Metis Identity Creation and Tactical Responses to Oppression and Racism[1]

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"The cruelest result of human bondage is that it transforms the assertion of personal dignity into a mortal risk."

(Scott, 1990, p. 37).

As one of Canada's founding Aboriginal people (Department of Justice Canada, 1982), the Metis exist at the periphery of the Canadian historical, cultural and social landscape. Today, the Metis are starting to write themselves into larger historical and social sciences narratives, reclaiming their right to inclusion and belonging after generations of living "underground" without public cultural expression. The Canadian Metis are an Aboriginal group who celebrate their mixed-ancestry and identify with a unique Metis culture. This culture evolved and crystallized after the Metis lived together for generations, mixing and mingling with other Metis of both English and French-speaking origins. Due to the forces of colonization, the Metis exist as marginalized Aboriginal people living between a number of cultural worlds within the larger Euro-Canadian society. In "Becoming Metis: The Relationship Between The Sense of Metis Self and Cultural Stories" (Richardson, 2004), I elucidate various tactics used by Metis people to create a personal and cultural identity. In this paper, I draw on this work to present some of the socio-political conditions that set the context for a Metis tactical identity development.

I present and discuss some of the responses enacted by key Metis interview participants in the process of creating a "sense of Metis self." These *tactical* responses were, and are, performed by Metis people who are trying to balance their need for safety and inclusion with a need to live as cultural beings in a European Canada. I term the responses "tactical," as opposed to "strategic," in response to an important distinction between oppressor and oppressed in colonial societies. Political strategies

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and strategic responses tend to be developed for long-term use by those in political positions of relative power, on secure ground whereas tactical responses tend to be developed "on the move," as short-term acts to attack political oppression. For example, General Middleton implemented strategic military plans to defeat the Metis, while Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumont employed tactical acts in response to Middleton's attacks. Finally, after discussing various tactical responses, I close with some explanations about how Metis people have developed a third space to create a Metis cultural identity.

Context for Responses to Metis Identity Creation

Metis people have been driven from their homeland and now live as a minority group in Canada, partially visible, partially invisible. As postcolonial writer Robert Kroetsch points out: "Now we are on my home ground, foreign territory" (1995, p. 395). A number of bodies of literature relating to colonization, oppression, resistance, and postcolonial and Metis identity informed my work (Richardson, 2004). Complexities of Metis identity issues become clearer when explained in relation to Metis resistance knowledges (Adams, 1989, 1995; Bourgeault, 1983; Campbell, 1973; Cottell, 2004; Richardson, 2005), postcolonial thought (Bhabha, 1988, 1998; Fanon, 1995; Harris, 1973; Kroetsch, 1995; Loomba, 1998; Said, 1993; Smith, 1999), and resistance/response-based knowledges (Coates, Todd, & Wade, 2003; Coates & Wade, 2004: Goffman, 1963; Reissman, 1993; Scott, 1990; Todd & Wade, 2003; Wade, 1997). These theoretical influences help contain and contextualize a series of identity processes that relate to Metis experience in particular and to colonized Aboriginal peoples in general, as well as to victims of violence and racism.

Metis identity is created through a process of social interaction and dialogic relationships between the inner world and the external world. Relations of unequal power serve as foundational influences negotiated by Metis individuals in the creation of "the sense of Metis self." Metis identity can be examined from a number of cultural and theoretical perspectives. Symbolic interactionist explanations of self-creation posit a dialectical relationship between inner and outer worlds, mediated by one's values and the sorting of experience (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934, 1977). Narrative explanations of a storied self resonate with Metis oral traditions and self-creation through storytelling (Bruner, 1987, 1990; Howard, 1991; Polkinghorne, 1988; White, 1997, 2000). Response-based understandings of human behaviour offer important insights into the social and interactive processes of Metis identity creation in a climate of social oppression and violence (Wade, 1997). In my studies of Metis history, I found that I agree with the statement: "alongside each history of violence and oppression, there runs a parallel history of prudent, creative, and determined resistance" (Wade, 1997, p. 11).

