The Social Construction of Urban American Indian Teen's Identity: How to be an Indian*


A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY


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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY


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May, 2012

**Acknowledgements**

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In a scene from the movie *Smoke Signals*, Victor and Thomas are leaving the

reservation and Victor gives Thomas a lesson on being an Indian. While on the

reservation Thomas is the one with the knowledge and skill to be a Coeur d'Alene Indian

and Thomas acts as if he is too cool for traditional stuff. Off the reservation, it is Victor

who instructs Thomas on how to be an Indian. Victor emphasizes to Thomas that

"others" (read white people) expect them to be warriors and if they can look like stoic

battle ready warriors, the whites will not mess with them. This discussion of "how to be

an Indian" is not about tribal knowledge or cultural practices but is about presenting

oneself to white Americans. On the reservation being an Indian is daily life, off the

reservation it takes work to be an American Indian. The same is true for teens in

Minneapolis. This dissertation analyzes teens', who participate in the American Indian

Youth Program (AIYP), daily work at expressing an American Indian identity.

I have been volunteering for the American Indian youth program[1] for the last five

years as a youth tutor/mentor, working with teens age 13-18 one night a week for two

hours. I occasionally attend the activity nights and attend all parties and celebrations to

which I am invited. I started in 2004 as part of a class project and continued to volunteer

after the class project was finished. At first, I was wary of being a youth tutor. I did not

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[1] Not actual name of organization

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think I was very good with kids and teens can be a bit intimidating. I, myself, am from a small town in North Dakota and movies like "Stand and Deliver" and other movies depicting inner city teens had given me the wrong impression of what to expect. Instead, I have found the teens to be funny, bright, and eager. There are no outbursts and little disrespect. They listen to what staff and volunteers have to say and are willing participants of AIYP. I fell in love with the program and have not left. I plan to continue my time with AIYP as long as I am in the Minneapolis area.

Minneapolis is home to one of the largest urban populations of American Indians in the country. The population of Minneapolis it is not as large as Los Angeles or other cities, yet it is unique in that an ethnic enclave exists. Minneapolis Indian country covers much of south Minneapolis. In fact, a majority of the American Indians who live in Minneapolis live in this area. The area covers everything south of I-94 to the city limits (which ironically ends at Coldwater Spring[2]) and I-35W east to the Mississippi river. Within this geographical region is most of the American Indian services, agencies, housing and businesses. This area is also home to Little Earth, the only American Indian controlled urban housing community in the United States.

My project offers a unique perspective on the construction of American Indian identity. While other projects have focused on reservation life, I focus on an urban population of American Indians. While other projects have focused on the identities of adults, I focus on the youth—a portion of the American Indian community that has largely been ignored. Past researchers who have focused on urban American Indians have

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[2] Coldwater Spring is considered a sacred site for many American Indian tribes.

often focused on the transition of American Indians from reservations to the cities. The teens in my project were born and raised in the city. In many cases so were their parents. This is not a case of transition but of a solid urban experience. My focus on this urban group of American Indian youth has led me to incorporate literature on American Indian identity into dialogue with the sociological literatures on ethnic identity, the urban experience and popular culture.

The teens I work with live in the inner city of Minneapolis and must interact with a multitude of individuals on any given day. The teens enact Anderson's "code of the street" through their use of stoic expressions and the "urban uniform" of jeans, tees, and sweatshirts that allow them to hide and blend in (1999). At the same time, they want to be recognized as American Indians and struggle to express that identity to outsiders who do not know what an American Indian looks like. The teens sometimes resort to using stereotypical ideas of "indianess", Indian sport mascots and beads and feathers to express themselves.

It is important to expand the focus of American Indian identity because issues in the American Indian community are often overlooked and under analyzed. When researchers are interested in American Indians they often take an historically based or "problem" based view. Researchers look to the past to see how, when and why tribes have changed and have attempted to add American Indian voices to history. American Indians, can be mistakenly seen as a historical group or as interesting only because of their historical challenges. I aim to expand our knowledge of contemporary American Indians as part of vibrant, growing and changing communities. While American Indians,

like other minority groups, face real and difficult challenges, I am not interested in studying the "American Indian problems" of alcohol, domestic violence, homelessness or criminal behavior. I believe that contemporary studies too often focus on the negative aspects of the American Indian community and not on the ways that they work to produce social stability and social change. (Jang 2002, Pinderhughes 1997, Peguero 1997, Pyrooz 2010 Tapia 2011).

