An Auto-Ethnographic Inquiry: Indigenous Ethnic-Racial Identity of An Indigenous Woman's Adaptation and Transformation

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Abstract
Persistent colonialization in Canada has tremendously impacted the perceptions and cognitions of Indigenous people on their ethnic-racial identities. Relying on an auto-ethnographic inquiry, this study explores how ethnic-racial socialization practices developed and transformed my ethnic identity as an Indigenous woman through using methods of layered accounts and the directed thematic analysis approach to highlight themes that reflect my experiences in my childhood, youth, and adulthood. Data is collected from self-inventory, journals, school papers, and emails that were written throughout my twenties. I attempt to understand the elements and experiences that make up my ethnic-racial identity. The findings illuminate issues of internal and external racism, cultural assimilation, and how I develop a need to over-compensate for my lack of knowledge of my Indigenous culture. Based on my experiences as a snapshot, this study unveils the adaptation and transformation of Indigenous people's ethnic-racial identities through the process of ethnic-racial socialization practices. Arguably, it would be helpful to foster and develop a positive ethnic-racial identity in Indigenous youth.

Key words: Auto-Ethnography, Ethnic-Racial Identity, Indigenous Woman, Adaptation, Transformation

Introduction

"Being an Indian is hard; people are going to expect you to do nothing with your life." Writing these words down hurts and brings tears to my own eyes. Ethnic-racial identity is defined as individuals' senses, emotions, and cognitions related to their ethnic heritage and racial background (Else-Quest & Morse, 2015). It tends to be developed and transformed through ethnic-racial socialization practices (Else-Quest & Morse, 2015; Hughes & Chen, 1997; Hughes & Johnson, 2001). Ethnic identity is often developed during childhood and adolescence through the ethnic-racial socialization practices fostered by parents or the caregivers of the child (Else-Quest & Morse, 2015; Hughes et al., 2006). Essentially, parents create the

environment and the experiences for a child to develop their own beliefs and feelings towards their ethnic-racial group. Hughes et al. (2006) described the process of the ethnic-racial socialization practices as having four components including *cultural socialization, preparation of bias, promotion of mistrust and equalitarianism.*

Historical motives and the methods used by the government to colonize and culturally assimilate Indigenous people have enormously impacted Indigenous communities, cultures, languages, spirituality, and traditions in terms of their ethnic-racial identity. Indigenous individuals will answer where they are from with their band or nation instead of the city, town, or province where they are living. To them, identity refers to not only personal identity but also the collective identity of their nation, cultural and familial collectives (Indigenous Corporate Training Inc., 2018). However, persistent cultural assimilation and colonization have made them traumatized to speak their language and alienated from their community. Furthermore, Indigenous parents intend to focus on the preparation of bias and promotion of mistrust, and families are inclined to be dysfunctional and consequently, Indigenous children are in the struggle of creating an ethnic identity in a predominately non-Indigenous society.

I am an Indigenous Nakaywayininwak[1] woman with three children, who grew up in my First Nation community. I lived on a small reserve named Fishing Lake First Nation until I was nineteen and was raised by a single mother with six children, two of whom were deceased. When I look at my life, my mother was too busy trying to provide the necessities of life to expose us to our culture. During my childhood, I wanted to deny the Indigenous part of who I am. I have never felt comfortable with that. In my student days, I had believed we were considered less and not as equal by the dominant culture. As a researcher in social work, I have always felt that because I was not adequately educated in the protocols of ceremonies and practices, I would not be considered culturally competent. My personal belief was that I should be connected to my culture as part of my identity as an Indigenous woman. The fact that I have fallen short in this area of my life has caused self-esteem issues. I have often questioned if I am "Indian" enough. I have always wondered if I was misrepresenting myself and my people. The responsibility to my community and identity as part of this ethnic-racial group was not embraced. Instead, I viewed the Indigenous collective as a hindrance to my identity, a burden that I did not want to carry.

Therefore, I wanted to dig into how my ethnic-racial identity was shaped by the process of ethnic-racial socialization practices as an Indigenous woman. Based on a retroactive inquiry of my personal experiences, stories, and self-reflection, I tried to explore how experiences in my childhood have affected the decisions that I have made as an adult and how my experiences developed my ethnic-racial identity and whether these experiences helped or hindered my ability to promote a positive ethnic-racial identity. My experiences and stories can be viewed as a snapshot to lend the group more attention within the existing structure. Moreover, my job is to help Indigenous youth, especially those in foster care, make connections to their community and their own cultural identity. This study would help better understand youth and their disconnect with their community and foster a positive ethnic-racial identity in them.

