousins to you know, to the other cousins.

Many influences come into play when mixed ancestry individuals relate to their supposedly non-mixed relations. Cultural values and Canadian stereotypes of Natives and other minorities are divisive, recreating the hierarchies of belonging of Canadian society, within families. Rick and his black cousins are treated like second class cousins when interacting with their British relatives who have rigid rules of acceptance and hospitality. They are left in the cold for being, not quite British enough. Imagine being the only family member not invited to a large family event, because you’re not quite "up to snuff". Imagine always having to find a legitimate reason, like being the wife of the deceased, to be invited to family gatherings. Though this may be a common experience, such familial racism cannot be justified, it cannot remain normal, especially in a land with so many cultures.

Emma – If I sorta think right back to the beginning and ah, the core of my being, it kind of starts with my family. And that was probably the biggest challenge in a way, because there was a lot of tension and conflict and discomfort and shame about the fact that um, my brothers and I were half-breeds and, um, that went back even further. And now, from some photographs I’ve seen recently, it may be something that was going on before my mother was even born, so, her parents disowned her when she married my father. And that tension remained in the family, even after my parents split up.

And my mom would take us and we’d go to visit the grandparents or the cousins and my cousins sometimes would call me names and I always felt less than them in terms of my grandparents, my grandfather. My grandmother was, he remarried but um, my grandfather didn’t, I didn’t feel connected to him at all. It was like he was disgusted by me. And I always felt like our family was treated less than everybody else. We were like... And so, no one’s ever confirmed this for me. But I know. Children pick up on stuff. And I always felt less than. And so that was a challenge. It’s hard to feel proud of yourself when you’re getting treated like shit.

It was never okay to be both in my family. There was non-Native relatives, and there was Native relatives. And, at no time did those families ever get together, where we were all
together, were all one, and my brother's and I were - like our identity was affirmed in this family in a loving way - it never happened, ever, and it never will. Ha, ha, ha, ha. I know it never will. So, and something that happened I guess, possibly as a result of that, was that big family gatherings and all that stuff didn't happen; it just didn't happen in our lives.

The taboos of intercultural intermarriage, with all their explanations, have been going on in Canada for centuries. As Emma suggests, the taboos aren't isolated events, they are entrenched for generations within families. Each family has its own prescriptions for dealing with such taboos, such as the case of Rick and Emma, where the children of such marriages are shamed, denied and denigrated. In such a setting, it's not often okay to be simply a person with mixed ancestries, to be "both". We are often pressured to choose cultural identities within each family situation, or they are chosen for us. To keep things in perspective, we have to remember that the taboos and prescriptions are reinforced by our relatives, communities and governments. This milieu only compounds the pressure to act in prescribed and proscribed ways.

Our identification with our ancestries, with how we have become who we are, is not affirmed without celebration. Family reunions, or lack of them, affect familial solidarity, which is the sense that we all belong to something strong that is rooted in the past. By establishing ties, beyond the nuclear family, we are establishing inclusive ties to all of humanity. In reunion with our relatives, we affirm each other, the way of the world, and our transitions through various rites of passage. For many people of mixed ancestry, the taboos of intercultural intermarriage are paired with the taboos of intercultural communication. Inclusive family reunions are rare. Without such ties, we are left rootless, adrift in a complex world, without affirmation, alliances or allegiances, beyond our siblings and parents. We must recreate our own identities and make tenuous ties to other families and communities, who already have their own entrenched
Emerging Whole...

allegiances. It’s no wonder that belonging is one of the greatest issues of mixed ancestry, when it can feel like you’re always an outsider looking in.

Clare - Another challenge was my mother. She was always saying things like you’re only 1/64th Indian anyway, you’re not like those other Indians, or, what about my side? We never really got along though, I used to be a tom-boy and she wanted me to be a lady. Good girls do this, good girls do that. She helped to keep me feeling that I was just faking, that I was just a wannabe.

What are those “other Indians” like anyway? Who is on the “other side”? In mixed ancestry families, the stereotypes and divisive forces do not remain outside, in the greater society, they permeate the personal relationships between family members. Each person of mixed ancestry comes to their own sense of self, within their own view of the world. When these senses differ within families, the consequences can be disruptive. In some families, the disruption reflects the animosities of the larger Native and Canadian societies. You’re not a real Indian, you’re just a wannabe, or, you’re just acting “White”, or, don’t let those Indian tendencies take over, don’t go Native on us, like so and so did. Since there isn’t a greater, inclusive family to belong to, with cohesiveness or belonging, the family fractures as each member connects to other, more attractive, outside networks of belonging. The semblance of strong family ties may remain, but they are deeply wounded.

Coming Out Indian

Bugsey – I probably ah, until I was forty, considered myself a white person... And then I went through a period of thinking about myself as being a Native person, or I guess, wanting to explore that and wanting to belong.
Claire – When I was a child, I used to say proudly that I was a Canadian, but then I found out that I was part Native, when I was about 14.

Since Native ancestry was historically hidden or suppressed in the efforts to blend in and gain the rights of Canadian citizenship, many people today are or were unaware that they had Native ancestry. This is one of the biggest “jokes” that I have encountered among Native people. The need of seemingly non-Native people to make connections with Native people is often seen as some kind of resolution of guilt for historical crimes against Native people. The phrase “my grandma was an Indian princess” is seen as a hysterical need to resolve Native-White relations by using stereotypical romantic fictions. One of the acknowledgments is that, probably, many Canadian people have “Indians in the closet”, especially if the practice of “customary wives” was common. But does that make you Native, or entitled to inclusion in a Native community? The issues that arise for those who wish to acknowledge and explore their Native heritage, are ones of legitimacy, which will be discussed later, belonging, and Nativeness.

Shiatox – I think when I was younger I identified myself as ah, mixed ancestry, of ah, part Scottish, part Native. Um, and only came to know that I was Sto:lo quite late, by the time I was about thirty.

It was challenging not knowing what our background was. And it felt very funny and very embarrassing to not know that. Um, so I would say that, we were Nootka, cause I’d heard that and I knew that was from British Columbia. And I thought well, that’s what we must be, ha, ha. And my Dad also thought that we might be Thompson. So we were close, hah, hah, hah.

Not knowing what your family history is can be difficult, especially in some Native cultures where knowing your history is equated with truly knowing who you are. Imagine the
dislocation you would feel if you suddenly lost 20 years of memory, or all of your memory. You would be like a newborn child, with no wisdom to guide you, making all kinds of mistakes until you could learn to respond appropriately to the people and things in your life. Others might pity you, or even shun you. For many people of mixed ancestry, the past has been blocked off, in the name of protective secrecy, leaving dislocation, embarrassment and many, many questions.

Rick – “I only recently discovered that I was Native, and only recently I guess, accepted it. Ah, I was told that we were Squamish. I guess, well, back when I was about 15, but you know, at the time it didn’t really mean anything, you know, it’s just sorta like, oh, hmmm. But I could tell from the way my, you know, I guess what I’m trying to say is that my mom told me for a reason, you know? We never really knew um, when we were very young, until after my Dad died and we were 14 so... I guess it’s only been two years since, you know, I really accepted the fact and come to more of an understanding about what it means.

It’s only been about ten years, that it’s become okay to reveal some of those family secrets about Native ancestry. With the jokes from Native individuals at the expense of people of mixed ancestry and the remnants of taboos and stereotypes still around, it takes a courageous individual to undertake the journey to find out what it means to be Native. Fear accompanies any first words or first steps taken in the exploration of Nativeness by people of mixed ancestry. The drive for a cohesive sense of self, for belonging, drives the quest into deeper and deeper and more threatening territories. Those already entrenched in some hierarchy of belonging often jostle with the newcomers for greater positioning, greater legitimacy and greater access to the rights of belonging. The barriers to regaining ones history and exploring ones cultural heritages, can be daunting.
Being White

Being fair-skinned, or “white”, confers both privilege and the related assumptions of belonging to the primarily white-skinned colonizing class of this planet.

The greatest barrier to egalitarian relationships between colonizing and indigenous peoples is the gap between human technological and social development. It’s been estimated that ten percent of the world’s population controls over 90 percent of the world’s assets, and that this ten percent resides primarily in the developed nations of Western Europe and North America. The technological age grew out of the advancements of the industrial age, replacing human employment with higher efficiency machines and processes. One of the side effects, coincident with ecological disaster, is the gap created between those that control the machines and processes, and those who provide cheap labour and who live on the lands and resources that are being used. The impoverished living and working conditions of the developing and underdeveloped (3rd World) nations are greatly influenced by the consumer driven economies of the more “developed” nations. The common acknowledgement is that the wealth of the planet is controlled by multi-national corporations. Governments are left to the tasks of pacifying and controlling their populations to ensure multi-national stability, and hence, national stability. In a more egalitarian society, social checks would ensure a more equal access to and distribution of the assets gained by the new technologies. Unfortunately, the development of such social checks have not kept pace with the technological developments, and we are left with the current global relationships between “haves” and “have-nots”.

The majority of those controlling the world’s resources have what are termed caucasian features and fair skin, and are primarily of European lineage. The impoverished work and living
conditions of Native people in Canada as elsewhere, are a direct result of the decisions made by colonizing peoples in Canada. Skin-colour plays an important role in the regulating of individual access to wealth, opportunity and power because it is an obvious identifier. Hence, hierarchies of belonging often follow colour lines. In much of the world, access to the wealth, power and opportunity of the developed nations is related to how fair-skinned you are, or how much you can pass for “White”. Conversely, there are hierarchies of belonging that run in opposition to “White” hierarchies, along the same colour lines but in the opposite direction. The darker you are, or the more you can pass for “Native”, the more you have access to the benefits of belonging to Native communities. I see this as a survivalist tactic, for ensuring that threatened people and Nations will survive as intact cultural and political entities, in response to assimilative or other genocidal policies.

**Rick** — I guess most people wouldn’t ever sort of guess that I’m, you know, Native, or anything, you know. We are living in Vancouver and there’s lots of different peoples here but, you know, for the most part, people just assume that I’m white like them. Well I look white, most of the time ha, ha, ha.

Assumptions of “Whiteness” or “Nativeness” are followed by behavioural expectations. Darker skinned Native people are expected to act “Native” and lighter skinned people are expected to act “Canadian”. Stereotypes serve as the expected behaviours for people given these specific labels. For people of mixed ancestry, the colour lines break down; colour isn’t a good indicator of allegiance or ancestry. The assumptions about how someone is supposed to act is connected to assumptions about who people actually are. Because of this, being fair in colouring confers automatic privileges in Canadian society, while being darker confers automatic
discrimination. The individuals below express the experience of being born into social circles that are divided along colour lines.

**Roxanne** – It's very difficult to be in a Native gathering and be judged because my skin is white. When someone came to speak and be a special guest [to the students I work with at the university], I was not included because I had too much white appearance. And that kind of thing happens a lot in the world we live in, that kind of prejudice. Because my appearance doesn't fit with the traditional... I look like my father but I don't have his colour. It's sad that people do that, and make that their only way. I've done the things that everybody does to... who live in a socially prejudiced world of not being invited to dinner because everybody there was going to be white and I wasn't. I've been not invited to Native occasions because of my husband being white and not wanting to include him. We have to really fight to find a place within either side, in any great depth, because both parts, with the whites, push you away because they have a stereotype of what Indians are, and the Indians push you away because they have a stereotype about what the whites are, and neither of them are right.

One of the "privileges" of being fair-skinned, is that you get to hear the worst, uncensored racist remarks made by Canadians towards Native people. The remarks are usually considered harmless, so complacency and tolerance are expected. Objections are often met with questions of allegiance. What are you, some kind of Indian lover? Attempts to educate people about the complexities of Native-White relations are often met with anger and impatience. In response, people of mixed ancestry often find it prudent to scout out their circumstances before they declare themselves or their ancestries, to “pick their battles” wisely.

**Claire** - Another thing that feels harsh is when I’m in a group of people where no one knows me. Nobody knows I’m Native and yet, through schooling and talking with my father and people on the reserve, and friends, I have a good understanding of some of the issues facing Native people today. So if I try and say something, people usually look at me like I’m some kind of ghost, like I’m talking an alien language or something. Even today, I have a hard time speaking because people rarely understand what I’m saying. Either it’s Native people who are looking at me like I’m a wannabe who is ignorant, or
it's white people who are looking at me like I'm a wayward, crazy in the head woman getting emotional about things that shouldn't concern me. If Native people know I have Native ancestry, they always seem to question my politics, like I might be too white in my allegiances. I always feel under the microscope. When I try and talk to people about mixed ancestry issues, I either get the, oh, you're one of those, looks or get given all kinds of advice about who to see, what to do about becoming more Indian. The only people I feel really comfortable with are people of mixed ancestry or those who have mixed or white people in their family. It always wrenches my heart to see people of mixed ancestry, sometimes in their thirties and forties who are still so split by being of mixed ancestry that they're literally shaking when talking to other Native people. I know what they're feeling I think.

Some of the most difficult situations I have been in, and have witnessed, have to do with being heard as a person of Native ancestry. Since I am fair skinned, my opinions about the state of the world, or even about my own experience sometimes seems to be treated as less important than the opinions of others who are darker, or who seem more firmly entrenched in Anglo-Canadian identities. Although I attribute some of this to my own insecurities and self-presentation, I believe this effect is socially reinforced, to maintain clear distinctions between Native and non-Native peoples. In courageous times, declarations of Nativeness, while looking obviously white, can feel empowering; it's like saying, here I am, in all my ambiguity. Emma, below, discusses some of her experiences with being both fair-skinned and tanned, in both Native and non-Native settings.

*Emma* – Sometimes I say I'm Native when I'm sort of acknowledging that part of myself that people don't recognize physically, as a way of um, explaining myself. It comes up in a lot of different situations I guess. I feel different sometimes too. Like sometimes I feel really white, or really non-Native, I'm always white, ha, ha, ha, pale, I'm fair, that's the word, I'm fair, ha, ha.”

I think a challenge to feeling um, connected to my Aboriginal identity has been the way I look, because I am fair and I have green eyes, and I probably look more like my Mom than my Dad. I'm not distinguished ha, ha. That's the phrase I like to use, I don't look
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like an Indian, ha, ha, ha, I’m not distinguished. And um, so that’s been, I think that’s been a challenge. I mean when I was a kid, it was the opposite. When I was a kid, I used to hide from the sun, so I wouldn’t turn brown, cause I’d go so dark. And it would attract attention to me and people would talk about it and, and I know it embarrassed my mother. And um, and then there’s times when I was older when I was living on my own, and almost wishing that I was darker. Which is probably a real foolish thing to wish for. Any dark person would tell me, probably. But um, so I didn’t have to deal with um, just that kind of racism that’s out there on a daily basis in the community. I didn’t have to deal with that. Because of the way I look I can sort of blend in. And um, but it’s, I’ve, I’ve had a real self-consciousness about that when going into an environment where there’s mostly Native people and where it’s like a Native event. And I’ve felt like an outsider. And I’ve attributed that partly to the way I look. But I know now that it was a lot of how I felt too; I didn’t feel sure of who I was and I felt like a foreigner. And of course, and now I know lots of people who are very distinguished, feel the same way. They feel like foreigners coming into their own communities and um... so that, that has been a challenge. You know, people uh, rejecting me because of the way I look, or people challenging me because of the way I look. Now, I mean that might still happen, but I don’t notice in the same way that I used to, because it’s, it.