Numerous Metis writers have documented the unique challenges relating to Metis identity formation within a context of Canadian oppression and Metis resistance (Bourgeault, 1983; Campbell, 1973; Richardson, 2001; Scofield, 1999). Relevant forms of socio-political and interpersonal violence are analysed in works

such as *Resistance to interpersonal violence* (Wade, 2000) and in *Domination and the arts of resistance* (Scott, 1990). Likewise, *A tortured people* (Adams, 1995) offers an engaging commentary on the situation of Metis and First Nations people in Canada.

Particularly helpful for understanding Metis identity creation is Wade's (1997) articulation of human beings as sentient "responding" agents, rather than as passive by-standers who are affected by their surroundings. This reformulation of many victim-blaming psychological theories offers dignity to oppressed peoples who have been pathologized and blamed for their suffering. Advancing earlier ground-breaking formulations of systemic communications (Bateson, Jackson, Haley, & Weakland, 1956), a major contribution to the understanding of "self and identity" is situated in the belief that we change ourselves through a process of social communication with the outside world.

Metis identity creation is enacted on a foundation of two life-affirming beliefs that are also foundational to both response-based ideas (Wade, 2000) and systemic communication theory (Watzlawick, Beaven Bavelas, & Jackson, 1967): first, that people possess pre-existing ability; and second, that people know how to be well. Although these beliefs may appear relatively basic, they have been strikingly absent in psychological theories and in depictions of victims of violence and colonized populations. Clearly, the Metis have been presented historically as deficient and pathetic, think for example of Metis leader Louis Riel who in spite of his extraordinary education and accomplishments as a political leader is often considered a failure (Adams, 1995; Storey, personal communication, 2005).
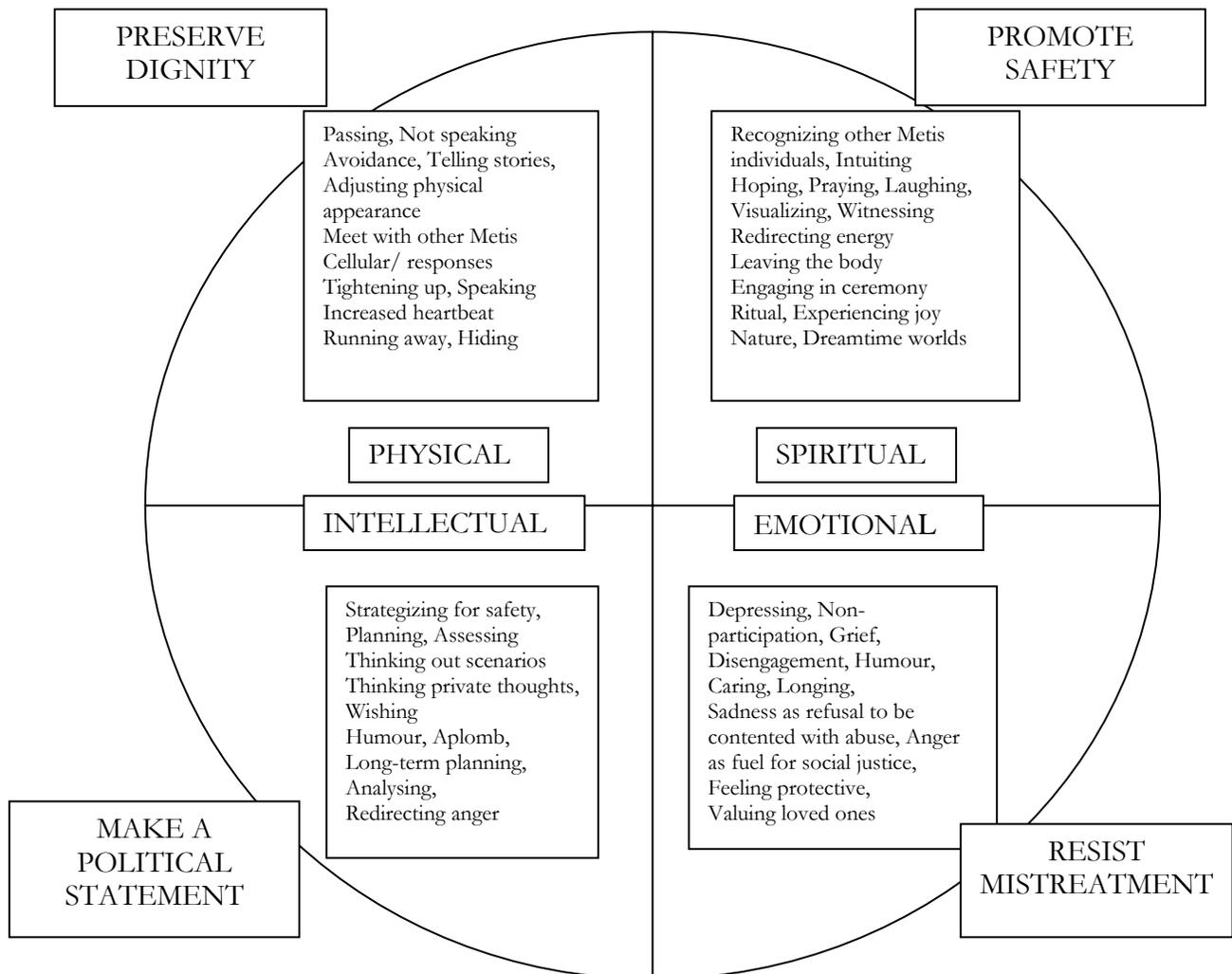
Regardless of educational background and socio-economic status, I found that Metis research participants demonstrated both *pre-existing ability* and *knowledge of how to be well*, alongside an acute analysis of social power. Participants were acutely aware of the various risks and disadvantages of having relatively less power than European Canadians, particularly if they had dark skin. Through various stories and testimonials, Metis participants acknowledged that, as marginalized people, they possess few political or civil rights while Euro-Canadian society is afforded a wide latitude for "capricious and arbitrary behaviour" (Scott, 1990, p. xi).