Research Questions

The research questions to be answered by this study are:

1. How do I define my ethnic racial identity as an Indigenous woman?
2. What are the components of ethnic-racial socialization practices?
3. How did the components of ethnic-racial socialization practices affect my development of ethnic racial identity?

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[1] Nakaywayininwak is the proper term that our people use, when referring to our people.

Literature Review

Early Theories on Ethnic Identity

Many studies have focused on the development of ethnic identity. Phinney (1989) explained how ethnic identity was developed during adolescence. He described her theory as an unexamined ethnic identity. Specifically, adolescents with achieved ethnic identity are shown to have better self-esteem and psychological adjustment (Hughes et al., 2006; Phinney, 1989). Phinney and Ong (2007) discussed why the self-esteem of adolescents might be linked to self-awareness. The authors also explained the theoretical background for a developmental model of ethnic identity. They explained in detail the formation of ethnic identity concerning self-identity, including the notion that ethnic identity is more stable in those with a secure self-identity (Phinney & Ong, 2007). According to French et al. (2006), Phinney's model is considered a measure of ethnic identity on a global scale, as she uses a combination of ethnic-identity achievement and a sense of belonging and exploration to examine ethnic identity over time. Hughes et al.'s (2006) theory of ethnic-racial socialization practices is based on Phinney's model. In addition, Phinney and Chavira (1995) studied that a parent attempted to deliberately teach children instead of being learned through practice and observation. This can affect the amount of knowledge a child will gain about his/her culture. As the theories and terminology developed over time, bi-cultural is replaced as egalitarianism (Phinney & Chavira, 1995).

Self-Esteem and Ethnic-Racial Identity

Ethnic racial identity is defined as central to oneself as it reflects the knowledge of individual's behaviors, rituals, or ceremonies characteristic to the group(s) that one belongs to (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014), and can be positive or negative. What is more, ethnic-racial identity and self-esteem have been linked in many studies and can have either a positive or negative effect on a child in their early years (Else-Quest & Morse, 2015). Positive self-esteem can be connected to a strong ethnic-group association and commitment to the group and pride in cultural activities (Else-Quest & Morse, 2015). Cheah and Chirkov (2008) studied how parents' personal and cultural beliefs affected their Indigenous children. In addition, self-esteem varies on which component of ethnic-racial socialization practices are emphasized (Else-Quest & Morse, 2015). Hughes et al. (2006) reviewed several studies on ethnic-racial socialization practices and the emphasis on the individual components and the connection to self-esteem.

Ethnic-Racial Socialization Practices

The term *ethnic-racial socialization practices* are used to describe how parents and others transmit information of their ethnic and cultural background to their children (Hughes et al., 2006). Preparation of bias is a term used when parents prepare the child for encounters of discrimination and give coping mechanisms for when it occurs. It can be proactive or reactive depending on the situation (Else-Quest & Morse, 2015; Hughes et al., 2006). It is not meant to be negative as it can have a positive effect, because discussions of race can lead to less stereotyping and prejudice (Aldana & Byrd, 2015). Second, promotion of mistrust takes place because of a parent's negative encounter with the dominant group (Demo & Hughes, 1990). This component of ethnic-racial socialization involves warning children of interracial interactions as they are considered negative and often not in favour of the minority ethnic group (Hughes et al., 2006). It is different from the preparation of bias, as it promotes mistrust in the interactions with the dominating culture. Third, cultural socialization is the development of ethnic-racial identity through teaching of cultural practices, language, ceremonies, values, and beliefs (Else-Quest & Morse, 2015). Cultural socialization practices are deliberate practices including cultural customs or traditions that are used to promote cultural pride in their ethnic-racial group (Hughes et al., 2006). The final component of ethnic-racial socialization is egalitarianism that is the parental promotion of equal opportunity and developing skills and characteristics need growing in settings being part of the mainstream dominant culture (Hughes et al., 2006).