Whatever the reasons for discrimination based on appearance, the effect is strong and becomes internalized by both those in positions of privilege and those in less privileged positions. I may know intellectually that discrimination by appearance is unfair, and as some people say “you shouldn’t feel that way”, but it does affect my interactions with both Native and non-Native people, when dealing with issues of Native-White relations. I am very conscious of how I look, and what that means in both Canadian and Native societies. I may be privileged to be fair-skinned, but I do not always feel privileged. Like Emma mentioned, it’s akin to feeling like a foreigner. Depending on the situation, I may feel more or less like justifying my position, with respect to my appearance. Claire shares how her skin colouring has affected her behaviour and her feelings about herself.

Claire – Because I’m white looking, my identity didn’t really bother me until I started to go to university. I was taking courses in Anthropology and forced myself to join the
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Native Student Union. I was extremely curious but terrified of being rejected, like, what are you doing here, you’re not Native. It helped that my cousin had already been involved, so I could claim legitimacy without looking the part. I used to tell people that everyone in my family was dark skinned but me and one brother, to kinda legitimize me as an Indian without the colour. That was the biggest thing for me. I love powwows: watching the dances, listening to the drums, camping and hanging out. I always feel like an outsider though. It was there that people would always give me the look like, what are you doing here, you whitey. It took me a lot of years before I got the courage to even dance in the inter-tribals. I would never dance in the competitions, mainly because I’m so self-conscious of my whiteness. I went to one powwow in Washington where almost everybody was white looking. I got really anxious. I was supposed to stay for the four days, camping, but I couldn’t hack that there was all these white people acting as if they were Indian. I just kept comparing their dancing, their singing, their sincerity to those that looked more Indian, darker skinned. White men can’t dance, kept going through my head. Talk about internalized racism! I realized how much my own stereotypes were keeping me from feeling really whole. Legitimacy was my biggest issue. How can I participate in Indian ceremonies or gatherings if I’m white? The more sacred the ceremonies, the more I questioned myself and the more questioning looks, even hostile looks, I got.

The battle against racism, from others or within ourselves is painful and confusing. Skin colour is one of the most primary of indicators used for assumptions of position in both Native and Canadian societies. Other physical indicators are used, like hair quantity, colour and texture, body shape, facial features and eye colour, but they are less stigmatic, treated more like the genetic variations they are. The next sub-section will discuss some of the non-physical effects of both physical hierarchies and cultural-political clashes on mixed ancestry people’s senses of being whole.

Feeling Split, Fitting In

Roxanne – People are attached to their roots or their origin and when you’re half and half, you don’t have the luxury of being a singular thing, you’re two. You’re always going to be those two parts. So because you’re always those two parts, you have a
choice of either battling those two parts and being one or the other and spinning around all the time... two separate worlds that I’m a part of. But I’m separate from them because I’m betwixt and between, so I’m really not either. What I found difficult was the prejudice of both sides of my own people. Whether white or Native. It’s very difficult to be in a Native gathering and be judged because my skin is white. And it’s very difficult to be in a white gathering and be judged because my father’s Native. And that’s the part I find difficult, that’s the part that I find most challenging is dealing with that dance that goes down in society out there. It’s not fair and it’s not right, but it’s how it is. And that’s the part for me that’s the hardest to deal with.

The hierarchies of colour and belonging, in both Native and non-Native communities, have forced people of mixed ancestry into an alienated and often invisible middle ground. Existing in this middle ground, requires living with the pressures of both worlds, where the political is felt very personally. The need to feel whole, or congruent is pulled apart by the need to acknowledge all aspects of the self. Some of the most common phrases I have encountered when talking to people of mixed ancestry have to do with this issue of being split. Roxanne uses “half and half”, “two separate worlds”, and “betwixt and between” to describe her feelings. Others, below, use such phrases as being “stuck in the middle”, “two sides of the same coin”, “tolerated”, in “contrast”, a “gray area”, or “conflictual”, and a place where “never the two shall meet”. What is it like to live in this middle ground?

**Gabriel** – In the reserve community I never felt that I really belonged. I was in the gray area. My father was white, my mother was Native and I was in the center somewhere, tolerated.

**Rick** – How do I identify myself. Well I guess I sorta feel stuck in the middle. I guess it’s difficult to be around Native people because of that too, uh, it’s because, you know, we weren’t really brought up with the culture or anything like that. And I guess that’s what being Native means to some people, is that they have their culture, but I guess to us it just means that we’re different, or for me anyways, in my family. And that’s a challenge
too, being around Native people, that we’re not exactly Native either, so we’re stuck in the middle somewhere. That’s pretty tough a lot of the time but it’s getting better. Gotta try and find somewhere in between which is a constant struggle, you know, you always have to be re-evaluating things it seems. I haven’t really come to a stable understanding of what that means yet.

Rick expresses concisely, what the experience of being in the middle is like: “you always have to be re-evaluating things it seems”. Our identities as people of mixed ancestry are dynamic out of necessity. We must re-evaluate each situation that we are in and each person within those situations. Although there is sometimes a sense that we are being opportunistically “two-faced”, or fraudulent, it is much more than that. To relate to people effectively, we must acknowledge our assumed place on the hierarchies of belonging in the eyes of both Natives and non-Natives. From there, we can communicate using the assumptions of others about our identities. If you think I have no right to be at a Native gathering or ceremony, I may give more details about who I am. If you think I know everything about Native issues, then I may warn you more about the complexities of Native issues and start from a different level of understanding. I am (as we all are) who I am, in relation to who others are. If I forget that, I am in danger of relying on static, rigid stereotypes to order my world. For people of mixed ancestry re-evaluating becomes an intuitive response.

Emma - It’s like two sides of the same coin. It’s like getting over self-hate, or an inability to feel whole... Part of being mixed is um, you’re not, not what everyone else is. Like if everyone’s non-Native, well I am. And that’s true. And if everyone’s Native, if I’m surrounded by a bunch of people that identify themselves as Native well I feel almost as if I need to acknowledge that there’s a part of me that isn’t. And um, I’m not sure why that is. But that’s definitely true. Um, sometimes I feel, and a lot of times it’s in contrast to my surroundings, or the people I’m with. I’ve been in situations where I’m with a group of Native women, they’re all sort of almost feeling like they’re trying to out do each other with stories about their Nativeness. And I feel really non-Native in that
situation. And um, and then if I’m with a group of non-Native people, I will feel my Nativeness more. It’s like a contrast. Because there’s something missing, some connection I have with my Native friends that I don’t have with people who aren’t Native.

I think in her [Mom’s] mind, she was trying to help me to avoid all the negative stereotypes... So that, in a real deep core way, created a real split. There was this real split, ha, ha. There was this, and then there’s that, and never the two shall meet. And that was a fact that I absorbed. ... Even though my dad said to be proud... I didn’t see him acting proud in some ways. And that was a conflict I guess. Like getting, a lot of confused information and split information. It created challenges to feeling comfortable and whole and like having a resolved feeling about my identity that all those things, early on, those early-on things got in the way.

Split identities, split information. As with anyone, we receive the knowledge, traditions and values of our parents. In mixed Native and non-Native families, this information varies greatly and is often conflicting. The distribution of this information can be confusing, especially if there are parental issues around fitting into Canadian society. As a result, each person of mixed ancestry receives different combinations of cultural knowledge, traditions and values, which in turn affects how one identifies with different people.

Shiatox – Getting entrenched with the idea of being Sto:lo. I guess there’s a bit of a challenge at all times because, I have other heritages. I guess being First Nations is ah, identifying with being First Nation, although I do have non-Native ancestry, ah, is very conflictual because it, sometimes because of the difficult relations between Native and non-Native, and I guess in a sense not really feeling comfortable with ah, I guess honouring that heritage. I consider, the linkage to non-Native heritage as that, as part of my heritage, but it isn’t part of who I am today. I have a non-First Nation ancestor. But that doesn’t make me non-First Nation. Ha, ha. So, it’s always a struggle. Being a Native person is always a struggle in our society because, everything you do, wherever you go whoever you relate to, if you’re relating to First Nations then it feels more comfortable because there’s an understanding about what it means to be First Nation. And when you’re relating to non-First Nations, you ah, you’re always feeling like you’re a mystery, and there’s always questions. And that’s a challenge because you’re always answering questions, always, always educating people, always defending, also, what you understand is right about who you are.
Both Emma and Shiatox, and in fact, everyone in this study, talk about a connection, of feeling more comfortable with Native people than non-Native people. I attribute this to the fact that Native people tend to be more knowledgeable, especially by experience, about Native issues than the general Canadian public, and possibly to the idea that it’s easier to identify with being colonized than with being a colonizer. I would rather associate with people who understand what I’m talking about, than with people who are always questioning the validity of what I understand and have experienced. Of course, “understanding” people would also include non-Native people who have a good knowledge of aspects of Native culture and history. Conversely, there is no comfort in associating with people who still have colonizing or stereotype-informed ways of relating to Native people. There may be colonizing peoples in my ancestral tree, but that doesn’t mean I have to approve or associate with colonizers today. In many cases, there is a strong need or even expectation that one should advocate for Native people, and as Shiatox suggests, explain the “mysteries” about Native people. Bugsey gives us two examples:

Bugsey – It happens quite often that people know that I have some Native ancestry, and they know that I’m very interested in the history of First Nations and um, so on, so I’m often called upon to give a Native perspective to things. Which I’m not always comfortable with. I try to give people... I guess my own perspective on things. And, imperfect as it is, I hope it’s better than what they’ve had before. ... it’s kind of an attitude that people seem to have: you’re an Indian, tell us about Indians. Heh, heh. Which is a completely, heh, heh, crazy thing to say. But on the other hand, I always try to address it the best way I can, because I believe that there’s so much misinformation, bad information out there that whatever people can get, if it’s thoughtful, it’s better than what they had before. So I just jump in, I think sometimes I’m wrong, but well, what else can I do? Yeah, it at least gives them a different perspective. Such that it is.

It just sort of depends on what’s come up in conversation. Often it’s treaty, sometimes it’s something to do with history, quite often it’s to do with just perspective. A non-Native perspective of Indians and those Indian related problems, like welfare communities and that sort of thing. And um, because I do understand the historic context behind a lot of that. I wouldn’t say that I understand everything about what goes on in
communities, but I do understand what goes on in historic context. I generally find myself jumping in and saying well wait a minute and then I start talking history and the things that have happened in Native communities, particularly on the West Coast because most of my academic study has been on the West Coast.

Being expected to speak for all Native people is ludicrous, no matter how knowledgeable a person is. At the same time, some find it a moral necessity to “even the scales”, to re-educate people who are misinformed about the deeper realities of First Nations history and contemporary existence. At times, the expectations and moral considerations are just aggravations, especially when the day’s allotment of patience has run out. In that case, it is easy to just redirect the questions, or to even ignore them. When will people find out for themselves?

Claire – Most of what I learned through the Native Student Union and the courses I was taking was about the coastal Nations. I went to almost any feast or ceremony I could get to. It felt really weird to just sit and wait for something to happen, so I usually helped in the kitchens with the feasts. I guess it made me feel more like I belonged. Almost all my friends were Native or mixed at that time. One challenge that is still facing me is that I know more about West Coast cultures than I do about my own Ojibway culture. I visit my reserve once a year or so, but I only get glimpses, gossip and a few stories about our history. The powwows are okay there, but everyone still doesn’t know that I’m related to them, I still feel like an outsider.

Claire’s experience reminds us that people of mixed ancestry are often on their own quests for knowledge; we too, are sometimes guilty of asking too many questions. In being persistent, sometimes we are ignored or harassed in our explorations and efforts to belong. While our Native ancestries may remain invisible, many of us still strive to express ourselves in the ways of our ancestors. The need to express our inner selves is often stronger than any humiliation or questioning by judgmental eyes. We aren’t wannabe’s, non-Native people who feel empathetic with Native ways of being, we are Native. Theresa describes her efforts to
dance at powwows, and the assumptions that assailed her.

Theresa – Um, assumptions that I’m not Native, assumptions that I’m um, White, assumptions that um, that I don’t know the culture. That like, for example at powwows, that I don’t know how to dance, that I don’t know, that I don’t know the rules of the powwow. Stuff like that. And when I started dancing, people looked at me like, they weren’t accepting me in, you know. I was an outsider and I would be by myself when I danced and I didn’t have any friends at the powwows, you know, just relatives and friends of friends that I um, recognized. After establishing an identity as Indian I found myself being challenged by others who were also Indian that felt that I wasn’t Indian enough, an outsider, or a city girl. I thought that the idea was ridiculous, but other’s opinions made me look at myself, my feelings, thoughts, and spirituality.

Efforts to belong to something, to Native culture or Canadian culture, are complicated by issues of skin-colour, context, knowledge, stereotypes and feelings and challenges to having split ancestries. When people of mixed ancestry step into the gray areas, of being both Native and obviously non-Native in ancestry, the black and white nature of Native-White relations are challenged. Old and new pressures influence people on both sides of the divide to respond to mixed ancestry people in hurtful ways. Nevertheless, we persevere, and make our ways through our histories, our childhood and these hurtful barriers, to venture out to make fulfilling lives for ourselves.

The Working World

Gabriel – I think I had doubts. You know, when you apply for work, you put down your personal file. When you went to school, one of the teachings was to be honest. If anyone asked me who I am, I’d tell them.

I guess the biggest obstacle would be no educational basis to where you think you should or could be. We were restricted to grade eight, suppressed to a specific level.
In both of these passages, Gabriel expresses his experience with entering the work world. Having spent time in a residential school, he learned about double standards and was subjected to mental and emotional abuse. The chances of finding work in the 1930's was severely limited by economic depression; with added disadvantages - limited education, psychological scars and Native stereotypes – the chances of obtaining employment were even poorer. Doubts would be expected in such an environment, especially if integrity required the revealing of those stigmatized disadvantages.

Those stereotypes and limitations are still with us today, internally and externally, putting pressures on our abilities to perform in a competitive Canadian society. What helps to empower some Native people today, besides sheer will, is the fact that cultural diversity is celebrated and established in Canadian law. Discrimination based on old stereotypes may still be occurring, but there is legal recourse against it. Mixed ancestry individuals are internally, ancestrally diverse. In the recent years, with Bill C-31 and other legislation, and through the growing revitalization of Native culture, it is safer to express ones mixed identity. For some people, there are opportunities to promote understanding of the experience and meaning of being of mixed ancestry, through employment or personal projects.