Experiencing wellness and creating a vibrant and evolving sense of Metis self is dependent upon the enactment of prudent and tactical responses in a climate where reprisal and punishment are possible. Through the engagement of the various Metis responses identified in this paper, the Metis apply their knowledge of *how to be well* while simultaneously creating a sense of their Metis self. The "Medicine Wheel of Responses" (see figure 1) provides an account of how the Metis have responded to oppression and racism in various aspects of their being.

**Figure 1. The Medicine Wheel of Reponses, from Cathy Richardson (2005).
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The Medicine Wheel of Responses

Based on the understanding that humans are sentient beings who respond to events,
including the diverse forms of oppression, rather than merely being affected by them.
Humans make choices, on a number of levels of their being, that:

PRESERVE DIGNITY		PROMOTE SAFETY
Passing, Not speaking Avoidance, Telling stories, Adjusting physical appearance Meet with other Metis Cellular/ responses Tightening up, Speaking Increased heartbeat Running away, Hiding		Recognizing other Metis individuals, Intuiting Hoping, Praying, Laughing, Visualizing, Witnessing Redirecting energy Leaving the body Engaging in ceremony Ritual, Experiencing joy Nature, Dreamtime worlds
PHYSICAL		SPIRITUAL
INTELLECTUAL		EMOTIONAL
Strategizing for safety, Planning, Assessing Thinking out scenarios Thinking private thoughts, Wishing Humour, Aplomb, Long-term planning, Analysing, Redirecting anger		Depressing, Non-participation, Grief, Disengagement, Humour, Caring, Longing, Sadness as refusal to be contented with abuse, Anger as fuel for social justice, Feeling protective, Valuing loved ones
MAKE A POLITICAL STATEMENT		RESIST MISTREATMENT

These responses constitute knowledge of *how to be well*, affirm *pre-existing ability* and
indicate Metis resistance knowledge (Wade, 2000; Watzlawick, Beaven Bavelas &
Jackson, 1967).