Indigenous Collectivism and Identity

Historically, Indigenous groups viewed their community as a collective and did not emphasize individuality. Once Indigenous people were forced to live on reserves and depend more on the government than on traditional ways of gathering food and hunting, there was a shift in keeping the community together with connection to the community. Communalism refers to the sense of community cohered by familial relations and the families' commitment to it, in which family is understood broadly and multi-generationally (Sinclair et al., 2009). It is important to acknowledge that kinship does not only require blood but can be created by many forms such as adoption, intermarriage, clans, community ties, and friendship. Whitesell et al. (2006) discussed that self-esteem was gained when an individual could contribute to the community and its collective well-being. However, mainstream society often places the individual self as the most important above the community. This conflicts with traditional socialization practices and norms of an Indigenous community.

In the mentioned research, the relationship and concepts of ethnic-racial socialization practices and ethnic-racial identity are clarified, and it can be viewed as a benchmark for the present study. Also, there has been no research employing auto-ethnography as a methodology in this field. Therefore, with the present study, I use my own experiences to examine and anatomize the interactions among self and the wider community. From the angle of an insider, I chronologically revisit my past and bring out major themes that emerged over and over and understand how the experience is linked closely to social context. This research can play a role in extending the research field.

Methodology

Auto-ethnography is increasingly used as a research method, pushing the boundaries of qualitative inquiry by focusing on a phenomenon in the life of the researcher as the central aspect of the study, and publishing the findings as a cultural critique (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Reed-Denahay (1997) determined that auto-ethnography could be used when there are questions of self-hood and could also be an authentic voice of those who are culturally displaced and in exile. Layered account auto-ethnography was used to tell my story, about how my ethnic-racial identity was formed. It uses *vignettes, reflexivity, multiple voices, and introspection* to allow the reader to enter the researcher's emerging experience of doing the research (Ellis et al., 2011). It allowed me to focus on my accounts using collected data, abstract analysis, and relevant literature to complete my auto-ethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2011). Also, the reflexive ethnography method, which documents ways a researcher changes because of doing fieldwork (Ellis & Bochner, 2011), was applied to this study. During my data collection and the coding of this material, I kept a field journal that detailed some of my reflections of the past and how it continually transformed my ethnic-racial identity.

Trustworthiness of the Auto-ethnographic Inquiry

Auto-ethnographic researchers depend on their own experiences as the only source of data (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013) and consequently, the academic rigor of auto-ethnographic has been questioned. In the present study, I coped with trustworthiness by (a) constantly verifying the authenticity of my journals, dialogues, emails, and my essays, (b) reading the relevant literature and comparing the experiences, concepts, and research findings to my own experiences, and (c) asking myself if the text secured a real sense of my lived experience.

Data Collection Methods

Data was collected through a variety of methods described by Chang (2008) from 2012 to 2014. Specifically, I began my field journal with direction instead of randomly writing memories. I collected data through self-inventory, reviewed journals, letters, emails, drafts of documents, speaking notes, minutes of academic meetings relating to Indigenous people, and school papers both from my undergrad and graduate classes. The process allowed me to better understand the moments that shaped and transformed my ethnic identity.

Data Analysis Methods

I chose to use the directed thematic analysis approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This approach is used for identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes within data (Braun & Clark, 2006). After I had gone through several instances and experiences of particular significance to the development of my identity as an Indigenous woman. I rated the experiences on a scale of 1-10, 1 being of small significance in forming my ethnic-racial identity and 10 being pivotal moments in my development as an Indigenous woman. I only used experiences that I rated 7 and higher. Some experiences could have been used as examples of the themes that emerged, but only those which were rated above 7 were thought to be integral to my ethnic-racial identity formation. I began first by coding my previous assignments that were written during my time spent as an undergraduate student. I then coded personal journals and reflections that were written over several years of travel. My current field journal was used to keep track of new information or reflections on past experiences. Once coding was complete, I identified four reoccurring themes: internal racism, external racism, overcompensating, and cultural assimilation.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. First, there is a potential bias in the research, as you are already looking for certain themes that are reflected in your research question (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Second, it is seen by others as self-indulgent, hardly reflective, or thinly connected to culture (Witkin, 2014). For some, it is not scientific enough for scholarship as there is no set-theoretical and analytical method to follow (Ellis et al., 2011). There is also the issue of memory and its reliability.

Findings

As mentioned, the purpose of this study was to explore how ethnic-racial socialization practices developed and transformed my ethnic identity as an Indigenous woman. I attempted to construct knowledge by exploring my personal experience. The data sources included my stories, self-narrative, emails, causal literacy notes, etc. throughout my twenties. The themes are as follows: internal racism, external racism, overcompensation, and cultural assimilation.