*Emma* – I write down introductions of myself a lot because I’m an artist. So often in my autobiographical statements, I’ll say something like what my name is and I’m an artist who is of mixed ancestry and then I’ll give sort of the details about that. And the reason I do that and, in many cases, but not always, is because the work that I’m showing or the work that’s associated with the autobiography um, contains information that’s directly about that. So it’s a way of giving people a way into the art work. So it’s more about the art work than myself, almost, or about my relationships, about part of my relationship between that part of who I am and the art work.
One theme that often enters the motivations of mixed ancestry people, is the desire to contribute to the well-being of Native communities. There is a certain amount of gratitude that some feel, for being able to take advantage of the promises made to Native people during the treaty years. Access to funds for education or medical-care is not guaranteed for Native people. As mentioned in the section on CONTEXT, there are many daunting hoops that a person needs to go through. If education is made possible for mixed ancestry individuals, the accompanying gratitude may translate into a commitment, like Bugsey’s, to “make it worthwhile for the Native community”.

**Bugsey** - I felt that I had a life where I was making a living and I was doing okay so it took me a long time to make the decision to say ok, if I do this, I’ll make it worthwhile for the Native community and I just define that as Native Canadian people. If I went there and got an education at their expense they would get something out of it that was worthwhile. And I believe that is the purpose of education for First Nations people. That those people who go ahead and get um, the so called higher education, whatever that means to people, have an obligation to somehow put it back into Native communities in this country, that’s what’s for. So ok, I’m doing that then, that’s the right thing to do. Heh, heh. And so, that’s what I’m about. The interesting thing is that I started out just basically going in a direction. Okay, I’m going to do something that I enjoy doing and I got into biology first but then wanting to serve this master I’ve described that basically I built myself for myself. I learned more and more about First Nations on the West Coast here, their history, perspectives, problems that they’ve had and I’ve just become really consumed with the whole thing.

For Roxanne, a mixed ancestry Medicine woman, the full appreciation of her work is limited by lingering prejudices about who is really legitimate as Native. Being of mixed ancestry at Native ceremonies often brings suspicions that your spiritual traditions aren't quite "pure" and can stimulate strong verbal warnings not to "mix" Native traditions with others. For people who have been raised in primarily non-Native homes, or homes where Native traditions
have been discouraged, these reminders may simply refer to one's status as a newcomer to Native spiritual traditions. A more insidious and often unconscious assumption seems to be that mixed ancestry people are not ancestrally pure, so they cannot be spiritually pure. Would you let someone who you think cannot relate to your spiritual traditions, into your most sacred rituals, or even touch your sacred objects? For Roxanne, these assumptions are combined with issues around fair skin colour, to the effect that, after decades, her special abilities are acknowledged and requested, but she is barred from fully participating in her community.

**Roxanne** - When I was at the university with people out there... At one point, um I bead the feathers for the students to carry in the processions. I would be working behind the scenes with kids who were unable to stay grounded because there's so much mental... Like from within my Native self, and from my understanding, I know that they need to be grounded, or the intellectual part of their lessons pull them away from who they are and what they are. It's kind of a subtle reminder to stay solid and connected with their own ways and their own people.

There was a young woman who passed away. I went to see the family and supported them in the hospital through all of the difficulties as she gradually passed over, and I helped the family through that so they'd understand and not be frightened. I did lots of support systems through that whole time. When she passed over, the family had a family meeting and I was called and I went to the family meeting and I was called and he brought me over to the front of the family and he stood me up and said you know this is Roxanne. She's been very helpful for our family, very grateful for what she's done, said very nice things and gave me a blanket. Four days later they had the funeral and we were all taken to the big house and I sat there and I watched the ceremony go through. And when the time came for give away, which is traditional, they stood up and they said thanks to everybody who helped with her, and gave them all blankets. I was not included. I was included and honoured and respected for what I did, in front of the family, but the prejudice of my white skin, they had to do it that way. They could not take me in the Big House and say, Roxanne did this for my daughter and we thank her, so that everyone in the place would know, because I'm white and they don't want to start political arguments with people, because I do Medicine. And perhaps they should have called other members of the community who do Medicine work. That's the kind of prejudice that I live with all the time. The work was good, and the work was accepted and the work was appreciated and it was honoured in a good way, but it's always that added little thing. It's like people giving you something and then taking it back. Thankyou very much, but... And I understand the dynamics they were under, and I'm not
angry for it. It's just sad we can't get past that kind of prejudice.

Entering the workforce can be intimidating for anyone. Many people of mixed ancestry face additional barriers or disadvantages to being gainfully employed, due to the effects of Canadian policies on Native people and due to the prejudices that arise around being of both Native and non-Native ancestry. On the other hand, when working in Native communities, establishing Native ancestry can open doors. The sentiment might be something like, okay, we may give you a chance because you might be able to understand our situation.

**Bugsey** – I think that by letting people know that part of my ancestry is Native, it was helpful in some ways in gaining access to people, that people were more willing to um, have me around. But then, being an academic trained in a western style has made it kind of difficult because I'm always constantly working in those two worlds: academic and traditional worlds. So I'm constantly trying to connect those two.

Working in a world where there are barriers of prejudice requires remaining steadfast in the striving for a good life. To do this, people of mixed ancestry must often walk between different cultural worlds and strive to “connect those two” worlds. Even so, obligations to do good work often leads to commitments to be of good service to Native people and/or to all people. The obligation for anyone working with people of mixed ancestry is to acknowledge the unique perspective that walking in two worlds can bring and, as Roxanne suggests, learn to “understand the dynamics” and to “get past that kind of prejudice” that reduces the well-being of everyone.
Introducing Whole...

Issues of mixed ancestry come and go with the tides of everyday life. Accordingly, some days are more painful, while others are filled with inspiration. Some of the most difficult times are those days or even months, where such issues seem to intensify. Sometimes the sensations follow big life events, like discovering or choosing an identity as Native, or when in greater contact with Native issues or Native people. The constant re-evaluating, mentioned by Rick, and constant confrontation can become a drain on one's energies. Emma, Shiatox and Rick share their experience with some of these more difficult times.

Emma – I’ve been asked by people in sort of a challenging way, where do you come from? And it’s, it’s kind of friendly but in another way I’ve felt like at times I’m being asked the Big Question ha, ha, ha. So then I would explain myself.

There’s been times in my life, not that long ago, that I felt like, I wish I could just turn it all off, you know, the conflict. When I started becoming aware of it, it sort of intensified I guess. I was like all this stuff just came crashing in on me or out of me or both at the same time and it was like, I just wish that I could shut that door and just think. I don’t want to think about this, I don’t want to think about the fact that my family was ah, in conflict and I don’t want to think about my Indian identity and I don’t even want to think about my identity. It was so, like intensely present all the time. This question and this exploration, it was just so intense. But it was like, no choice, ha, ha. It’s almost like being swept up in a big wave, eh? Like I’ve felt a few times such despair about it that if I didn’t have a child, I might have killed myself. Like I just felt so much grief about it.

“Where do you come from” is one of the most angst producing questions given to people of mixed ancestry. As Emma mentioned, it can be friendly or a challenge. Pronouncing one's identity confidently and concisely is often denied people of mixed ancestry. To “explain” ourselves means to position ourselves in the history of Native-White relations. We can give a
short answer or a long one, depending upon the situation, but really, if a thorough answer was wanted, it would take a very long time. Hesitation or “going on” about one's identity often leads to feelings of insecurity in a situation, which is sometimes the desired result. Without a deep understanding of personalized Native-Canadian history, by both speaker and listener, knowing who you are, or expressing yourself can be painful and confusing, even to the point of considering suicide.

Shiatox - And that would make us very confused because we didn’t know what was wrong with being an Indian. And when we went home to tell our parents, you know, the kids are calling us Indians and we weren't feeling too good about it. And my dad would tell us we weren’t Indian. Hah, ha. And that made it confusing again because we didn’t understand why we were being called Indian and what was wrong with it and now why was our father telling us we weren’t Indian. Ha, ha, ha. And that, made it confusing again because um, we didn’t understand what, why we were being called Indian and what was wrong with it and now why was our father telling us we weren’t Indian. So, it was confusing because we’d look in the mirror and still could see that we were, we were brown, and we were different than all of our peers. We had a huge, huge family, seven kids. Ha, ha, ha. And ah, that was a challenge trying to understand what it meant to be, not to be Indian, and ah, even though it seems like we were. And then to be Scottish, but not to look anywhere’s near Scottish, ha, ha. Or what Scottish might look like, or white. So, that was very confusing. My Dad would say that we were half-breeds, and ah, that seemed to be okay. We didn’t know what our Sto:lo background was. We didn’t know that ah, you know, we’d know we were Indian although my Dad said we weren’t. So when we’d ask what kind of Indian are we? He’d say ah, he didn’t know but he’d say that ah, in the community where he grew up, they were called Siwash. Siwash Indians. And it seemed to sound as if it were a derogatory term, Siwash. And I, for the life of me, until just recently did not find out ah, what the term Siwash referred to.

As Shiatox has expressed, the question of whether you’re Indian or not, is very complex and confusing, for both children and adults. Identity confusion can be an enduring sensation for people of mixed ancestry, at least until there is more understanding of the context in which we arose. With experience and knowledge, it is easier to come to terms with, or make decisions
about who we are, or who we want to be. Often, it takes decades for such resolution to happen.

Rick describes how finding out that he had Native ancestry, helped him to put his experiences into perspective. He wasn’t stupid, he was just different.

**Rick** – I went to school with Gordon Campbell’s kids and all these other kind o people that were you know, really popular and stuff like that. You know, I wanted to try and fit in with them and stuff like that, but I don’t know, I didn’t for some reason. I used to think it was cause there was something wrong with me, and maybe I was just stupid or something, or maybe I didn’t have the right kind of clothes or something like that. And then when my Mom pulled this, that we were Native, we were like well, naw, how can we be Native, we don’t live in teepees or anything, you know. But then, ah, slowly it began to make sense that well, maybe the reason that I didn’t feel like... if I didn’t do very well with these kind of people, it’s because I am different. And I guess, even though we weren’t brought up in a Native way... my Mom was really trying hard to go along with the fundamentalist born again Christian sorta way of bringing your children up, which was supposed to be a good way, I guess. It slowly made sense that, oh ya, I guess we are Native cause we’re very different I guess. I guess that’s how I identify myself. It’s just being different in that way. And ah, it was kind of a relief to find that out cause you know these other sorta fears I had, they sort of, well I sort of resolved. I guess I’m not fitting in because I’m not stupid, you know, I’m just different.

By knowing where we come from, we are free to journey into our futures, with more secure understandings of what drives our thoughts and actions. But we aren’t solitary beings. Humans are sociable beings and we depend on our relationships with others, to inspire the fulfillment of our lives. As such, it is important that others truly understand who we are, so that we can communicate from a starting point of common understanding. Being of mixed ancestry means that for people to truly know you, they must address their understanding of Native-White relations in Canada. This is a difficult task at the best of times, which means that often, people of mixed ancestry are misunderstood.
Emerging Whole...

Rick - I wanted to try and make all my friends understand what that meant you know, and it just sort of made things worse. I’d do things that I’d hoped would cause them to think of things but to them, you know, I was just being a dog or whatever, ha, ha. I was just being a Rick-dog. But you know, you can’t really expect a lot of people to understand. You know, they either do or they don’t, and there’s not much you can really do to help them to understand cause chances are they’ll just take it the wrong way or you know, make things worse. So I’ve sort of given up on that. It’s a big job ha, ha, trying to educate everyone, so I’ve sort of given up on that. Sometimes I just gotta try and say something that’ll get their attention, make them think a little bit. But then you know. You gotta figure you know, you try so many times and say 9 out of 10 times you just end up feeling stupid, and then that one time, that one time makes it all, seems to make it worth it sometimes. Well I guess it’s always been there that, you know, it must be something wrong with me kinda thing. You know, but I’m beginning to realize more and more that it’s not always only me. Most of the time it’s both. But you know, I freely admit that it’s me, but a lot of the time they’re like, oh yeah it’s you, instead of being like, oh it’s me too, you know? It takes two to tango you know.

It takes two to have a real conversation, to establish real understanding. In my experience, most people, besides mixed ancestry individuals, don’t want to know about Native-White issues, and care even less about understanding the complexities of mixed ancestry issues. “Oh that” has been a common comment when introducing my thesis work. Dismissed. But the issues, as tedious as they are, won’t go away until there’s more progress, by both Native, non-Native and mixed ancestry individuals, with resolving the relationships and issues between the people of these Nations. Real people are suffering as a result of a lack of concern. Some of those, like Rick at his most distressed, turn to counseling services for relief.

Rick - I went to some counseling here. I don’t know if that really helped ha, ha. Cause you know, you sit there and you talk to these therapists. And stuff like: oh yeah well hmmm. But they never really have anything good to say afterwards. So it just sorta, makes you feel, well, so am I crazy or what? You know? And they don’t really ever say anything that um, really made me feel very, that was very helpful you know. It was just like, well yah I guess that’s the way I feel, I guess it’s okay cause they didn’t say I’m crazy. They didn’t say that, you know. I don’t know, I didn’t really find that to be of much use. And a lot of people couldn’t really [understand], didn’t really think that they
ah, well maybe they do but if they did, they didn't really, couldn't really help me figure it out. It just seemed like they didn't know what I was talking about, you know. It seems like a very difficult thing to understand, you know. What people are saying and, you know, the words that they use can mean a lot and you gotta try and figure out, you know, the way that everyone, the way each different person uses that word I guess. Well, just take for instance respect. You gotta say, you gotta respect people, but then at the same time... It seems like a simple thing and maybe a lot of white people, or non-Natives think that they know what that means like, oh yeah, you just sort of respect them, and that's all there is to it. But they don't really know practically what that means. And I guess it's the same way um, trying to explain to other people, just that whole thing of feeling misunderstood you know. I guess I still feel misunderstood. I've felt that way for a long time.

The historical and current conditions of Native-White relations form the background for the difficult experiences of people of mixed ancestry. Childhoods are confused by the complicated clashes of Native and non-Native cultural values, both within the family and in the broadening world. Growing up brings questions about our identity and urges to belong, to fit into societies that are welcoming and/or comfortable, and to be understood. Divided allegiances lead to feeling split, or what's been called cognitive dissonances. Skin colouring and other physical identifiers play a role in how we are accepted by our ancestral communities. Stereotypes and other prejudices restrict the depth of our acceptance and access to our families, culture, and communities. Efforts to persevere, beyond intense pain, confusion and despair, inspire quests for knowledge and resolution of the aggravations of mixed ancestry existence. Compassion, experience and understanding helps us to begin journeys to wholeness, and towards the resolution of Native-White issues, through commitments to reach out, to assist Native communities, and to build bridges between ourselves, our peers and our communities.