Lack of Cultural Safety

The medicine wheel contains an overview of various Metis responses to oppression and racism, actions that are initiated at various levels of being. Many of these actions serve to keep people safe in times of danger and may be enacted at a conscious, intellectual level or at a more subtle, intuitive or physiological level. Although most responses do not stop the violence or danger, they often constitute a form of ethical or political opposition to the injustice. Henry, Tator, Matis, & Rees (1995) defined a particular aspect of White-Aboriginal relations in Canada: Canadians are said to value equality and therefore cannot address outstanding issues of racism and oppression against Aboriginal people if it entails treating certain Canadians "unequally." This impasse or *double bind* leaves Aboriginal Canadians such as the Metis in a position of cultural and personal vulnerability. For example, when caught in situations of oppression, Metis individuals may face increased danger when they speak out or act directly against the violence. Therefore, many Metis choose aplomb and act prudently in the face of danger, while responding internally to the oppression or injustice.

In my study, Metis research participants reported experiencing censure, danger and discrimination in a number of ways. Metis people enacted numerous tactics for self-preservation and the preservation of dignity. As in other forms of oppression, open defiance was the least common form of resistance by victims (Burstow, 1992; Coates & Wade, 2004; Kelly, 1988; Scott, 1990). Many Metis responded by trying to keep themselves, their families and their culture alive, but had to do so in secrecy, as for example, when asked what it means to be Metis in Canada, Aline[2] said that "being Metis means keeping your mouth shut" (Richardson, 2004, p. 112). Her mother told her to not talk about "the family" when she was outside of the home. Aline's family members used a Scottish surname when applying for jobs and avoided using family names that were identifiable as Metis.

Although much of the discrimination was enacted in mainstream society, the Metis also experienced racism in non-White communities. The Metis learned the politics of silence and denial. Howard Adams reported: "one of my maternal aunts has refused to allow me in her house or to speak to her because I stated publicly that my mother was of Cree ancestry" (1995, p. 145). Another research participant, Julie, said: "prejudice is such an evil thing, and as Metis we often get it from both sides of the blanket. A feeling of never quite belonging anywhere haunts me" (Richardson, 2004, p. 5).

Metis writer Joanne Arnott (1994) wrote about her experience of racism and ancestral denial:

> I am a person of mixed Native and European heritages. Fundamentally what I have inherited is a good deal of information about the various European traditions from which I come, and racist denial of the existence of my Native ancestry (1995, p. 1).

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[2] Names of all research participants have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

The experience of being persecuted as both "different" and "undeserving" is typical for many Metis people. In this cultural context, disclosing one's identity was unsafe and imprudent for many Metis families. Being treated with dignity and respect took precedent over the need to be culturally visible.

The Strategy of "Passing" as a Response to Racism

Many Metis people have made strategic decisions to try to "fit in" or "pass" in the dominant culture in order to promote personal or family safety and opportunities for economic and emotional wellness. The term "passing" refers to the act of appearing to assimilate into another culture, without being noticed as "different." For the Metis, passing meant presenting oneself as either White or First Nations in order to escape being socially ostracized. In colonial society, possessing dark skin has lead to various forms of discrimination and positioning of the 'other,' while light skin has concealed an invisible Metis-ness. Skin has been problematic for many Metis people because it has confounded their attempts to protect themselves from racism and hide their Aboriginal origins. This has led to the Metis being named "the invisible people." "'Passing' is one of the very few options for survival of a mixed-race people in a virulently racist society" (Arnott, 1994, p. 59).

However, passing does not protect the individual from the internal wounds received by witnessing racism towards other Metis people, particularly other family members and loved ones. Complicated dynamics of racism have been experienced within Metis families, where the "colourism" present in the mainstream society means lighter people are valued over darker people. Metis people have experienced another aspect of this dynamic, where they are rejected in First Nations communities for being "too White" or "Wannabe Indians." On what has been called "the other side of the blanket," participant Julie talked about her sadness in being excluded in the First Nations world:

> I'd like to say I feel more [in the First Nations world] but that isn't always the case. Now that I am older and am seen as an elder it is better, but when I was younger I faced a lot of prejudice from Natives because I am very light-skinned. I still feel a bit nervous when I am around "full-bloods" that I don't know well. They don't always treat me like a Native - figure I'm just another "wannabe." That used to hurt most of all (Richardson, 2004, p. 128).