Internal Racism

Internal racism did have a large impact on creating my ethnic-racial identity in childhood and how I perceived my ethnic-racial group. Many of the stereotypes about Indigenous peoples told by my mother were part of the preparation of a biased perspective. I have been told about the differences between ethnic-racial groups and non-Indigenous people before the age of five. I remember when seeing signs in a store, "no more than 1 bottle of Scope or Lysol will be sold to one person" because they contain small amounts of alcohol. I could feel that storekeepers made sure that we were treated differently. At that time, my self-concept was not fully formed, but I knew it was better to be white than brown if I wanted to be treated fairly. My encounters as a child with the dominating white culture were negative.

Stereotypes were not explained to me or part of my parent's vocabulary at my young age. I did not know what stereotypes meant to me, but I felt the effects of it on several occasions during my childhood and youth in rural Saskatchewan, Canada. I was one of three or four children from my reserve who went to the town school. It was the first time I interacted daily with non-Indigenous people. I had only known people with brown eyes and brown hair. When seeing a beautiful doll with blonde hair and blue eyes in the classroom, I wanted it so badly that I stole it. The teacher asked my mother to have me bring back the doll. My mother said, "Just because we were Indian, doesn't mean we were all thieves". At home, my mother told me, "If you took that doll, you're just another thief. Everyone already thinks all Indians are thieves, but even worse you're a liar." Those words stayed with me for my whole life.

There were times when my mother took a stand against stereotypes. It was at these times, that I was proud of her, and she gave me the confidence later in life to do the same. I remember being short a few dimes for a candy. A storekeeper said to me, "Ask your mom for more money unless, of course, she drank it all up." The next day, my mother argued with the storekeeper that not all Indians were drunks. She explained to me

being a drunk all the time was what people thought about us. However, even though, it did not mean we had to believe them. As an adult, I am grateful for that lesson. However, at that time, the shame of being associated with the negative stereotypes did create a depression for me. I was more withdrawn at school and began to escape into books and music to not think about where I was. I longed to be an adult and move away from the reserve.

Preparation of bias and promotion of mistrust is taught by socialization practices, but it can be perpetuated from the community. It is the notion that someone can be "rezzed out" or "is too rezzed." Rezz is slang for reserve and means a person is acting "uncivilized". It would be demonstrated by not speaking when the dominating culture spoke to the person, or the Indigenous person did not make eye contact. In my youth, I did have feelings of social incompetence. I did not want to be singled out and was afraid to share my opinion. I believed that because I was Indigenous, my opinion would not be respected. Being "rezzed" also was associated with having a heavy Indian accent. I tried to get rid of my accent because it was part of the internal shame of being Indigenous. I would emulate non-Indigenous peoples and use my "white" voice. I still use my "white" voice on formal occasions.

In my childhood, I longed to belong to the dominating culture. I believed that if it was so hard to be Indian, why bother being Indigenous? I thought it would be best to be as "white" as possible. Despite your hard work and behavior, you would still be just another Indian, which resulted in my hating my ethnic-racial group. These thoughts were reinforced at the age of twelve. I went to a sleepover at my British friend's house. My mother reminded me of not getting too crazy or wild. I took that comment as "don't act like an Indian." At the sleepover, we started to talk about the boys in our class who were cute and who were ugly. All the Indigenous boys were placed in the ugly category. My so-called friend explained that all the Indigenous boys acted the same. She added, "But, we don't mean you, you're not like them, you're like us." I was so conflicted at the time.

Internal racism does not only have to be restricted to the individual but also their ethnic-racial group (Hughes et al., 2009). The stereotypes that I was exposed to include the belief that white people think all Indians are drunks, on welfare, have lice, sniff gas, and steal. Some of the stereotypes were reinforced by the people in my community. For example, many individuals in my community were on welfare. I would see these long lines outside the band office when people waited to pick up their cheques. The white kids in class made so many jokes and comments about how the whole reserve was lining up and how the bar would be so busy that night. I was not angry with their comments, but I felt so ashamed to be Indian.

There is a stereotype that most Indigenous people have problems with substance abuse. Substance abuse of alcohol, drugs, and solvents were found frequently in my community. All substances were easily accessible in my community for both adults and youth. Several youths would sniff or inhale glue, nail polish, gas and I was no exception. I felt it was important if I wanted to be part of the group or hang out with Indigenous kids on the reserve and I was buying into these stereotypes that skewed my perception of what it was to be Indigenous.