If there weren't any clashes between First Nations and Canadian peoples, the issues of being of mixed Native and non-Native ancestry wouldn't be so intense. The relationships,
internally and externally would be more like those between neighbouring families, rather than like those between enemies. In such a world, the secret child of Romeo and Juliet could come out of hiding and the celebration of its unique life could commit the families to a strengthened and mutually satisfying future. At this point, it may seem a little naïve to ask Native people and Canadians to celebrate the unique life of their mutual, mixed offspring. On a personal level, however, there is more motivation to succeed. To emerge whole from Native-White relations, people of mixed ancestry are forced to bring together aspects of themselves, and celebrate them in ways that create continuity with the past, congruency within the self and better relationships between people of Native and Canadian nations. In the next section on STRATEGIES, we will present some of the ways that people of mixed ancestry help themselves to emerge whole from their intimate experience with Native-White relations.
Section Three: STRATEGIES

One of the greatest gifts the Creator has given to humankind, has been our ability to transcend our difficulties, to seek a good life, even in the midst of turmoil and animosity. Sometimes, during intense or painful times, or when we reflect upon all the problems of Native-Canadian relations at one time, creating peace for ourselves may seem impossible. The wisdom of our elders and of great prophets in the past remind us that everything changes and everything passes in the cycle of life. Taken in small amounts, we endure, we accept and we gain wisdom with every experience. Our struggles seem to dim over time, and our perspective grows in size, to make room for forgiveness and more fulfilling lives.

Transformation & lifelong learning

Gabriel - And for some reason or other, I happened to have just by luck, made the right choices.

Gabriel credits luck for his successes in life. Having gotten to know him a little bit, I would have to say that “for some reason or other” has more to do with his success. Beyond being orphaned and being raised Catholic in a Protestant community, beyond residential school abuses, beyond stereotypes against Natives and a grade eight education, beyond the Great Depression and World War II, Gabriel lived to raise a large healthy family with many grandchildren. In person, he is humble, generous, filled with humour and eloquent with his chosen few words. Even within a two hour interview, the transformations that are possible for
mixed ancestry individuals, are made known by his example. Inspiring.

Being of mixed ancestry has meant different things in the different contexts that the generations have passed through. At times, when it was shameful, or when it was better to try and blend in, some of us responded in the best ways we knew. With awareness, acceptance and acknowledgement of our ancestry, we began to explore what it really means to have two or more cultural heritages. There have been times, past and present, when we experiment with our identity, with ways of being. Sometimes we have been ridiculed or “put in our place”, but still we venture out in our desire to be whole in our self-concepts and in our lives. Gradually, our intense inner battles and responses to tense outer conditions, seem to wane, almost like the calm that surrounds the veterans who have seen it all.

*Emma* – I think that, at one time, I’ve gone back and forth. It’s like, there’s a time when I didn’t um feel that comfortable acknowledging my Native ancestry, and then there was a time when I almost despised my non-Native ancestry. At first it [acknowledging both ancestries] was sort of an exercise. It was like a way of forcing myself to do something that in my mind I knew was right. It’s changed over time, like there was a time when I would say I’m small m Metis because I am mixed. And I would introduce myself as mixed blood. Also um, I’m of mixed ancestry. I guess that’s something that’s changed and evolved over time too, is my whole attitude about what I call myself. Cause there’s been um, it seems like such a long story. If I say one thing about who I am, there’s this whole big history and story about that. And I used to feel like I had to tell people all that stuff and more and more I just don’t care. I don’t need to explain to people who I am. And, this is all kind of historical now, and I think these situations, it doesn’t happen... Like I feel like I’ve, reached a certain level of comfort with all of this that I didn’t have even a couple years ago. Everything I’ve thought of as challenges like, you know people um, rejecting me because of the way I look, or people challenging me because of the way I look. Now, I mean that might still happen, but I don’t notice it in the same way that I used to, because it’s, it was my issue. And now when people are kinda hostile towards me or challenging, it doesn’t bother me as much, because, I’m more comfortable now. But it comes and goes. Like, when I’m feeling really strong and connected, it’s good, and then there are times when I’m more vulnerable and you know I’m sure I haven’t felt the last of that. I’ve been challenged, feeling like I need to explain myself. Yeah, it’s interesting. There is a time I’ve been challenged by non-Native people and Native people for you know, sort of identifying myself as I do. And um, looking back on it now,
part of it, there were challenges that affected me because I was insecure and unsure of who I was, and because they have their own issues, they have their own insecurities and issues about their identity or power or, and um, so that’s why, why they were challenging me; the bleeding lamb attracts the wolves ha, ha, ha.

It’s weird cause, thinking about this, knowing that we were going to talk about it again, but now I feel pretty comfortable. And I don’t think... Probably all the challenges are all still there. In fact, my family, my mother’s still uncomfortable about the Indian part of my brothers and I, and the fact that I identify myself openly as Indian. And I’m not ashamed of it any more and she’s not comfortable with that. But that doesn’t stop me anymore. And when I was a child, it did, I think. And in terms of the way I look, um, I figure if I’m relatively healthy looking, I’m not an unattractive person ha, ha, ha, I’m okay. You know, if people don’t like the way I look, and I guess the more people I meet, the more I realize that we Indians come in all different sizes, shapes, colours ha, and hairstyles and types. You know, there’s Yuppies, there’s Rappers, there’s drunks and there’s farmers and cowboys and blond, green-eyed, freckles ha, ha, ha. And everything in between. So maybe that’s helped me to get over that a little bit too. And I think I feel more satisfied with myself inside, generally. And it’s like, I don’t care as much about what people think about me.

Though the history of Native-Canadian relations will always be there, and though the challenges of discrimination, family divisions and despair may still return, there is a point where people of mixed ancestry develop, what Emma calls, a certain level of comfort with one’s identity. At the same time, there is a development of a certain amount of detachment, a little less caring, a little thicker skin, that enables us to move on with our lives, in spite of the fact that Native-Canadian issues are a long way from being resolved. For Roxanne, detachment became the tool that enabled her to be more fluid in her identity.

Roxanne - And what I learned was that if I didn’t detach myself, from being attached to being Native or being attached to being white, that I was going to have trouble, that’s where I found trouble. So when I got in that place of no longer making either important, but just being whatever part of myself was strongest at the time, whether I was with white company or with Native company. And that’s when my life began to move, when I stopped having that constant battle of betwixt and between and where do I belong. And I realized that I belonged to whatever was happening right then. And it no longer became
Talk of detachment always reminds me of the teachings of Buddha, who warns us to stay away from worldly attachments, to prevent suffering. Being attached to being Native, while being fair-skinned, certainly has brought me suffering. At times, detachment was my only defense. Detachment doesn’t always mean living without passion, or giving up. It can mean living fluidly, as Roxanne describes, fully in each moment, letting go of each passing experience, so that life is lived now, rather than in ones desireable or undesireable fixations. The trick is to realize on a very deep level, that we can make choices, choices that make being simultaneously Native and non-Native easier to deal with.

*Theresa* – *I have accepted my differences, learned my preferences, and understand myself a lot better. I choose to feel comfortable with who I am and I know now that I am lucky to be a diverse individual. I use this identity in order to help describe who I am and what I believe in to others. I just try to be myself, knowing of my beliefs and being aware spirituality.*

Theresa suggests that choosing to feel comfortable with who we are, requires practice. She reminds us that before we can make choices about aspects of our heritage that we wish to identify with, we must first learn about our options and preferences, and accept the challenges that come with those options and preferences. Such learning requires time, introspection and, as mentioned before, continuous re-evaluation.
Cultural choices

People are born into their own specific cultural contexts, with their own specific cultural choices or limitations. Initially, we learn and take on the cultural choices of our guardians. As we grow in independence, we experiment with those guidelines, to see how important they are for us. The realization that there are others in the world besides ourselves, inspires us to ask who we are and how we are different. For people of mixed ancestry, these questions take a little longer to answer. We may be born predominately into one cultural setting, but sooner or later, it is revealed that there is another family heritage to consider.

Like Rick, I too felt that I was fundamentally different from my Canadian peers, though I didn’t understand that it had to do with value systems, until my thirties. With Native and non-Native parents, we are given two sets of values, some overlapping, but others incompatible and requiring conscious or unconscious choice. For me, it’s taken years of experimenting with variations in identity, to come to a sense of self that seemed integrated and congruent. The individuals, below, share how they chose to vary expressions of their identity, according to their own personal background and the situations they were in.

**Gabriel** – *I would just tell them what they needed to know.*

Gabriel’s response to questions about his identity is very simple and practical, but complicated. His confidence betrays his elder years, and his ability to access what others “need to know”. Such ability requires strong interpersonal skills in listening, sensing and the reading of body language. Once we have these skills, we can become more comfortable with ourselves,
in our continuous re-evaluating of each situation. These skills are valuable for any person, but essential for people of mixed ancestry.

**Bugsey** — It kind of depends on how the question is put. Often if it's an elder who says to me "where are you from", I've come to realize that that is a question that says that they want to place me somehow in the world and if I have ancestral roots that are First Nations, then they want to know that. And so I respond by saying that on my mom's side ah, my grandfather is of Mohawk and Cree and the rest of my ancestry is non-Native. And I talk about coming from the Michelle Band and having grown up in Edmonton and so on. It just sort of depends on how much people want to know. I'm quite comfortable talking about my past.

**Roxanne** — You have to stop and come to a place of just being who you are and honouring whichever side of you is present by the reflection of the people around you. So when I go into a place where I'm with a Native person; I'm just Native, to me and in myself. I do the same thing with white people. And I move between those two steps, but to me I see them as two separate worlds that I'm a part of.

It's a personal identity crisis and it's back to ah, the two lines I like the best were "what you think of me is none of my business", I like that. I never read the book but I love the title, hah, hah. I think that really is wise and it just said it all in the title. And, so, but that's a hard place to find, it's a hard place to find because you don't know who you are. Because you have to stand in that place of being the light instead of being the world around you. And once you're in that place of light then you don't have that battle. But finding that when you're a teenager is no easy task. I think in the beginning you have to know whether you identifying at that moment, deeply with your Native side or whether you're identifying deeply with your white. So, you have to come to that place where you, you find that place inside yourself of accepting who you are. And then adding the others to it. Or that aspect of self. So, it doesn't, in the end it doesn't really come down to being Native or white; what it comes down to is acceptance of self.

And then, then going from accepting yourself to changing yourself into an image you wanna be. It's sort of like putting on a coat, you know, and different ones, different times. There's the old, there's a joke about wearing a hat. You know, which hat are you going to wear today. And you learn to move between the three. And I think that comes with maturity. And it's really not something you can help a lot with except supporting them with their own personal identity. And I also think you need to please whatever part of you needs that. Right now I need to be in my Native. There's no way to work in that energy. The rate of vibration within you is um, because each has a different rate of vibration, neither higher nor lower, just different. And if you're going to be in that
vibration, if you're going to be working in a field or with people, everybody has a specific energy. And you have to find that special place you resonate in, to be with them. And then move on to the next place. And when you go to your, you meet your buddy downtown at the pub, you put yourself at a vibrational rate for the pub time, and have a really good time. And, and you turn around when you go to visit somebody at a church, you put yourself into a ceremony. You know. It's not an easy identity thing, though. Because you don't really know who you are. You realize you're all of it. And it just a facet of you. And, you know, it's not who you are; who you are is just who you are. And the aspects that you choose to let your light shine, and which facet of yourself you want to use for the day, or what hat you put on. It's your own choice. And you learn to move between the different ones. It's not easy.

In the situations that Gabriel, Bugsey and Roxanne have shared with us, it is the re-evaluating of situations that determines how one's identity will be expressed. You just have to determine which hat, or vibration is appropriate for the situation you're in. Emma, below, makes use of such re-evaluating, but defies the pressures, personal or social, to identify one way or another, and expresses her full identity as a person with mixed ancestry.

Emma – It kind of varies from situation to situation. Sometimes I introduce myself formally in a situation, I always acknowledge both of my ancestors. And I guess in the last couple years actually, I've started to do that really regularly and to um try and feel pride in both of those things. Now I'm trying to find some comfort in both. And to actually to be really open and honest and clean about that. And sometimes I'll finish my introduction and say, I'm telling you these things about myself because I'm proud of them. And um, it always makes me feel really comfortable and whole when I can introduce myself that way, and acknowledge both parts of who I am. So, I guess it depends on circumstances. Lot's of times I just don't say anything about it anymore. I just don't ha, ha.

Some people of mixed ancestry, sometimes after years of consideration, choose to identify with one aspect of ancestral heritage over another. For some it means choosing to identify with a non-Native culture. For others, like Theresa, it means identifying primarily with
being Indian.

*Theresa* - *I found that I am different from many people and that’s okay, I have many dimensions and I am made with variety but I am comfortable being Indian.*

The last few paragraphs bring up the necessity of distinguishing between identifying *with* and identifying *as*. To me there is a fine line between these two phrases. I can identify *with* something when I can see aspects of myself within it, while “it” is external to myself. I can identify *as* something when I recognize that that something is within my self, integrated and inseparable. I think this is important, because it speaks to the question of Nativeness, and to who is Native, in the indigenous sense. There are many non-Native people who can properly identify *with* being Native, and who can even strive to live, what they consider Native lifestyles. Nothing wrong with that. But here I draw my own lines. Nativeness isn’t just culture, values or spirituality, it’s also shared history and ancestral connections. Those things are essential. People may lose understandings of those things, through residential schools, child welfare abductions, adoptions, brainwashing or any number of methods of genocide, but they’re still there to re-discover. As such, non-Native people without those histories or ancestral connections cannot be Native, because they already are not. In a similar way, Native people without the histories or ancestral connections of say, being Scottish, can’t be Scottish, although they can wear a kilt.

It has been important for the people of this project to acknowledge that there are cultural choices to be made. The external world demands that we make our identities known, especially during conflicting moments. People of mixed ancestry can reveal any aspect of their identity, that they choose, with or without explanations, and in the ways that they deem appropriate.
There is a security that comes with knowing what the proscribed behaviour is, in differing cultural contexts. With this knowledge, people of mixed ancestry become freer to relate in the ways that they feel most comfortable with. Challenges to one's identity can be faced or ignored. Opportunities to share one's background can be expressed through words or behaviour, and participation in Native events can be done with the understanding that there may be discriminatory consequences.

**Weathering the storms**

_Gabriel - Sometimes I'd joke with them. How much original Canadian are you? I'd say DP. [What's DP?] Displaced Person, a term used after WWII for people who had no place or country to live in._

One of the greatest healers, of anyone's pain or discomfort, is humour. Throughout the interviews that I took part in, there were tears, anger, fear, defiance, caring and most of all laughter. This thesis must have seemed pretty glum so far, dealing with context and experience, if you did not catch the laughter and irony that pervaded each word shared. When is a person of mixed ancestry most Indian? When it’s summer! When is an Indian not an Indian? When they don't have a piece of paper. One of the biggest jokes for people of mixed ancestry, is that we are the children of Nations that are still at war with each other, albeit mostly a cold war. What irony! When is a Native white? I am Native, but I am fair-skinned. I am visibly White, but my heart is with the struggles of Native people. Many people don’t know what to do with us and are often uncomfortable, or even embarrassed for us. Abominations! Hah! Who’s been sleeping with who? We are the proof that the worlds of Native people and of non-Native people are
inextricably intertwined. And the joke is on anyone who needs to deny our existence, or who
needs to deny the complexity of Native-White relations. We’re here to stay!