Patty, Susan, and Aline also shared this kind of caution or nervousness in the First Nations context. Patty said, "sometimes I'm nervous round being a Metis person [in a First Nations setting] 'cause I feel like that's [being Metis] is frowned upon" (Richardson, 2004, p. 127). Aline reported feeling insecure at a powwow, thinking that others were saying "Why is that White woman here?" (ibid., p. 127). Susan reported that she dealt with being in First Nations settings by "not relaxing," referring to her need to plan what she will say about herself and how she will respond if told that she is an imposter: "Well, I feel like I'm going to be looked at as a White person

unless I self-identify, at which point I assume I'm going to be looked at as a 'Wannabe' Indian" (Richardson, 2004, p. 127). Susan shared the following experience of helping a Metis man find employment in Vancouver:

> Metis history is amazing. And painful! I mean with all the pressure that Metis people have gone through. For example, one of our members, he's trying to find a job. He's in one field but he wants to move into another field of work. You know, he puts on his resume that he is Metis. His friends have told him, you know, not meaning to be mean or anything, you should drop the Metis from [your] resume. Still, stuff like that is happening! (Richardson, 2004, p. 113).

Metis interview participant Roland believes that "the worst kind of racism is that which occurs in one's own family." He said:

> When it comes entirely from my family – that is kind of the worst form of discrimination, you know. That's funny because I had an aunt who was very racist, and didn't want anything to do with it [her Metis culture and ancestry], and I guess I just have to accept that (Richardson, p. 150).

Detectable in Roland's comment about having to accept racism in families is the message that he does not accept racism of any sort, and that he finds racial discrimination morally repugnant. The sadness experienced at moments like this by Metis individuals, like Roland, can be construed as an emotional response to injustice. Despair was one of the main themes that emerged from the research; a sense of despair and sadness that can be interpreted as political protest, on the level of the emotions, against violations of human dignity. That Metis people experience sadness and despair is a sign of what Wade has called "flagrant emotional wellness" (Wade, personal communication, 2004). In fact, to not despair over these conditions would be surprising and could even indicate some kind of illness of the spirit.

Metis poet Dumont (1996) did not have the option of "passing" and writes "all the bleach and soup bones in *The Red & White* couldn't keep our halfbreed hides from showing through" (p. 17). Typically, Dumont's Metis friends and family would be placed in the situation of having to decide how to respond to racism, whether to speak out in defense of other Metis and risk being attacked, or whether to say nothing and experience a form of shame or "survivor guilt." Both choices were unsafe and unsatisfying, and constitute ultimately limited options for action. In a context where social justice is absent, and where victims may place themselves at increased risk when they address the injustice, social violence is often used against those with lesser social power. Victims are seldom able to stop the violence that is being perpetuated upon them. Metis individuals, like other victims of violence, tend to "go over" the scenes of violence in their head, reflecting upon their own actions, to ascertain whether they were responsible for part of the violence. To be well emotionally, at the level of integrity, Metis people look inside themselves to see if they have acted in ways similar to the oppressor. Todd, a therapist who works with male perpetrators and abused women, says that victims of abuse tend to take responsibility in inverse proportion to

the perpetrator; hence, he has ironically called this conscious scouring the *law of inverse moral proportion* (Coates, Todd, & Wade, 2003).

Metis participant Sarah demonstrated an application of this law by analysing her "White privilege" as an invisible Metis who accessed post-secondary education with ease due to her lightness of skin:

> You know, basically I've always been in the White world. So, you know, I have gotten the advantages of, you know, being White. Going to University, getting my PhD, you know, if I was darker, or looked more Native, it could have been a lot more different (Richardson, 2004, p. 126).

Sarah, like many Metis who pass as white in the dominant culture, have had to sacrifice aspects of their cultural pride, or their right to be "who they are," in order to access the same rights and privileges as other Canadians. Again, the difficult choice of accessing opportunity or risking the denial of that opportunity constitutes another form of the double bind.