Another stereotype is that most Indigenous persons are thieves. For example, when I was thirteen, I was caught stealing. The man at the drugstore called the police. He told the police officer Indians were thieves and only knew how to steal. I begged the police officer not to tell my teacher. I was more concerned that he would see me as a thief than my mother finding out what I had done. It was at this moment that I felt that if I was perceived as a thief, it should not matter if I acted like one. I began to steal pens, stickers, candy bars, and small items.

Another stereotype is of receiving an education from a non-Indigenous institution would be more valued. In grade twelve, my reserve opened a school. I wanted to attend but my mother and eldest brother were opposed to it. My mother felt that I would receive a better education in the town school and assumed being educated at a "white" school would better prepare me for university. This bias carried forward and stayed with me well into adulthood. When I applied to universities for a degree in social work, I chose the University of Regina's program instead of the First Nations University of Canada. I believed a degree from the University of Regina would be more widely recognized and would give me more work opportunities.

Internal racism created self-esteem issues for me and resulted in me shaming myself and my people. Intellectually, I should not feel shame as it was part of the process of finding my identity, but I still cringe when I think of these moments denying my own people. I began to direct my shame outwards and began to hate the dominating culture. I blamed it for my weak ethnic-racial identity.

External Racism
The point when I stopped wanting to be "white" and started to take pride in who I am does not have a clear date. My thoughts and feelings changed over time, but this change began in high school. I was given knowledge of the role Indigenous peoples had in history by my high school social studies teacher. I looked at my people differently and in a positive light. Over sixteen years, I had experienced racism and "turned the other cheek." The dominating culture had taught me that my people were insignificant and more of a burden to society than contributors. Beginning in high school, my anger grew based on past events and present-day issues facing the Indigenous community. For example, a girl in my grade eleven class said to me, "I'm tired of paying taxes for your people to sit around and enjoy welfare while my parents and I work our asses off." I decided to learn as much as I could about Indigenous people and wanted to use intelligence to argue every negative point about my people. Mendoza-Denton et al. (2002) acknowledged that rejection by the dominating culture could result in negative feelings toward the dominating culture. It was the negative reactions that drove me over the next nine years of my life.

Henson et al. (2013) speculated that those who experience discrimination often sought out others from their ethnic-racial background. I wanted to find those who could understand my anger. I learned about how the government treated Indigenous people and this made me angrier. Indigenous instructors often advocated that Indigenous people demanded the right to have equal treatment under the law. Some instructors went so far as to blame the dominating culture and their assimilationist policies for the reason our communities were so dysfunctional. I had bias and mistrust in the dominating culture and the government. Many of the papers that I wrote while pursuing my Bachelor of Arts in Indigenous Studies were reflective of this type of overt racism towards the dominating culture. During the years to follow, my assignments began to look more racist. I began to feel justified in my responses to the dominating culture because of the past trauma from the historical assimilationist policies like the in 1857, the Gradual Civilization Act (Robinson, 2016). I wanted to erase the eagerness to throw away my ethnic-racial people. The new words in my vocabulary were oppression, subjugation, and systemic racism. I wanted to use education as my weapon against all oppression. In 2013, I wrote about education. "All these forms of colonialism are clear in academia, as much of the content created and taught is done so by the colonial perspective and does not include Indigenous knowledge or sources." I began to blame the problems of Indigenous peoples on colonization and the colonizers.

It is safe to say that the promotion of mistrust which I was taught as a child could account for my readiness to embrace opportunities to feel anger and racism towards the dominating culture. By my early twenties, I was redirecting my anger that was once directed towards myself to the dominating culture. I used historical examples of misguided trust in the dominating culture, like broken treaties and the Indian Act policy as an excuse to mistrust the dominant group. Promotion of mistrust focuses on the discrimination itself and not addressing it positively creates friction between the minority and the dominating culture (Hughes & Chen, 1997). It was easy to be distrustful of the people from the dominating culture because, from an early age, we were taught to mistrust them.