Emma – Sometimes I’ve called myself a half-breed, almost with a kinda glee ha, ha, ha, ha. Kind of a fuck you kind of thing. And um, because I’ve been called that by other people and been really hurt by it when I was younger. So, it’s kind of a way of taking it back and almost wearing it like a badge I guess, kind of a little bit rebellious I guess. I get a certain amount of enjoyment out of um, sometimes when I’m with a group of Native people of being really in your face about the fact that I’m not, that I’m not pure Native or pure white, that I’m mixed. I get a certain amount of, feel empowered when I can say that out loud in a group like that. And not feel ashamed of it. Almost daring, to challenge. Yeah, who here is full blood? Ha, ha. Who here doesn’t have some European in the closet? Ha, ha, ha.

Another strategy that people use to break free of enforced identities, is to leave those situations of confinement. One of the best ways to do this, is to move away. What better way to rediscover or redefine who you are, than to go where no one knows you? Moving to a different place, leaving the same old family and community behind, can bring a feeling of freedom, freedom to listen to your heart and desires, freedom to relate to people in newer, more congruent ways.

Emma - Moving away from where I grew up has been a really good thing for me. Because it gave me freedom to become who I’m supposed to be. It’s like going back around the circle and getting back to where I’m supposed to be. And that was an unconscious thing; I didn’t say, I’m going to move to BC so that I can become who I’m supposed to be ha, ha. You know, and get comfortable with my identity as a mixed ancestry... You know I didn’t know any of that. It was just like, I gotta get the hell outta here ha, ha, ha. So that’s been a good thing.

And um, as soon as I moved here, I started exploring Indian stuff ha, ha. You know at first from a real distance I guess. And it was sort of not really an intentional thing, it was partly a resolve to just breaking away from that environment, that early environment I guess. And, um, I was able to start defining my own circumstances and feeling like I
could be myself. But I didn’t really know what that meant. And ah, so that was 19 and a half years ago, so it’s, I’ve been kind of sort of recovering I guess, for the last 19 years, slowly.

One way of dealing with being of mixed ancestry, is to acknowledge the vast complexity of all beings, whether of Native, non-Native or combinations of ancestries. Even on this vast North American continent, there have been over 500 years of relationship between European and Native peoples. That’s about ten generations. If you live here, chances are good that there are people in your bloodline, or in your relations, that have integrated influences from both European and Native cultures. To talk about “pure” bloodlines, is to enforce the illusion that there has been no “tainting” of ancestral lines. Either way, such talk is only important if there are hierarchies of belonging to maintain.

Roxanne - As far as I’m concerned, everybody’s mixed now. There’s not very many of the pure blooded people left, where they really are 100 percent pure, where there’s been no grandparents on either side since the white man came that have not been with white people. I don’t believe that there are very many really true, totally blooded people left. And so long as there’s even one, you know four generations ago there’s still the essence of the energy, that heritage is within us and should be honoured, and whether it’s Native or otherwise.

Roxanne raises another point that I intuitively agree with. She talks about essences of ancestries that are passed down, like ancestral memories. Our ancestors are with us today, guiding us and assisting us in our daily lives. If we, or our ancestors, have related with diverse peoples, we have to come to terms with that in our selves. Of course, the more information we can collect about our past, the easier it is to do this. Modern scientists have happened on an aspect of this understanding of our connections to the past, through their work with physical
emerging Whole...

memory. The body is capable of remembering disease states, enough to reproduce them. There is speculation that such memory is cellular and possibly genetic. Deepak Chopra has been instrumental in advancing such research, in his merging of Western and Eastern philosophies about healing the mind, body and spirit (Chopra, 1991). We are who we are, not only because of who we relate with, but also because of who our ancestors are. There are “essences” that are carried through our bloodlines, that remind us who we are, daily.

Emma - It’s weird, even when my cousins called me names, like they’d call me little squaw and half-breed, when none of the adults were around, I remember feeling like, even if I didn’t know how to act or feel externally really proud of who I was, I remember thinking somewhere inside me that, that just made me more special than them. And there was part of me that knew that, or that believed that, or felt that. Like I knew that for me, that was part of what made me special; even if I didn’t know how to live that out.

Values & Spirituality

Emma - It’s like that whole thing of All My Relations. It’s like all my relations, I take it all the way. It’s not just about family and blood, but it’s a good place to start to um, to acknowledge, cause the whole idea of accepting my Aboriginal self, in a way, has no meaning if I can’t accept the other part of myself too.

Roxanne and Emma have mentioned honour as an important aspect of coming to terms with being of mixed ancestry. The phrase “All My Relations” is very complex and means different things to different people. To me, the essential principle is the interconnectedness of all things, not just physically, as in ecological principles, but also spiritually and psychologically. I am like a drop of dew on a complex, multilayered web that includes everything that is, or was. From an understanding of this relationship, it follows that I will strive to respect and honour...
everything or everyone I encounter, as I would aspects of myself. To be whole first requires acknowledgement of the whole. Denial of any part, leaves out a big chunk of understanding about how and why things work the way they do. From the perspective of mixed ancestry identity, this principle means that I must honour all aspects of who I am, which includes at least acknowledging all of my ancestors and cultural heritages, even if I choose to identify primarily as one thing or another.

**Emma** - When I was a kid, just being in the woods, that helped me a lot to kinda survive. Being alone in the woods when I was a kid, that was a part of how I had some sense of who I was. And it's not necessarily like the Indian in the woods, but just as a human being. Feeling like, like I was okay in that situation, when I was alone in the woods. Ha, ha.

**Claire** - Of course, I have off days where I feel like a timid, nervous animal, where even talking to people I know is hard to do. On those days, I just take time for myself, do something physical like going outside where the fresh air can remind me of my humanity, or maybe smudge and pray.

For Claire and Emma, and perhaps others, getting outside, or into the woods have helped them to feel their basic humanity. I believe it’s important for everyone to be near living things. Cities and buildings can be stifling in their deadness, absorbing our lives if we don’t venture out into nature to remember what it feels like to be refreshingly alive. Amongst living things, we can re-energize and put into perspective the busyness of our minds and bodies. We can slow down and be quiet, or we can run fast and shout, but we are alone with no one to impress; we can be our true selves, with no questions asked.

Whether it’s smudging or prayer, following your spiritual path, listening to your dreams,
or finding the meaning of special experiences, there are things around us, beings and tools, that help us to keep in balance with ourselves and the world we live in. For some people of mixed ancestry, these gifts can help to create a sense of peace or wholeness in the core of our being, so that external discrepancies, or reflections, become irrelevant to who we are.

*Emma* - And I think getting connected to my own spiritual path and starting to learn how to act on that, that’s a major way that I’ve overcome a lot of challenges, because it’s really internal. Because it doesn’t matter what I look like, it doesn’t matter what anybody else thinks, and it doesn’t even matter what I do or who I hang around with. It’s all inside me. My identity is mine, ha, ha. It’s all inside me and I can, in my house or in my bed, or walking down the street or at my job, wherever I am, if I can feel comfortable in my own skin, then to me that’s a very spiritual thing. It’s like my existence at this time, on this planet, is a very spiritual thing. So that’s helped me to feel more comfortable and to face those challenges of my identity.

Dreams have really been important to me because um, I think my dreams were almost reassuring at times. In my dreams I’d feel okay about who I was. And my identity was there in my dreams and information was in my dreams. So that would help me face challenges too. And maybe that’s why that little part of me when I was a kid knew that, even though my cousins were calling me names and my grandfather treated me like shit, that I was still okay, ha, ha. Like somewhere, somebody or something was still giving some kind of support or just instilled in me somehow that I was special. Not more special than anyone else, but just that um, everybody’s special, everybody’s got something to offer.

Everyone *does* have something to offer. It helps to have people or the world around us to remind us that we, as mixed ancestry individuals are each unique and special in ourselves.

*Bugsey* reminds us that whatever way we can find to bring ourselves to that place, faith can help to keep us in that special place of peace and wholeness.

*Bugsey* - I’m not too worried, I have faith. I guess that’s what we need, a little faith. I think that I have some things that I understand that are useful to anyone regardless to where they come from. And, I guess it’s important to know who you are and learn to be
comfortable with that, and as you’ve just said, I’ve arrived at that place. And I think that that’s very true, I am that way. And I understand that in my life I need to live everyday and I need to enjoy the passage of time. Time needs to go by with life and joy and um, to take one of your words, balance, there has to be a lot of balance in a person’s life and it’s really good to have um, to sit down and have a really good look at certain things that are represented by words like respect, trust, uh, love, family and just what all that means, and to develop a good understanding of those things, and I think that people who do that, develop a really strong foundation to go on and do other things. I feel like the work that I’m doing is quite extraordinary. And I know that I’m very ordinary, but by having all of that stuff holding me up I feel like I can go ahead and do those things. And I think I could be an extraordinary person but if I didn’t have those things I would get no where with the kind of work I want to do. So that’s about it. Oh, always realize the things in life that a person needs to be thankful for. I always know what I need to be thankful for: my family, my friends, my life, my hobbies, my work. All of those things, and I always know those things and I’m always thankful, and I’m always happy and I’d like to acknowledge those people and those things, verbally but also inside myself, in my heart, I carry those things always.

**Rick** – They never really criticized anything, you know, what we’d do, you know, they didn’t really, didn’t really even ah, didn’t really seem like they’d judge us, in that way at all, you know, we’re just family, and, that’s all there was to it.

Living, enjoyment, passage of time, balance, respect, trust, love, family, work, and gratitude. As each of us learns the personal meaning of these words, and take them to heart, we too can become ordinary people doing extraordinary things. The perspective we take on things can be instrumental in making those changes. Gabriel shows us the strength of his heart in his courage to transform hardship into good lessons.

**Gabriel** – Not eating for a few days teaches you a willingness to survive. I can survive on next to nothing.

Well I always go back to what I had on the reserve and how the school was strict, and the double standards for treating you. I could see what I could achieve. These things were achievable, but I knew I had to work doubly hard. I guess you would call it, in better terms, racial handicap. You have to work twice as hard if you want to succeed. But in
the army I didn’t find that. Maybe it was there, but if I tried as hard as everyone else I could succeed. That was my niche, working hard to succeed. There was no perceived handicaps in the service regarding my background as a Native person. You progressed by merit. It has to do a lot with the personality too. You just can’t go around with a chip on your shoulder. You have to be sort of a diplomat to succeed; you know what they want to hear, so you say those things, but otherwise you have your own agendas, about how to get there. You know how to get there, if you want to achieve anything. But I thing all in all, I’ve achieved my goals. I started with nothing. I think I have reasonable material things and lifestyle. People are surprised when you come this far. And, it’s shocking to non-Natives, when you’re a Native, that you can talk, some of them are quite eloquent! Always surprising to the general perception.

In retrospect, I was fortunate as an orphan to have had a strict discipline structure, to prepare me for the difficult times ahead. I observed discrimination on the reserve from religion, families, inter-tribal animosities and distrust of other ethnic groups. Very early I detected double standards and eventually understood the purpose of the hidden agendas. Be analytical and use the best of both worlds.

A willingness to survive, combined with seeing what you can achieve, hard work, diplomacy, analysis and using the best of both worlds are formulas that have helped this mixed ancestry individual to succeed. What works for you?

Learning the Teachings

Theresa - Even though I was unsure of myself, I always knew in my heart who I was. It took many different experiences which led to heart aches, anger, frustration, and happy times. Whether the road is straight or curved there was always enlightenment on the way. Everyone of mixed ancestry is bound to have confusion not only from other people, but also within themselves. It isn’t easy find who you are no matter where you come from or where your history is. I’ve found that by going by how I feel, learning about myself and learning about both worlds made me better understand how I wanted to identify myself. The struggle is hard but it does get easier with each new experience.

Explore and learn, explore and learn. Theresa admits that dealing with mixed ancestry
identity is difficult, but gives us the hope that with each new experience and new information, it gets easier and more enlightening. Roxanne shares with us some of the important teachings she received when she was a teenager, and explains how it is applicable to resolving one's identity.

*Roxanne* - I guess it goes back to my metaphysical training, that I'm not my body, and I'm not, the essence of who I am has nothing to do with what's out there and how others see me; it's how I see myself. And how I connect within myself with the creator. So I don't, I don't give a lot of power to that, and that's a personal choice. I think if you go to a place, if you don't come to a place within yourself where you see yourself as um, an entity to yourself, or a, complete in yourself, that whatever comes to you or is included in your world is bonus. If you work from that place then you're going to be able to find those niches and places where the different cultural parts of your self grow. But if you don't do that, then you've got a lot ah, yah it would be a problem. For me the lesson that I was told that I like the best was the example of the diamond, that who I am is the light, the light in the diamond is, you know makes the fire in the diamond. It's the light, it's not the diamond that's making the fire, it's the light that's making the fire. If you, and I see aspects of self, whether Native, white, you know that part of me that's part of me, it's like the baskets from this island. And so long as you're projecting your light into that form, into that diamond, then you're going to have fire, but that comes from you. The essence is you. It has nothing to do with the diamond, it has to do with the light entering in, reflecting off the aspects and creating the fire. So for me, because I see my white aspect and Native aspects as just many aspects of myself. I don't see, I don't identify myself as, as you know, the outward appearance or other people's interpretations and labels. I just did that as a... to develop or not develop, and I think that you get to a place where you have to look at every aspect whether you like it or not, and that's what we're doing here. So, for me, I don't find a lot of conflict with that any more, but... an elder taught that to me when I was about 14, 15.

Who was it that said “and the truth shall set you free”? For people of mixed ancestry, where there are often gaps and mysteries about one's history, the collection of knowledge becomes the truth that sets us free from the constraints of our past. I used to think that ignorance was bliss until I remembered what it was like, not knowing why certain things were the way they were: confusing, embarrassing and sometimes painful. Finding or being given information about one's family or culture or history, helps to put things into perspective. I am who I am because of
the decisions that my parents and their parents made. I know this, and don’t know that, because of these traditions or legal intrusions. The more I know about the past, the more I can understand the present, the more options I will have for the future. For some people of mixed ancestry, looking into the past is like piecing together a puzzle.