The double bind, a term for a "lose/lose situation" investigated by anthropologist and communication analyst Bateson, was recognized as a kind of trap that sometimes constituted a context for schizophrenia after extended periods with no respite. Being caught in a "lose/lose" situation is reminiscent of the Metis experience of being neither this nor that (e.g. neither White nor First Nations) and being told that you don't belong. The Metis devised tactics to transcend and overcome this Cartesian duality, and these tactics were identified by Metis people as integral to their health and wholeness. For example, research participant Julie talked about wanting to learn about ways to transcend the limitations of duality: "Being neither one thing nor the other, I would like to explore more of how to take these two traditions and bring them together in a new way of being. But for me it is still a discovering process" (Richardson, 2004, p. 113).

Third Space Possibilities and Sharing Metis Stories

The tactics discussed by the research participants in my study coalesce around the theme of creating a *third space* where Metis-ness, Metis community and Metis knowledge can be shared. In this Metis space, history can be retold from a Metis perspective; a Metis-centered analysis can be refined. Groups who are oppressed, marginalized, or who have been harmed in similar ways experience support in joining together to share, discuss, analyse, and develop strategies for action (Bhabha, 1998, 1988; Goffman, 1963; Reissman, 1993). By spending time in Metis-centered situations, "colonial interpretations can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1995, p. 184). Metis cultural tactics for *how to be well* become central to cultural activity. Belonging is implicit.

Coates and Wade (2004) have shown that wellness after violence is linked directly to the presence of social justice and an accurate account of the nature of the violence, in addition to what has been called a positive social response (Donalek,

2001). Goffman (1963) noted the importance of oppressed people coming together to strategize and develop a counterhegemonic discourse to the "dominant story." The Indigenous researcher Smith (1999) identifies *the act of witnessing* and *sharing testimonials* as one way to promote wellness for victims of violence and oppression. King (2003) invites us to live differently because we have heard important, life-altering stories about the experience of Aboriginal people in North America. Stories have the potential to incite social justice.

So how do Metis people enact their *knowing how to be well* in the absence of social justice? When Patty was told by her university instructor, in a class analysing issues of race, "Well, you look White, so you are White!" Patty chose to speak aloud her opposition, stating, "No, I am Metis!" (Richardson, 2004, p. 123). Patty linked her frustration and anger with her instructor's comment with the fact that "she herself does not identify with the colonizer and does not want to be told she is the colonizer." She added, "I constantly need to fight to prove who I am, and I'm not liking that at all!"

A research participant named Peter recalled "trying to scrub the darkness out of his skin" as a child (Richardson, 2004, p. 150). Once when he was a bit older, he was walking with his brother when some people asked them if they had just gotten back from Mexico. Peter remembered thinking, ironically, that they could not afford to travel to Mexico, but it was a plausible explanation for the darkness of their skin. Peter's strategy of not correcting other people's inaccurate assumptions maintained an ambiguity around his position in the social hierarchy and race relationships in the community. Riessman (2000) documented the following notion: "Resistance thinking and avoidance strategies do not attack stigma and discrimination directly, but they may be tactically necessary. Open challenge of a dominant ideology is not always possible" (p. 124). Peter spoke of practicing "aplomb" (Richardson, 2004, p. 145), which he explained as "keeping calm in situations of danger, to prevent an escalation of danger and promote safety." Clearly, it would have been unsafe to assert his Metis-ness in the midst of a racist, anti-Aboriginal climate.

Peter later commented on the intense racism he encountered when he and his family left their small Metis community to move to Edmonton: "it was a hard thing to be halfbreeds living in north Edmonton in 1950…a hard urban place where you are brown and most of the people are White" (Richardson, 2004, p. 123). Such experiences have lead Metis people to develop alternative inner lives where Metis-ness may be central to their private existence and people engage in fantasy conversations where they "talk back" to the oppressor.