My data included several instances of interaction with the dominating culture where I felt I had to justify my Indigenousness. I have been often told to go back to where I came from. I began to respond by saying, "my people have been here for over 500 years, this is our land you are standing on, you came here from another country if you don't like being around me and my people, you leave, you go back to your country!" I wanted to make sure that it was clear that Indigenous peoples were here in Canada first. I would often hear the same words paraphrased by other Indigenous peoples from other countries speaking about their dominating culture or their colonizers. At the meetings I attended, I was introduced to different Indigenous groups like the Mapuche, Sami, Naga, and Chukchis. I traveled to Argentina, New York,

Geneva, Cook Islands, Nepal, India, and Greenland to meet with Indigenous peoples to discuss issues that we all faced in our countries. I was forming my ethnic-racial identity based on my university education and my interactions with Indigenous peoples internationally. With my knowledge of the history of Indigenous peoples in Canada and because I grew up on a reserve in Saskatchewan, I felt I could convey our struggles to Indigenous peoples internationally.

I wanted to believe that if Canada was not colonized, we as Indigenous peoples would have a perfect society. There would have been no social problems related to alcohol, substance abuse and, therefore, no violence and sexual abuse among our people. My 2004 paper reflected this idea. My question was that if the Europeans were not concerned by the color of our skin but the social make-up of our society when this was all taken away were they ever going to treat Native people equally? Or was the social betterment an excuse to break down a strong people that they would consider their own greatest threat to their society? I thought of my ancestors, my grandparents who were placed on a small piece of land and forced to farm. My mother told me a story about the small amounts of rations people on my reserve was given in the winter. She spoke of going to bed hungry. Tears roll down my cheeks for my family and my people; it still hurts today. In a 2004 paper, I wrote that I wanted to express this oppression. "There are many ways the Indian Act still holds Aboriginal people down and separates us in groups, status, and non-status. It holds men in higher regard. Our people were once an equalitarian society." It was then in my mind the "noble Indian" was born, and I was part of that once perfect society.

My external racism went so far as to deny my blood half of my DNA. My great-grandfather on my father's side of the family was white and an Indian agent. My father's brothers and sisters married "white" people. They looked down on my mother because she was Indigenous. The fact that they were racist to their kind did not make sense to me. I rejected and denied the "white" side that they were so proud of. In my eyes, I did not in any way have any type of white blood. In my heart, I was full Saulteaux.

My racist attitude was a reaction, in part, to my conditioning to mistrust the dominating culture. I wanted to have a self-identity that was rooted in my culture rather than the dominating culture. All the warnings of the dominating culture gave me information and things to look out for. I expected more of myself, now not for recognition from the dominating culture, but satisfaction and contentment and my peace of mind. External racism led me to overcompensate for the lack of knowledge I had of my culture, thus beginning my persona of the knowledgeable Indigenous woman.

Over-Compensating
A large part of over-compensating was my eagerness to become educated in Indigenous studies and issues. I would take Indigenous classes and other classes and I would ensure some Canadian Indigenous content. For example, if the class did not have a focus on Indigenous peoples, I would write a paper that explains how Indigenous peoples were affected. I always found some way to connect the course to Indigenous peoples. In 2004, I wrote the following in an Indian studies class. "The Indian Act has not fully assimilated Indians but has done an incredible job of paving the way by breaking spirits. It is now up to today's generations to decide whether an outdated policy like the Indian Act will decide who they are and where they are going in the future."

I was determined to prove to my peers that I knew where we came from. I wanted the dominating culture to know what they historically did to my people and how it affects us today. In Indigenous studies class, I would always be so proud to let everyone know that I was raised on a reserve. I had experienced the oppressive policies and could articulate how they shaped my life and other Indigenous peoples. I believed that if I could project this image of a true Indigenous woman, I would one day believe it myself. I wanted to create a persona of an Indigenous woman secure and strong in her ethnic-racial identity. I would gladly express my pride in being Nakaywayininwak. I would tell people I was full-blooded, having both parents as Section 6(1) status Indians per the Indian Act. I wanted to be more than just "Indian" by status but also my lifestyle. I wanted people to know that I could hunt and fish and exert my treaty rights in all manners. My pride in my communities' ceremonial rituals was also overcompensated. My over-compensation led me to comment on how my community would still do things the old way, purer, especially

among classmates. I wanted my community to be more traditional and that would mean I was more traditional.

In international forums, I realized the stronger I spoke with an accent the more accepted I would look to other Indigenous peoples. I often used a thick accent while speaking with other Indigenous groups. I do naturally have a noticeable accent but is not as strong as I have used in meetings. I have been told that my children have thick accents, especially for children who were never raised on the reserve.