_Claire_- I guess what’s really helped has been to find out more about Native history, my own history. I’m sort of the genealogist of the family. So far, though, I’ve concentrated on my Native ancestry since it interests me more. My French ancestry is hard to pinpoint; what’s French culture? I know some French language but I’m not bilingual. What’s been really helpful is learning about how messed up Native history has been. I’m a product of Native-white relations in a very personal way. The legislation, the Indian Act and the way it’s disrupted families by imposing destructive councils, agents, definitions, and status. That’s been the worst aspect. Understanding how legal definitions of Indian or whatever, work to separate and disintegrate not only families but whole communities and individuals, really helps to put things in place. Having only simple knowledge of what it meant to be me, created a real anxiety, an insecurity, that could only be alleviated by more knowledge. Kind of like building bridges between aspects of myself. With understanding of my family’s history, I could justify, or, legitimate who I was, because I knew who I was. I still don’t go looking for, or place myself in the spotlight, to be scrutinized. The real test will be working in some kind of borderline work where I will be scrutinized by both sides, Native and non-Native.

Knowledge about our past and present may give us personal options for the future, but it also can provide keys to important opportunities. In Canadian society, institutional education is often seen as a prerequisite for entry into the work world. The more formal education you have, the more doors will be opened. For people like Gabriel, who have been held back from schooling, options for the future may be limited without further training.

_Gabriel_— Actually the only thing that held me back in the service was my education. But I did go back to school. I’m mostly self-taught; I do a lot of reading. I knew there was a better life than what I had experienced. In the army I had 35 courses, different courses. It didn’t come out to about 1965, when they started to encourage you to qualify for
highschool. I didn't have that opportunity to get ahead. I took GED too. Math, literature, all those good subjects. I guess I always had the ability to lead, and state my views. I suppose I succeeded where others might have failed, through work and determination.

For some mixed ancestry individuals, experiences with higher education can provide the history and knowledge that informal training and personal searches cannot. Testing out identities and being tested can be catalyzed by the intensity of college or university life. We meet hundreds of new people with unique personalities, and we may meet some individuals who are similar to us. We learn to think in abstract Canadian ways, that challenge us and help us to delve deeper into ourselves. We try to understand those feelings that there’s something wrong with what’s being said or done. We find energy to motivate ourselves, and are motivated by the thoughts, beliefs and movements of those around us. We are inspired to know more and more.

*Emma* - I think that sort of developing my mind has really helped too. Just growing up too, just growing up. I’m forty years old now and I think I’m like half way there; I’m going to live to be old and cranky ha, ha, ha. And sit in my rocking chair and make the neighbours whisper ha, ha, ha, ha. What an ambition eh? The kids’ll love me, the adults will fear me ha, ha, ha, ha. Yeah, I think that just developing my mind and developing my spirituality.

And then I was also going to school in, to college in another town and that was also very liberating. To be with all these strangers. And that was when I started doing um, when I was doing that Early Childhood Education diploma. I did some papers that had to do with First Nations stuff. And spoke about my family and my, and my being First Nations. I was able to do that there but I wouldn’t, wasn’t doing that in my home-town.

Going to school was a really good thing, like going back to school as an adult, because I became politicized I guess. And it was partly because, I mean it probably would have happened no matter what I was studying, but I went back to art school and that was a big part of my identity too. I used to think I was crazy, but then I realized I’m actually an artist ha, ha, ha. Cause my mind just seemed to work differently than everybody in my family and even in my town. I always felt a little bit off and I think making art and...

One of the things that happens is that you start finding your voice and you find this
authentic voice. In order to do that you have to really listen to yourself. I think it’s kind of gone back and forth where, time to get comfortable with my identity has fed my art work and my art work has fed my identity and it’s kinda been ah, those things have nurtured each other. Like the very first sculpture I did in art school was a half-breed mask. And it was the first time that I really did anything that overt in front of all these strangers about the fact that I was mixed blood. And that environment was very safe. I was with these people for two years and the teachers I had were awesome; one of them in particular was really into personal history and all that. It was like I entered into this environment and it was perfect. And it really helped me find my voice, which is expression of my identity I guess. So art has been a huge part of it, cause it’s kinda been a way of um, sort of been a way of communicating and exploring that I’m really comfortable with. It makes sense to me. It’s like dreams, same thing.

University life is sometimes the first safe place for mixed ancestry individuals to express who they are. In such places, young men and women are expected to operate with a code of equality and tolerance, that gives formal opportunity for people to express new ideas and often, to speak out against the shortcomings that they have perceived in society. It’s a prime opportunity to examine the consequences of historical and current Native-White relations, and to resolve such issues within the self.

Shiatox – Well maintaining, or developing I guess a whole sense of self is ah, I guess began when I started university, or somewhat before that when I became involved with the ah radical movements, and ah, demonstrations. And there became an awareness of First Nations issues and that something had, had gone wrong, and there was redress that was sought now, and it was in the open. So at that point it felt like a relief to know that there was a huge group of people that I was also a part of. And then, on through university I think it’s been my main question, ha, ha. Throughout my education is ah, defining what it is to be, to be a First Nation person today. And particularly, I guess, because I’m Sto:lo, looking at what it means to be Sto:lo today. What does it mean, what does First Nations education mean, what does ah, Sto:lo education mean. What is the importance of our relation to our culture and our language. And how do we ah, how do we make sense of what our culture and language mean to us in today’s society, compared to what has been documented in the ethnographic and anthropological works, which seem to be, or seem to have been um, dealt with somewhat as a thing of the past. And all during that time when those things were collected and how we’ve lived our lives to today, has not been made sense of, in that way that we make meaning of our lives. So that’s
how I, I guess I say I'm developing a whole sense of myself. And, because it seems like there's been a huge gap between knowing and understanding um, for myself, where I come from, what my, my people's history has been. And then through my education, little by little filling that gap.

To where right now ah, I'm working with the issue of language. And seeing how language identifies us. Seeing how language, our own language can help us understand this situation that we're in today. Whereas we've used English, so we understand who we are in English terms. Now I'm finding that ah, I'm learning how to understand who we are in Halkomelem terms. And how Halkomelem helps us to know who we are in today's society and how we relate to ah, to our society through our culture. There's, there's such interesting things to learn in our language. When you haven't had it...

Another thing I discovered about our language, our language of Halkomelem, is that the Salish language actually originated in our territory, ha, ha. Because there's a larger Salish family, but it started somewhere and ah, expanded into these other areas, these other places. So it was interesting to learn by examining um the background and origins of our languages. That it originate in our area some ten, it's understood some ten thousand years ago or so. Um, and to think that today we're in a situation where our language is nearly extinct. I think just the power of knowing that there's ten thousand years of history there, to back up on. I think that the language is bound to survive. Because we've got that history, that legacy of our language to bring forward. And I think that's a very powerful thing to have and to know. You can't take away a person's language and tell them they're Indian and expect that to change everything. It hasn't. So um, so we know who we are, we know who we are as distinct people because of our heritage, because of the way we are. And the way we are is not assimilated. So I guess in terms of coming whole, we constantly wrestle with these issues and try and remember that, for myself, I try to remember that even though the, the fights or the frustrations of trying to bring understanding to these issues is not just for me, but it's for future generations. And so we just keep developing so that maybe tomorrow, our, our descendents will look back and say my god can you imagine what it was like back then, ha ha hah. In a good way, so that we also honour those who had to suffer for our benefit today. So those are important. Those, those kind of issues kind of guide me, in my work.

Knowledge reveals truths and helps us to define our reality. Language forms how we capture and express those truths, and can lead us back to who we've been, who we are and who we can be. By looking at our Native languages, we can get a greater sense of our long history as Native peoples, and our position in this recent moment in time as the young descendants of the meeting of old cultures: both indigenous and alien to this land. But language is a medium for
communication between cultures as well as within cultures. In the next sub-section, we will look more closely at the benefits of interpersonal communication, of sharing knowledge and experience, on the formation of whole identities for mixed ancestry individuals.

**People Who Help**

Rick - It was just only when I ah, started the program that I was even around Native people. I started hanging around the longhouse more and, that was kinda funny ha, ha, ha. It was sorta like, oh wow I'm Native, I was an Indian so ha, ha, ha. I think I made people uncomfortable sometimes ha, ha, cause you know, I was pretty hyped up on that and they were sort of, just wanted to get along with school and didn't want to talk about it or anything like that. You know, I began to learn about that kinda stuff. I didn't really know what being Native meant until I started to learn about, you know respecting people, and just sort of looking at people, looking at things that way, you know. And I thought it was really cool cause it seemed like a better way. And I thought I was really smart, I figured this way out and well, all Native people think that way, and so it sorta was cool to make that connection. But um, that really gave me a lot of strength to think that, you know, there was a reason that ah, you know, my family was messed up and it wasn't just cause they're stupid or something.

Now, I'm just trying to find people who understand and not have to worry about trying to help them figure things out, you know. To just have some space where I can you know, be myself and not have to worry about other people, what they think and stuff like that.

I had one friend who I grew up with, who is Native and you know he was, it was always important to him. And I didn't even know where I was from or anything you know, and he'd always tell everyone, yah, Rick's Native too. He was always proud of it, so sorta made me proud of it too, so that was cool.

And ah, I guess that's what my Mom was telling me in a weird way when I was younger was that, you know. I was trying to, I always sort of wondered, always wanted some answers: well, why didn't we fit in very well, or anything like that, or just had questions about that kinda stuff. She's always sorta pushed me in that direction but never really said that out right, kinda thing. Sort of left it up to me to discover myself. Well it was difficult. Sort of strengthened who I am in the end, you know. So that was good.

Well, it's really helped to be around people who've had similar experiences. Um, those kinda people weren't really around when I was younger, so I didn't really have anyone to talk to back then. But since I've been going to university and been around the
longhouse, I've met a bunch of people who, who've had very similar experiences, so it's helped to talk to them. It's helped to have other friends, you know, I mentioned that one friend that I did have um, who's also Native, when I was growing up. So just mostly talking to people, and sharing experiences.

It's been good to meet people who sort of can understand. And ah, for the most part they've been Natives or part Natives. Actually I have a good friend who's full-blood, ha, ha, ha. And she's really nice and you know, we always have good conversations so, that's really helped a lot. You know, I do have some, had some other friend, good friends who I grew up with. I feel comfortable with them and feel relatively understood with them, just cause they've seen me go through all this and maybe have a better idea of what I'm going through. I always make myself get out there and talk to people.

Other people help to teach us about ourselves, by the way they react to our words and behaviour. We learn what is inappropriate in certain settings, by the looks, words and behaviours of those around us. Rick discovered a lot about his own values by seeing what he felt was a better way in the actions of others. Having such values, like respect, affirmed in such practical ways, helps to make sense of the conflicting values presented during childhood. The chaos created by the battles between Rick's mother and father, were because of real, core issues, not because they were inherently "stupid". Putting ourselves in situations where we can meet people of our cultural group, or similar groups, like the longhouse at Rick's university, is crucial for our understanding of ourselves.

In addition to providing reflections of knowledge, people form communities that can provide a cushion for living in, a sometimes hostile, Canadian society. Meeting similar people, who have similar backgrounds or understandings about history and the meaning of events, can provide people of mixed ancestry with an ideal place to begin healing the internal wounds of Native-Canadian relations. Such people-environments operate at higher levels of understanding about common interests, like Native-Canadian relations, than in the general community. This
ensures that people can interact, comfortable in the knowledge that they need not expend too much energy on basic facts about the world. You can be yourself, and it's okay.

Special people in our lives can also act as role models or catalysts in our explorations of our identity as mixed ancestry individuals. People who are proud of ancestries that are similar to ours, and who seem to remain popular in spite of such pride, are like models for successful identity. When those people support us and include us, for who we are, they affirm our identities and help to impart a sense of belonging, or a sense of community. When others value us, we feel valuable. For most of the people in this study, there have been such people, and they are acknowledged for their importance in helping us to feel whole. Sometimes it is a family member, sometimes a friend, or even a lover.

_Emma_ – It wasn’t ’til I was a teenager again, when I was sixteen, and I dated this guy who’s sort of a real hippy. And he really was supportive of the fact that I was Indian and thought it was really neat and um, and ah, it was like the first time... And we had a lot of common interests like in herbology, you know plant medicine and that kinda stuff. And we kinda connected on that level. And that was really liberating for me.

I used to ask my Father a lot of questions. And I hung on to some positive memories too, memories of going to the reserve and visiting my Aunt. And that’s kind of stayed with me, as a source of feeling connected or something. Some small thread. And friends, and some of them non-Native friends who have been very supportive and encouraging in sort of a spiritual cosmic kind of way. There’s a couple of people, like that guy that I dated, and another friend, who both, they both really stand out in my mind as people who um, assisted me in gaining an appreciation of that specialness. And possibly, that’s just the way they are for whoever spends time with them. It wasn’t just because of the Indian thing, it was just because of their, they’re both very spiritual people.

And now I’m starting to think about um, my uncle, my Uncle George who’s been a real good um, I don’t know. In a lot of ways I feel like we have this real soul connection. Cause we have so much fun together, but we have these intensely spiritual, philosophical conversations, and we have this great time and he’s brutally honest at times. And I don’t know, there’s something about, about his... He’s just been a good sounding board for me and very supportive and, I mean if you have people like that in your family or um, well my cousin too, she’s been great ha, ha. Cause we’re, like we’re a similar age, our
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families, went you know, we kinda had different directions and upbringings in some ways. But it's amazing to meet someone when you're in your twenties and you have kinda a similar sense of humour, you've never met before and you have similar grasp of humour that no one else gets and I don't know, it's kind of amazing too, and because of being similar age and you know, going to school and all that and becoming politicized and exploring stuff at the same time; that's been a real support that's been very helpful. Theresa - Most of the friends I did have though were of mixed ancestry or Indian. When I went to Native school, I found a place where I fit in and I was excepted. All of the students there were of mixed ancestry or Native. This acceptance and familiarity that I found helped me to identify myself as belonging with these people.

Claire - Talking to other people of mixed ancestry has been a major key to my healing as a split person. Talking with people who understand, who you know understand, is really empowering. Who've maybe felt the same pain, the same fraudulence, the same sleights, the same self-consciousness. Knowing that others have been through similar experiences helps me to feel stronger, like others get through it, and still are competent beings, are still striving, making successes. If I think about the last few years, I think my family and friends have been the most important in helping me coalesce myself. Mainly because they've been the sounding ground for my discoveries and mostly non-judgemental about my choices. Of course they don't know what's going on inside me, but they're still there, and will be, now, for a long time. Even in my oddness of being split, they're still there and accepting, even if I don't know my language or all the ceremonies or songs or traditional ways of being, I'm Native in a very fundamental way, but also in a unique way. I might have non-Native ancestry, and, I guess what I'm trying to say, is that I consider myself Native, even if I can't pass any test on culture or language or history or blood quantum, or geography, et cetera. And I'm finding out that that's okay, and pretty common, even if people don't want to admit or make public their own incongruencies, with the popular stereotypes, or latest definition of what traditional Indians are. Understanding of the history, acceptance and understanding by others, and I think, continued exploration of my own spirituality and my own maturity, are primarily what have helped me.