Thinking thoughts of resistance *in the privacy of the mind*, or creating *hidden transcripts*, is also common (Scott, 1990). While some Metis people live in the dominant culture and practice "White ways," they think "Metis thoughts" in the privacy of the mind. The resistance of the mind has been documented as "the private, hidden space of consciousness, the 'inside ideas' that allow [women] to transcend the confines of oppression" (Scott, 1990, p. 124). One of the ways to transcend oppression is to tell stories from life-affirming perspectives that help us to feel whole.

Stories remind us of *how to be well.* As cultural psychologist Howard (1991) says, a culture is a group of people who share the same stories. Metis people share stories about how to be well in spite of having to become culturally invisible and live in non-Metis cultural worlds.

King (2003) says that "stories are a form of medicine" (p. 92) and, like many good medicines, they fight illness and death. A number of Metis participants identified the act of sharing stories as a process of soothing in times of difficulty which could be seen as a way to create a third space - a Metis space. One Metis participant, Susan, shared numerous stories that her Dad had hold her. Her family stories served the function of making people feel better in challenging situations. One of her Dad's stories was told to help comfort her younger brother when he got in trouble at school:

Like when my brother was having trouble at school, he [my Dad] told a story about when he went to an English school for the first time. He didn't know how to speak English; he only knew how to speak French. And so everybody would come up to him and say things like, "Hey, do you wanna fight?" And he'd be like, "Yeah, yeah sure!" [because he didn't understand what was being said]. And we thought that was just hilarious, like the idea of our dad not knowing how to speak English, or he used to say he was kicked out of Catholic school because he was too smart for the nuns. And just the idea that it made it good for my brother because he really struggled with school. I think it made it good for my brother because he'd think to himself, 'Well, I'm too smart for my teacher anyway!' (Richardson, 2004, p. 116).

Roland said that he finds hope in sharing stories and he experiences a strengthening in his Metis cultural identity and pride:

By telling the story, I hope that it inspires people and that there's not going to be any feelings of shame for anyone about being open about their heritage…It does create hope. It also creates a sense of ownership. These are my stories; these stories affect me. It brings me closer to feeling pride in my Metis community – the feeling that I am Metis. It's not just a label. This is what I am. It's more of a validation that I am part of a race of people (Richardson, 2004, p. 157).

Peter experienced a sense of excitement when telling Metis stories and uses stories to help others to identify with their Metis ancestry:

Ahh, I get excited. I get excited about – if you're sharing Metis stories, It's just big fun. And if you're at a spot where you think, by telling the story that you can bring somebody out [of the Metis closet], or give them a new perspective about all mixed-blood people, that's kind of exciting. I think it's an intimate subject that lets you get involved with people in a very safe way (Richardson, 2004, p. 157).

Sometimes, people need a safe space where stories can be shared and respected as cultural knowledge. For Metis people, Metis-specific cultural spaces are important for preserving the sacredness of stories and to use stories as "discursive strategies" for

propagating a particular point of view (Coates & Wade, 2004); in this case for advancing the view that is it good to be Metis and that it is safe to be one's self (e.g. Metis). Such conditions help in the strengthening of Metis cultural identity.

Creating a "Third Space" Community

A third space offers a place where hybridity, or being mixed-race, can be experienced holistically and celebrated as central to Metis culture. A third space offers an escape from Cartesian duality and polarized thinking, from being stuck between being a White person with some Indian blood or a Native person with some white ancestors. Guyanese writer Harris (1973) identified this opportunity as accompanying an "assimilation of contraries" (p. 60). Bhabha (1998) conceives of the third space as a holistic place where

> unity is not found in the sum of its parts, but emerges from the process of opening a third space within which other elements encounter and transform each other. It is not the combination, accumulation, fusion or synthesis, but an energy field of different forces (p. 208).

This "energy field of different forces" constitutes a place that feels qualitatively different than other cultural spaces for many Metis. Perhaps it has the feel of the place Julie was looking for in her quest to belong. Research participant Helene speaks about the pleasure in being together with other Metis people, in Metis settings, in contrast with her experience in the Euro-Canadian world: "When you are together with other Metis people, it's a pleasure. But otherwise you're always ashamed. It's really true. . . always have that feeling that you're inferior, and you don't believe it, but it's true" (Richardson, 2004, p. 129).