I have grown so much because of the cultures I have been exposed to. In 2005, I attended a two-week conference in Greenland. Twenty different Indigenous peoples from all around the world met to discuss Indigenous issues and international affairs. It was a learning opportunity of a lifetime for me and many of the participants were young activists in the international scene. I had decided I wanted to be part of this group of young activists for Indigenous issues. At the conference, an evening was set aside to showcase dances and songs in our language. When it became my turn, I did not have anything to share. There were no words that could express my deep-seated regret that I was not able to show my culture.

Cultural socialization practices give pride in knowledge of culture, and this is what it meant to accomplish (Else-Quest & Morse, 2015). I was confident in my ethnic-racial identity until confronted with someone who spoke their language. I envy people who participated in their ceremonies and danced pow-wow. Meeting other Indigenous peoples who are connected to their language, customs, and rituals can make me feel shame. In my need to over-compensate, I found my desire to tell lies is greater than my desire to learn more about my culture.

Cultural Assimilation

The ethnic-racial socialization practice of egalitarianism focuses on our sameness and not our differences (Hughes et al., 2006). The need to thrive in mainstream society was part of my upbringing. My mother wanted her children to have a good education, to get a good job, and to be able to be just as good as everyone else and have better than what is offered on the reserve. Phinney (1989) focused on the need to participate in social activities and cultural traditions. Some practices include religion and spirituality. I have participated in some ceremonies as a child and later as an adult. As a young person, I believed what elders have said was true and the stories that were told about spirits and how easy it was to anger these spirits. I believed in giving offerings to the Elders and asking them to ask Creator for help in all aspects of life.

During my travels, I have seen other cultures and their religions. In my first marriage, I converted to Hinduism but did not practice the religion. I noticed how the Hindus made offerings to the Gods as did my people. This similarity gave me comfort and made me question the rituals of all faiths. Years of travel have also made me question how much of the ritual can be considered superstition. I wonder why we must pay for God's blessings. I wonder why we are not seen as enough without having to give physical things.

I have been redefining what Indigenous is to me and changing what did not work for me. It is a normal greeting to kiss our grandparents, aunts, and uncles, and hug cousins and extended family. At the age of seven, I was molested by an older cousin. Part of me believed that this abuse was easier to take place because I was not taught boundaries due to kinship protocols. Accordingly, I am teaching my children to shake hands and it is ok if they chose not to.

The cultural socialization process of teaching children pride in their culture through history and books (Hughes et al., 2006) is something I do for my own children but was not part of my upbringing. I have written down several stories my mother has told me because I do not want to lose them. My view of traditional storytelling has changed because of my formal education. I am extremely proud of my Nakaywayininwak roots. I want my children to say, "I am Nakaywayininwak, Indigenous, and belong." It is important that one day, my children tell their children to be proud of their roots. I hope they are less likely to struggle as I have with my ethnic-racial identity.

I believe it is part of a process of what Hughes et al. (2006) and Else-Quest & Morse (2015) were referring to as egalitarianism. My mother played a role in placing egalitarianism deep in my subconscious. She would say that we need to keep moving, reconcile all that has happened to us in the past. It was "ok" to acknowledge the disparities and disadvantages that we endured from the dominating culture and

government. I have the respect of my culture but have not honored it to the extent I wish I had. I regret not learning my language and not being able to share that with my children. Language is our connection to the spirit world, to the Creator, and the "happy hunting grounds" as I was told by my mother. I believe that the Creator hears my prayers no matter what language I speak.

I would like to honor some of my traditions but honor my children as well. There are rituals in death that I would like to keep such as prayer by an Elder. In my 2015 social work paper, I wrote, "If I am to die and am given 24 hours, I would like an Elder to pray in Saulteaux, for me and explain to my children where I am going." I would still like the fire to burn for me for four days. My children can decide the rest. I understand that traditions change and adapt as do people. This change is part of the new version of my ethnic-racial identity today. In trying to be as equal as possible, I did not nourish the uniqueness of who I am, but I did develop into a person to whom I am extremely proud.