There are also trained people available to help put being of mixed ancestry into perspective. There are Native healers and Canadian professionals whose sole occupations are to assist people during their life's journeys. The most helpful interpersonal skills that these people have, in my opinion, are empathy, unconditional positive regard, listening, reflection and assistance with finding options. For the last skill mentioned, the helpers must have a broad and deep understanding of Native-Canadian issues and resources. Without this understanding,
helping sessions are in danger of going nowhere, of focussing only on the problems, not on their resolution. Ricks experience of a university counseling session, in Section Two, is an example of this. The most critical issues that arise for people of mixed ancestry, are issues of mental health and spirituality. Choice of assistance can be crucial to ones self-esteem and sense of congruence. My personal bias and experience is that Native healers are better able to deal with psychological, metaphysical and spiritual processes than mainstream Canadian healers, who tend to use biomedical models which focus on symptomatic classification, diagnosis and pharmaceutical treatment (see Rod McCormick, 1995). In Claire’s case, Native healers were instrumental in assisting her to relate to her experiences in a positive way.

Claire - I’ve always had weird experiences that I didn’t want to tell anyone, because my brother’s schizophrenic and I was afraid they’d put me away too. So I really wanted to talk to a Medicine person. I met a mixed ancestry Medicine man who taught me a lot, and then in university I was introduced to a Medicine woman who was also of mixed ancestry. Sort of appropriate, eh? They have always been real supportive of my spiritual and metaphysical development and have helped me to understand a lot of things. I’m not schizophrenic, because I know the difference between the spiritual worlds and the one I’m living in. I am really interested in learning more deeply, about the spiritual teachings, the Mide teachings, because it might make sense of my experiences, but the time hasn’t come yet. Maybe it never will. At least now I feel more comfortable with myself, with my identity and spirituality. I’m not crazy after all.

Often, there are more public events that people of mixed ancestry can take part in, which can facilitate healing and a sense of wholeness. I’ve always found cultural events, feasts, ceremonies, and traditions to be helpful for feeling connected outside of myself, which in turn, helps to put the issues of my inner self into perspective. I may seem to be struggling all by myself, but there is a larger community, with similar needs and aspirations. I can do something and I can even say something, if I want. On occasion, there are public lectures, protests and
projects to partake in, which can increase personal understandings about the complexities and pervasiveness of the issues of Native-Canadian relations. Emma gives us one example.

_Emma_ - And um, you know, I was involved in this Royal Commission thing and it was a whole group of people of mixed ancestry. And it was about cultural identity and um, mixed ancestry, living in an urban environment. That was our group ha, ha. And it was awesome cause I’d been thinking about this stuff for, all this art work that I’d been doing, for a couple years I guess, I’d been intensely doing this. And you know none of my classmates were involved in the same work, like there was no other Native students, but everyone was very supportive and ah, they were all dealing with their own stuff. And to sit in this room full of, like, 20 people, and talk about this for two days... It was very, I don’t know, it was just an awesome experience. It was um, and I had a lot to say; I had to be really careful not to like dominate things. Like, who’d like to go first? I will! Ha, ha, ha. And I had all these words and all these thoughts and all these images that were, it was just such a relief to be able to sit and talk with people who really understood and, it’s very, it was quite amazing. Lots of laughing and, you know, it was, yeah, real understanding was there in the room.

With safe places to talk, and deeper and mutual understandings of issues of Native-Canadian relations, with people to reflect, give example, share and uphold us in our daily lives, we are helped to move forward, to more wholistic senses of ourselves.

**Emergent Identities**

We have talked about the context of Native-White or Native-Canadian relations, about the experiences of some mixed ancestry individuals, and about the strategies that these people use to develop, strengthen and celebrate their cultural and personal identities. Identity formation is an ongoing wholistic process that includes many worlds of experience. We are always in a state of identifying with people, beings and things in the world around us, and identifying
ourselves as aspects of who we are, who our ancestors were and who we wish to become. For some people of mixed ancestry, identity is fluid in situation and in time. If you ask each person who they are, at different moments in their life, at different places and events, you may get different answers. But although the process is dynamic, there is a slowing down, an increasing satisfaction with emergent choices in identity, that is assisted by maturity, experience, understanding and an accumulation of strategies for coping and excelling. As of October, November and December of 1998, in those specific moments of time when the interviews took place, the individuals involved with this research project identified themselves in the following ways:

**Gabriel** - I would say I'm Canadian, but I would qualify that with the three areas I mentioned: Scottish, French and Native.

**Bugsey** – I identify myself as a person of Native and non-Native ancestry. I don't identify myself either way... I've just ah, wanna be me. And who I am is part Native and part white and I'm okay with that.

**Shiatox** – I identify myself as a Sto:lo person. A Sto:lo First Nation person with um, Scottish heritage and some other kinds of heritage, including Shuswap. But I'm primarily Sto:lo.

**Roxanne** – I would answer in the traditional way I'd speak to any traditional Native asking where I'm from, and I'd say my father's from, he's Coast Salish, and I'm from the Tsawout Band, and I'm, you know I'd say those things that are my family line. And with white people, unless asked, I seldom mention, because I don't want to deal with prejudice.
Emma - I’ll say um, what my name is and I’ll say um, my Father’s family is Anishnaabe and my Mother’s ancestors came from Britain. I guess if the people I’m with seem to have a sense of humour and it’s kind of a friendly environment, I might call myself; I might say I’m mixed blood or I’m half-breed, or, but if I’m ah, and if I’m in a situation where it’s maybe all non-Native people, and um, I might say that I’m Native.

Theresa – I am Anishnaabekwe from Scugog Ontario, and Rama. When others insist I explain further, which is due to my appearance, I tell them I am Indian and that my father is white.

Claire – When people ask what my background is, I usually say Anishnaabe French. If more details are asked for, I say that my mother is French and that my father is from the Mndjikaning First Nation in Ontario. After that, I might say that I’m a status Indian and registered with the Mississaugas of Scugog First Nation. It’s kind of complicated.
Section Four: GIFTS

If we go back to our Romeo and Juliet metaphor, we have to remember that the story of Romeo and Juliet is a love story. We have to remember that against all odds, with the greatest hopes, prayers and determination, these two mismatched people aspired to a life of true love. In the case of Canada and First Nations, the odds seem to weigh heavily against any loving or egalitarian relationships. What inspires me is a belief in the inherent good nature of human beings, and in our ability to transcend and even learn from tragedy. While we hurt and push others away with our fears and ambitions, we would all ultimately like to live in peace. Is there any hope for love, integrity, respect, generosity, sharing, equality and truth between Canadian and First Nations people? Is there anything we can do? In this section, I will share some of the ideas and actions that people of mixed ancestry have given, towards the healing of Native-Canadian relationships in the greater society.

Rebels with a cause

Rick – I always go and say things, I’ve always sorta been mouthy hah. I guess I get it from my Mom. I found a letter, they’d had to give me the paddle again, you know, at school. Used to get the paddle all the time. And ah, so sometimes I say things that, I try to make people think or something, but usually I just end up getting myself in trouble ha, ha, getting myself paddled ha, ha. So I really try and make myself get out there. It’s difficult a lot of time. Sometimes I go home at the end of the day and I’m like, achh man, why did I say that, you know. But it just seems like I’ve always gotten into a lot of trouble, I’ve always been a real troublemaker, you know. I’ve always been getting into trouble with the police and everything, but how else are you supposed to learn, right? Pushing the barriers, you know, learning the hard way. So yeah, definitely a sort of Robin Hood kinda guy. Yeah, I always used to, I’d always try really hard to ah, you know, I’m trying to fix society I guess, ha, ha. Try and fix the world ha, ha. Cause I know better ha, ha. Just gotta try and say something that’ll get their attention, make
them think a little bit.

I have an admiration for people who speak out, for people who are bold, challenging, courageous, defiant, and even irreverant, in a good way, because they have an energy that can change the world. It may be anger, sadness, frustration, confidence or knowledge that fuels such boldness, but it doesn’t matter. The bottom line is that such people care. Would they say anything if it didn’t matter? Perhaps, but there’d be no passion. Speaking out helps people to persevere and live fulfilling lives, in spite of the difficult legacies, disadvantages or prejudices that they inherit or encounter. And it can affect other people, too. It’s inspiring and exciting to be in the presence of someone with integrity, who doesn’t fear the consequences of challenging unhealthy aspects of the status quo. Sure, the consequences of such boldness may not always be helpful, and some people might feel hurt, but the passions for change are stirred. If we can each muster up the courage to speak out, when we feel it’s necessary, then there’s hope for the world, and for mixed ancestry people.

Our Children

Just as we were born into a specific context, with unique historical, physical, psychological and spiritual characteristics, so are our children. If we are of mixed ancestry, so will our children be. Any issues we have with our identity, or with Native-Canadian relations, effect how we raise our children. If we can start the search for understanding, the search for continuity and congruency, if we can reach a place of peace or wholeness within ourselves, then we are better prepared to assist our children in their explorations of their own identity. Emma
shares her concerns about her own son and about the approaches she uses or is considering for supporting him in the future.

Emma – I’m just thinking about my son now cause um, I know that um, even though I’ve faced a lot of stuff and dealt with it on a personal level, I think um, it’s still hard for me to know how to help him with that. Because um, he’s, well at times in his life, almost blond, and he’s got blue eyes, very fair. And um, we’ve been in situations where Indian kids have treated him like shit and he’s ah, he hasn’t talked about it in a while, but when he was younger, why are the kids at the powwow so mean to me, they think I’m white, they call me names. And so it’s like he’s getting it too. And he’s a good person, and he’s a great, you know, has a really good spirit and um, I don’t know. I don’t know, I don’t know what to do with that.

So now I guess the next step is for me to figure out how to, how to support him. So, I mean the one difference is that he’s had the opportunity to come to different events and to be really in that environment and to have exposure to cultural stuff and opportunities to participate in that kinda thing. But I know, partly because, you know, probably because of my stuff that I was going through and because of the way he looks and he faces those same challenges I faced. But um, he’s going to have to make his own decisions about all that. Like I would never force him to do cultural stuff or, but it’s available to him. So when he’s at the age, at an age, where he feels he needs those things, I imagine he’ll make his own choices. So, and that’s, that’s kinda the next challenge for me I think, is to um, be supportive of my son through similar stuff. Cause I know on a spiritual, like internal level, it’s really important to him. But, and we’ve, we do little ceremonies together and he’s come to other bigger ceremonies with me and, not a lot, but some. And ah, he’s a real cosmic guy ha, ha, ha. And I think he’s, yeah, and I have no way of, you know, I can’t decide and I don’t even want to, what’s going to happen for him. But it troubles me sometimes. I kinda think about that. And then I don’t want to like feed him problems too, like, wow is he the way I am, like I don’t wanna, kinda well, he knows if he needs to talk about these things, and it comes up sometimes, and we talk about it. But I don’t want to force him to have issues about it. Cause maybe for him it won’t be an issue. Maybe he doesn’t identify with being Indian. Which seems kind of impossible ha, ha, ha. Considering the way that life is. Um, around here and around just the things that I do and, but um, I don’t wanna force him to have my issues, anymore than will happen anyway ha, ha. It’s yeah, I’m definitely a little bit confused about that. In terms of that kind of political stuff, he definitely identifies with being Native. Like he doesn’t feel like a victim, but that’s the way his, like he’s anti-oppression and anti you know, like he doesn’t think colonization’s been a really good thing and um, and in terms of the land question, I mean he’s got a real sense of justice about all that. And I don’t know, I mean that’s just part of his character anyway I think, justice. But um, yah it’ll be interesting. It will be, that’s gonna be a story that unfolds over time ha, ha.
Resolving issues of mixed ancestry identity, require resolving understandings of Native-Canadian relations. As was discussed previously, learning about ones history, about ones current context, and about the influences of other people’s values and behaviours can help us to build a sense of perspective, a more whole sense of ourselves as people of mixed ancestry. Emma reminds us that the best support we can give, is to be there for our children, to provide opportunities for exploration, and above all, to create an environment where children can realize and choose who they want to be. We cannot help but share our identity biases and cultural preferences with our children, and we may even think that our way is the best, but ultimately, our children are on their own journey, and will make their own decisions,

**Helping those who follow**

**Rick** - Don’t jump, ha, ha, ha. As bad as things may be, and you know, I guess, there’s always tomorrow ha, ha, ha. I don’t know it’s all I can say, you know. I hear that and I’m like, that sounds stupid, and, I don’t care, I want something now, you know. But you just gotta hang in there I guess. I guess it does get better, you know. And it is worth it, I guess, it is worth it you know, it isn’t all for naught. It just makes you stronger in the end, I guess.

Words of encouragement, empathy, humour and the knowledge that things do get better, help to hold people up. Issues of being of mixed ancestry may be difficult or intense at times, but we can make it, alone sometimes, or with the help of others. The following important words and experiences have been shared with the specific purpose of assisting others in their struggles with Native-Canadian relations and issues of mixed ancestry identity. What kind of advice would you give others struggling with their identity?
**Bugsey** – *Persist, don’t give up. Have faith.* I think, faith has been I don’t know, the word faith is overworked by Christianity. Just have faith that things will work out. The most amazing thing to me is that if I decide that I want to do something, and I’ve seen it, not only in myself and the things that I’ve done, but in other people around me. *Making the decision, making the commitment to go someplace and do something, is the catalyst.* Once a person has made the decision that they’re going to go somewhere and do something, the world changes around that person, to make way for them so that they can go to that place and do that thing. So for a young person that’s trying to find themselves and to do something, if they just understand what it is that they want and decide that they’re going to go for it no matter what, that it will happen. I’ve got a quote upstairs on my wall from Elija Harper. It says “keep going, whatever happens, keep on”. I like to keep visible reminders of inspiration around me. I see those things, I see those things, and during the hard times, and everybody gets those, those things that are just down, I don’t know. I have to speak for myself and say “I have those times when I say I’m just going to chuck it all and go back to something else I’ve done in my life. To heck with all this”. And I start looking at those kinds of things I have. And settle down and say just remember, have a little faith and keep on. That’s about it.

**Shiatox** - I guess, I guess I would say it’s important to know what your ancestry and what your heritage is, and to um, the decision I think is really quite personal um, for, for myself, not having the knowledge or being so distanced from what ever it is, what ever it means to be Scottish um, for myself it’s a choice to focus on what it means to me to be a Sto:lo person because ah, because that’s all I know, that’s all I’d grown up with, even though I didn’t know my name was Sto:lo. Um, living in the Fraser Valley and the lifestyle we had, even though we didn’t know it was Sto:lo. So, I guess it’s a personal choice. I think you should honour all of who we are. All of what we are. Um, and I do honour the ancestors that I have who are Scottish. Although it’s not, I’m concentrating too much, I need to concentrate on what’s important to me for the time being. Maybe at some other time I might explore that other part. So for young people who are struggling with who they are um, I found knowing the history of ah, of our country, knowing what happened um, in terms of the First Nation, non-First Nation relations, really helped me to put things into perspective and to um. Mixed ancestry, well, it can go either way, and it’s both, and they’re both honourable, if you decide to associate with one part of you more than another at one time, that’s okay. But if you’re searching for who you are as your First Nation ancestry um, then there’s, there’s simply lots of resources, and to seek them out. That would be my advice.