> Susan refers to a sense of recognition when together with other Metis people:

> There was a room full of Metis people and people who really – it was strange - it was like almost sometimes like the same sense of humour as my own family, and sometimes really reinforcing for the way I was brought up, and for my background and things that happened (ibid., p. 129).

Patty says that she feels most clear and articulate in Metis settings:

> I think I'm more confident in the Metis world, like I feel better that I am able to articulate who I am and what the issues are for Metis people as well as myself, as a Metis person, better than in any other setting. (Richardson, 2004, p. 130)

These research participants described first finding this sense of Metis community in a variety of locations such as a Metis community agency, a Native treatment centre, on a grandmother's porch, on the prairies, and together with Metis family and friends in homes and outdoors (Richardson, 2004). They also experienced various intuitive processes that offered clues or insights about Metis ancestry. These intuitive

experiences help Metis people find a sense of "home" and have helped connect them to other Metis people.

Intuitive experiences included possessing an affinity towards other Metis before knowing they are Metis. Many Metis have perceived an incongruence or a void in their family history when Metis culture was kept hidden. Sometimes contrasting information would emerge, creating holes in the "official story." Many Metis children have been adopted into other families or raised in foster care; some were not told about their Metis ancestry. It is not uncommon to have an intuitive sense of one's origins, even before evidence is produced.

Metis children are often born with "Mongolian blue spots," or have had "Native" dreams, visions or visitors from the spirit world. Many Metis report mystical experiences in nature that hold some meaning for their identity (Richardson, 2004; Scofield, 1999; Trudeau, 1999). Metis people often have epiphanies or "Aha!" experiences when they discover they are Metis, and feel that they knew (at some level) all along (see Richardson, 2004, p. 32-35). Metis ancestry and hidden identity tend to live within the realm of family secrets, and are often revealed on the deathbed of an elder (ibid., p. 36). Family secrets often constitute the double bind where people suffer if they talk about "the secret" (e.g. risk losing the affection of a loved one) and they suffer if they don't talk about "the secret" (e.g. by being denied the "truth" about themselves and access to their culture). Information and family stories are instrumental in finding one's way to culture and cultural identity. Spending time together with other Metis, in "third space" Metis settings may involve a process of gathering genealogical information and finding relatives. Through the sharing of stories, Metis people gain a stronger sense of who they are and what it means to be Metis.

At the beginning of the study, when I asked Metis people to tell me some of their Metis stories, participants commonly replied that they didn't have any. When they told me the story of their life and their journey towards a greater sense of Metis self, I would then retell the story to them. Participants were commonly astonished that they had "a Metis story" – often a story of not knowing what it means to be Metis after generations of keeping Metis culture hidden or "underground" and the process of finding their way back home.

Metis psychological wellness is strengthened through the experience of being a "whole," rather than "part" Indian: As political and cultural strategy of opening a space of possibility and opportunity, "the application of a third space thinking... quite properly challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force..." (Bhabha, 1998, p. 208). In the process of forward motion, the Metis create new possibilities for identity and cultural expression. Metis people can place themselves back in the centre of their cultural universe. The enactment of a wide range of strategic responses, at the various aspects of self (intellectual, physical, spiritual, emotional) serves to promote social justice, community safety and awareness of the Metis in the Canadian cultural landscape.

This paper has outlined some of the historically-based, ongoing challenges facing the Metis. As well, various responses and tactics of resistance have also been articulated. These tactical acts include aplomb, passing, sharing stories, and creating community in a Metis "third space." By pushing against the sharp edges of oppression, the Metis may one day be recognized and acknowledged for the wounds received while contributing to Canadian nation-building, as one of the three founding Aboriginal peoples. While responding to various forms of external oppression, Metis culture has survived as "inner experience," nurtured by the powers of creativity and the human imagination. In the words of Metis poet Menard (2001, p. 32):

> I was born the privileged skin
> and my eyes are bright, bright brown.
> You'd never know there is Metis blood
> raging underground.
> Let me tell you a story about a revelation,
> it's not the colour of a nation that holds a nation's pride
> it's imagination
> it's imagination inside.

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