Cultural assimilation may not have been a choice for Indigenous people who were adopted out or put in foster care at a young age in a non-Indigenous home. For those who want to be a part of mainstream society, it may be a concession that we must make to not only survive but excel today. I do not believe assimilation needs to completely take place. We can decide what parts need to be part of the mainstream while maintaining our cultural and ethnic-racial identity. My current place of employment is to provide cultural and spiritual opportunities to Indigenous youth. It is my responsibility to help youth to find appropriate ways to connect to their Indigenous heritage. I am also willing to learn about Indigenous culture with them.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study has looked at the many facets of ethnic-racial identity and experiences that have shaped and developed my ethnic-racial identity as an Indigenous woman. As I analyzed the data (journals, university class assignments, self-inventory). I got a clear picture of how ethnic-racial socialization practices shaped my personal ethnic-racial identity. Each stage in my development from child to youth and into adulthood taught me different skills to navigate this world. In some ways, it taught me to view the dominating culture negatively even to the point of being racist. In other ways, it prepared me for the reality of being an Indigenous person.

Ethnic-racial socialization practices teach children about their cultural heritage. Ethnic-racial identity is developed by talking to children and showcasing prominent people of their cultural or ethnic background. It includes celebrating cultural holidays and exposing children to positive role models from their own culture (Hughes et al., 2006). My mother exposed me to my culture when she had the time and that was the key. I have more time to provide support and some pride in the ethnic-racial group of my children. If I had not been taught a strong work ethic, I would not have built a life where I could make time to teach my children about how lucky they are to be Nakaywayininwak Indigenous.

Internal racism can be described as the internalized negative stereotypes related to one's racial group. These negative stereotypes are escalated by the marginalization of the group's social status (Cokley, 2002). Studies have shown that many minority children living in a country where they are not the dominant ethnic-racial group often struggle with internal racism, specifically when they have a weak ethnic-racial identity (Hughes et al., 2009). Hughes et al. (2006) also reviewed several studies which concluded that preparation of bias and promotion of mistrust about ethnic-racial identity caused an overwhelming disadvantage in self-esteem, ethnic affirmation, and antisocial behavior. External racism was a source of anger and strength for me. I used the anger to push myself to achieve despite the disadvantages I had in my childhood. External racism shaped my ethnic-racial identity as it forced me to take a hard look at how outsiders affected my environment. Preparation of mistrust planted the seed of anger towards the dominating culture. That seed was not only put there by my mother but by her mother and her mother before her. It was a construction of our past and contact with the dominating culture, and as that history and past is a part of me, so it is part of my ethnic-racial identity as an Indigenous person.

Cultural assimilation and egalitarianism have shifted the balance for me. I have come to realize that I will not obtain cultural knowledge in my lifetime and most likely create an ethnic-racial identity that is

more rooted in existing in mainstream society for myself and my family. Parents possessing a mainstream orientation are not likely to stress race, instead, emphasize self-confidence, self-esteem, competence, and hard work to defend against societal insults and racial gaps (Scott, 2003). I need to make the changes to own ethnic-racial socialization practices while my children are young. I want to promote the strength of cultural knowledge while promoting egalitarianism in my home. I recognized the value in being Indigenousness, not only for the opportunities but because it gives me a unique background. I still carry the shame of not having a strong self-identity rooted in my culture, but I try to reconcile the two opposing realities.

The four themes were not linear but cyclical. They were fluid and overlapped over time into each other. I understand how some experiences formed my ethnic-racial identity and realize that it is not static but like my people the Nakaywayininwak Indigenous. Each component still resides in me: the shame in my youth, the anger in my teens, the sense of overwhelming pride in my twenties, and the acceptance of my place in mainstream society. The amount of culture of knowledge is connected to my self-identity, and this can be increased if I chose to explore my culture. All these components and periods create a complete picture of who I am and tell the story of how I came to be.

Based on my research, the need is clear for continued growth in the research of ethnic-racial identity and Indigenous peoples. Canada is considered a multicultural country and prides itself on its acknowledgment of Indigenous people's contribution to its society. However, there is an inadequate number of resources and funding for Indigenous researchers. Indigenous identity or ethnic-racial identity with Indigenous peoples are often only addressed when the research is about cross-cultural adoption, residential school, and the sixties scoop. I think it would be beneficial for people who question their Indigenous ethnic identity so that there can be a dialogue about what could strengthen their ethnic-racial identity. With the Indigenous population growth in Canada, scholars, educators, and parents need to understand the processes of enabling children to negotiate contexts characterized by high racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity (Hughes et al., 2006). If this were to happen, cultural programs could be developed and expanded for youth both on and off-reserve. This would be something that would please the Creator. Kitaypinawayh[2].

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[2] Kitaypinawayh is the actual way to say thank you in our language.

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