**Claire** – If I could give some advice, it would be to find out about your roots, the real story, and to explore your culture. And when it feels the scariest, to push on through the fear and humiliation, in a good way, because it’s usually not as bad as you think. There are some pretty mean people out there, Native and non-Native, but that’s their problem.
There's a lot of good people who're willing to help, and lots of information out there. It just takes time and will, and it just keeps getting easier and easier. I've felt like running away from anything Native at times, any Native situation, but I can't anymore. For better or worse, who you are, is who you are. Learn about who you really are and then you'll be able to make some decisions about what you really want to do. You're not completely Native and you're not completely white, but you can be completely yourself, with understanding and a willingness to go on. If you choose to take a Native path, then you'll have the reasons why behind you. If you choose to take a non-Native path, or a new mixed path, then you'll have the reasons behind you. It's your choice, and they're all okay.

Emma – I guess, the first thing that pops into my mind, is that it does matter. Ha, ha. Cause I've had a lot of people tell me that it didn't matter. Like just forget about it and... I think that ah, if a young person's having questions and, and um, conflict and then, it does matter. And if people tell you it doesn't matter, it's because maybe they don't understand. Or maybe they're trying to protect you or what else, what ever. But um, I don't know, I think um, just to be fortunate enough to have people enter into your life that um, that you trust... I think it really helps to talk about it with other people who have similar questions. And then to, to somehow find that, which isn't always an easy thing. Like to find um, people who understand, like people who you share some kind of experience with, can really be helpful I think. Um, so it's the same thing, it's like finding support. And sometimes it's not something that you can go looking for, I think it just comes into your life when you need it. But you have to notice. And ah, I don't know, when I think about that real hard despair time, like to get through that, like to not let the despair drown you. Cause I think it can be a really hard thing. Especially if you feel alone with it. I mean, maybe that's why lots of young people don't make it, cause they don't have anything, no support for their despair, like I think a lot of times we carry despair that's not just our own. Like we have this family, all this hysterical family conflict and despair and we just absorb it like little sponges and it's not even just our parents, it's like, generations and generations of despair and conflict. And when you start digging into that, it sort of comes to the surface and can be pretty devastating I think. So it's, in a way it's not to be taken lightly. It's really good to have a sense of humour about it all. And I guess that's why finding people where you know, enjoying your time with people who get it? Because it can, it can be lighter and not so overwhelming. But I mean to know that there, there can be light at the end of the tunnel, as they say, hah. But even when it feels really horrible and awful and painful, I think sometimes that happens just before it gets better. And that things can get better. Like now I feel like, that horrible, horrible time was probably not that long ago, it was probably, still in university, so probably about '90, probably about four or five years ago. That's when I felt like that. That's not very long ago. And now, I feel much stronger and more content. That's a good word, content. And more comfortable in my own skin. And, so it does get, it can get better quickly.
Theresa – Well, they know in their heart who they are and um, in their minds, who they are... and they shouldn’t be pressured to be somebody else that they’re not comfortable with. I think that um, looking for things that they’re comfortable with, which way they’re comfortable, how they’re comfortable being, you know? If they’re comfortable with being with white people then that’s okay. They could uh, talk to people. Like for me ah, I ask people about culture and, cause I didn’t know very much. Asking people questions and talking to elders and talking to my Mom and my relatives, talking to friends, getting out there...

Even though I was unsure of myself, I always knew in my heart who I was. It took many different experiences which caused heart aches, anger, frustration, and happy times. Whether the road is straight or curved there was always enlightenment on the way. Everyone of mixed ancestry is bound to have confusion not only from other people, but also within themselves. It isn’t easy find who you are no matter where you come from or where your history is. I’ve found that by going by how I feel, learning about myself and learning about both worlds made me better understand how I wanted to identify myself. The struggle is hard but it does get easier with each new experience.

Roxanne - It’s also stages and that, I don’t know whether that’s just part of being young also. But I’ve watched them go through the stages of getting really into the Indian and wearing lots of jewelry and their hair long and being real traditional and all that stuff. And gradually the hair gets cut, the jewelry slows down... Because as they get their own identity of themselves as Native, and in touch with that vibration inside themselves that is Native, and can feel it and can accept it and understand it, then they no longer need the outward anymore. Because they don’t need it to reinforce who they are. And that’s when I know that they’ve really sort of found what they’re looking for. And then all that sort of stuff settles down. And it’s then that they usually come and ask for Medicine stuff. When they start really looking for the meat of what they’re learning.

And the energy, the overall feel of somebody who’s Native is very different than the overall feel of somebody who’s white. And when you’re one of each, you, you have that in you, and you resonate with that at different places. I think it’s genetic, yup. I can, I don’t think it’s accidental that my daughter and particularly my granddaughter have a talent with the piano... It came because their great grandfather gave them his gift. It’s just a gift of the family that moves through. And I think that applies with, with all of our teachings, and I think that it comes out once in every seven generations. So within that seven generations, another one’s going to come because that’s the gift that’s carried... I believe is carried by the family bloodline. Native tradition said that, mostly Native and Celtic traditions have said, that I have worked with, have said that, has said that, that connection passes through by connection here, because the ancestors don’t leave. They follow with us and work with us. I like, I like the DNA thing because in many ways it can, it can, it’s a safe place for people who can’t accept the other potentials, what can I say. I say to people well, it’s in the DNA, they just haven’t found the little lines or
marked the place yet. And that's fine. I don't really care how they get there, I just want 'em to get there. So we can get on with it and grow in consciousness. When um, when somebody says to me that they have a reincarnation memory and other people say “well, I don't believe in reincarnation”, that's the answer that I use all the time. I say well, ancestral memory. If you want to take it to ancestral memory, it doesn't matter. Because it's what you get and what you learn. And it makes you come to that place where you're in touch with your higher self, and makes you clear about where you're going. Who cares? Like the fact that you're going to the store for milk. You know, it doesn't matter, as long as you get the milk. It doesn't matter whether you wanna go by car, or whatever vehicle you use to get you there. The result is you got the milk and that's all you're really there for. It doesn't matter. Too much is on the tool you use, instead of the result. It's becoming so, the world is becoming so small. That you just can't, you can't maintain separate identities. It's not going to happen. In order for mankind to progress on the whole, it can't stay divided.

While it is very important to help people to deal personally with the way our societies are, Gabriel reminds us that we have to also create support for Native people in more formal ways. We have to create bridges and transitions between Native and Canadian worlds, through appropriate social and education programming, so that the consequences of the socio-political clashes on people, are not so intense.

_Gabriel_ – In corrections I saw a lot of young Native men, more than others. They were totally lost. They don't know what the rules are, what the law is, so they end up in jail. There is a need for some kind of training for young people leaving the reserves, about what to expect. They need life skills for the real world, to be diplomatic, education, trained Native teams to counsel at the reserves, cities, et cetera.

Inspired yet? There is so much information, so much experience, so much strength and hope that has been shared that I am momentarily wordless. The hearts of mixed ancestry individuals have spoken and their words have wisdom. Understanding and resolving mixed ancestry issues is complicated, but not impossible. The eight people who shared their words...
here are proof that there is much that we can do as individuals to heal ourselves, support each other and change the world for the better.

Accepting & Working in the Middle Ground

**Bugsey** – And I feel like I can ah, I can fit in the world and accept that there’s a lot of things that can be done by people of mixed ancestry. I feel like I’m right in the middle of a lot of things. Like there’s the Native and White issues. And of course I’m very interested in Aboriginal issues and so in my own work, I’m right in the middle of traditional knowledge and western science, because I’ve got a degree in science... so when I write, I wanna write for everyone. Not just for an academic audience. So I find myself right in the middle of all these issues and it can be daunting sometimes, but, it’s pretty exciting too. And it’s a great opportunity to do a lot of good in the world and I think when I was thinking about going back to school, I decided that, that was what I wanted to do, so here I am, just overflowing with all this opportunity.

My connection is with western scientific knowledge and traditional knowledge of First Peoples. I believe that there’s a very strong connection and so I see that as my niche. Place where I can work to bring those two things together so that people who are practitioners of traditional knowledge can get the benefit of western science at the same time, by having my foot in the world of western science. I want to be able to show those scientists that traditional knowledge is something that is very relevant to western science. Western scientists go into an area and they’ll do a study that lasts two weeks or two months or maybe even for several years. But they can never, ever aspire to the amount of knowledge and understanding that people who live in that area, on that land, know about it. Those are my challenges and like I said they’re self-inflicted. But I’m happy with them, comfortable with all of that.

Many people of mixed ancestry are personally interested in healing the relationships between Natives and Canadians. If we can make connections, create an acknowledgement of each other’s strengths, as well as challenges, then we can begin to work together. Much work has already been done, but more is needed. Many mixed ancestry individuals are drawn to learning about Native ways of life and about Native issues, to balance out their understanding of
Canadian ways of life, or visa versa. Being knowledgeable in these two areas often situates mixed ancestry individuals as liaisons, translators, and brokers between Native Nations and organizations, and Canadian organizations and governments. The need for more people who can negotiate or navigate between these different worlds is essential for building a better future for both Native people and Canadians, especially in institutions that greatly impact upon the lives of Native people.

**Claire** – Wholeness: on a good day I feel more than whole, on a bad day, I feel as if every conflict, every bit of suffering caused by poor Native-White relations is on my shoulders. I am the continuing reminder, my sometimes pain is the continuing reminder that all is not well between First Nations people and non-Native people. A good thing that's come of all this, is an understanding of the tensions and conflicts, I think, which helps me in my work towards alleviation of some of the issues, and that feels good.

Working between diverse cultures can be as painful as living with two ancestries. Mixed ancestry individuals have experience living and dealing with the tension, aggression and pain that are created by the clash of philosophies and ways of life, as a matter of survival. In a similar way, working in the middle ground is recognized as a high stress area, a “hot seat”, that brings dissatisfaction, pressure and anger from both Native and non-Native people. Historically, these positions have a high turnover rate, whether they are held by Natives or non-Natives. Even so, you will often find people of mixed ancestry in such middle ground positions.

**Emma** - It's really interesting. And I think that one of the reasons why I feel a little more comfortable about it right now is just because I've found ways of that being a good thing instead of a bad thing in the last couple a years. It's like I don't feel like something's missing. It's like I get the best of both worlds and that's a nice thing.

And now I almost feel, just in terms of the work I'm doing, not my art work, I don't have
time right now for that, but um, the work-work I'm doing has been almost like... The things that have been challenges and difficult for me in the past have allowed me to do a good job at what I'm doing now. Because I can go back and forth between this First Nations organization and this government office. And I can go back and forth between these different, very different groups of people. And sometimes not so different groups of people, and um, and feel okay. I can do that. So I'm sort of like this, that black area, this gray area that I used live in, between my families, is now where I work, ha, ha, ha. And it's okay. I kind of, it's like this painful thing has turned into a gift. And I guess that's the way it goes sometimes, eh? So, I guess that's probably all I have to say about that ha, ha, ha.

Working in the ground between Native and Canadian people can be very rewarding. As Emma shares, there is a certain amount of accomplishment with being able to negotiate between both worlds. In addition, the assumptions that mixed ancestry people aren't really connected to or knowledgeable about their communities can be used to advantage in negotiating situations; difficult questions can be raised or observations made, that may not be spoken between groups with established allegiances. There are still hard times where everyone seems at odds, but the focus becomes creating common ground, or creating compatible visions. We may be divided internally and externally, but there are ways of resolving our differences. The skills and strategies that are employed to create a sense of wholeness within mixed ancestry individuals can be applied to working in the middle ground, to helping people to emerge whole from Native-Canadian relations.

Conclusion

The existence of Native mixed ancestry people threatens the solidarity of Native peoples, because of the Canadian policy to use pseudo-blood-quantum measurements to determine
populations of Native people, and hence to justify the control and disintegration of Native lands and resources. As a result, hierarchies of belonging develop along lines of identity, to maintain access to positions of privilege and power. Mixed ancestry individuals are juxtaposed between the hierarchies of belonging of Native peoples and those of Canadian society. Native-White political and social clashes ensure that issues of mixed ancestry are made invisible, gray areas, that are deemed secondary to the issues of the survival of Native Nations, and to the maintenance of control by Canadian governments over lands and resources. I suggest that issues of mixed ancestry are integral to the resolution of relations between Native and Canadian Nations, because such issues are the consequences of the historical and current policies used to subjugate Native Nations. Issues of being of mixed Native and Euro-Canadian ancestry are the indicators of socio-political dysfunction and can serve as focal points for the resolution of relationships between Native and Canadian peoples.

Having ancestors who are Native, as well as Euro-Canadian brings both privilege, if you are fair-skinned, as well as pain. The sensations and experiences of the people involved in this research project are diverse. The issues of Native-White relations affect mixed ancestry individuals on a very personal level. There are many themes and commonalities that arise from the experiences of such people: such as family dysfunction based on clashes between cultural values, racism, questions of legitimacy, feelings of being split, and the intensity, confusion and despair that come with a denied sense of belonging. Many individuals deal with these issues most of their lives, though periods of intensity seems to wane with an emerging sense of wholeness that comes with increases in knowledge, experience and the acquisition of coping strategies.

The strategies employed by some mixed ancestry individuals to deal with their
experience of being of mixed ancestry, are diverse and wholistic. Most revolve around a maturing sense of acceptance of how Native-Canadian relations work, and of ones place within both Native and Canadian situations. This acceptance is facilitated by exploration and experimentation with the meaning of ones identity, by humour and the gaining of new perspectives, by turning to people who can help, by learning about Native-Canadian history, and by becoming clear, committed and knowledgeable about ones own spirituality, beliefs, values and behaviour. One of the greatest tools that people of mixed ancestry often develop, is the ability to re-evaluate the context of each situation they are in, with respect to their own identity. Such re-evaluation enables more effective communication and more appropriate behaviour within shifting cultural, social, and political circumstances.

Mixed ancestry individuals are often committed to creating better lives for themselves, for their children and for the societies around them. Resolving internal battles provide a map for resolving the Native-Canadian conflicts in everyday life. The acquisition of useful strategies to cope with these battles, and emerging acceptance, can trigger the energy and inspiration required for altruistic commitment. Such commitments can result in efforts to challenge the status quo by speaking out, providing assistance to others of mixed ancestry, and finding work in fields that provide opportunities for the resolution of Native-Canadian issues.

Gitche Migwetch and thankyou for reading the words, thoughts and experiences that have been shared here, and for the considerations and actions that may result. For the good of All Our Relations!
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