The teens at AIYP choose and care about an American Indian identity. They construct the identity out of the various materials, tools and tales they have available. While they may not construct a tribal identity in total, they do construct a way to be identified and to identify as American Indian. For many of the teens being seen as or identified as an American Indian is very important to them. Students at Spanish language immersion schools[3] work to illustrate their American Indian cultural heritage. Teens who go to large urban schools wear and bodily enact American Indian images. Students sometimes employ stereotypes of American Indians to effectively establish their identity.

In the following chapters, I will discuss the importance of the location and geography of the AIYP, the use of Indigenous culture to create a Pan-Indian culture, the use of urban culture to create an American Indian Identity and finally, the use of popular culture in creating an American Indian identity. I will then discuss whether or not the teens' identities are an example of assimilation into the wider culture or instead are a

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[3] A number of the teens attend Spanish immersion schools. Some of the teens are both Latino and American Indian and they attend to learn more about their Latino heritage. A few attend because they have smaller class sizes and more one-on-one attention. It is an interesting phenomenon that non-Latino/a teens attend these schools but is not addressed in this study.

form of expanding the boundaries of what it means to be an American Indian. The following is a brief overview of these chapters.

Most research in sociology on American Indians focuses on historical issues, (Akhtar 2011, Clemer 2009, Denzin 2011, Foster 2010, Steinman 2012). When contemporary American Indians are the focus, sociological research generally looks at life on the reservations or Indian problems (drinking, interpersonal violence, low graduation rates). Little research has focused on the lives of contemporary urban American Indians, much less teen identity expression. As the next generation matures and takes on positions of power it will be important for political and policy issues that we understand the identity process so we can begin to recognize what is meaningful and important to the new generation.

Many researchers have focused on American Indians move to cities after WWII when government policies "supported" American Indians moving off destitute reservations and becoming more fully assimilated Americans (Fixico 2000, Lobo 2002, Shoemaker 1988, Weibel-Orlando 1991). The American Indian population of other large American cities has been explored. These cities, Los Angeles, Chicago, San Francisco have dispersed populations of American Indians from a number of different tribal backgrounds. Minneapolis is an interesting case in that most community groups and residential areas were centralized due to discrimination and affordable housing. This centralization along with significantly fewer tribal nations being represented in the city makes Minneapolis a unique case of an American Indian ethnic enclave.

In Minneapolis there are two main Nations: Dakota and Chippewa; they both had sacred places and encampments in land that is now the city of Minneapolis. It is quite common to find/see/hear Ojibwe or Dakota languages, materials and culture; yet rare to hear about or reference other tribal groups. For example, at the organization where I volunteer, many of the staff speaks Ojibwe and they have labeled many items and objects in the Ojibwe language. Dakota culture is presented through the names of the rooms and in the commonalities of the two tribes culturally.

**Pan-Indian**

While there are two main nations in Minnesota, American Indians work to construct a united front to distribute goods and resources and to organize for political and social change. In Minneapolis a pan-ethnic identity is predominant. Most organizations and services are open to all American Indians and little differentiation is made between the tribes. While there is a long history of inter-tribal relations, it is the move to the city that spread pan-Indian identity throughout the US. The rise of the American Indian Movement (AIM) also consolidated interests into a pan-Indian organization. The formation of AIM in Minneapolis has left a lasting impact on the identity construction of American Indians. Through shared cultural, political and social histories members of various tribes have come together to create a unique identity as American Indian. The AIYP teens live in a city that is both historically and currently formed as pan-Indian. There is no one tribe has established itself as the cultural or political representative of American Indians. Instead there is a network of cooperation and shared futures.

The teens themselves express a pan-Indian identity. They are more likely to refer to themselves as American Indian, than by tribal designation. The proliferation of pan-Indian organizations and services helps guide the teens understanding of what it means to be American Indian. While the teens hold tribal identities it is there pan-Indian identity that is most useful in this setting.

**Urban Environment**

As city dwellers the AIYP teens must work to fit into the urban environment. In pop culture terms this is often associated with hip-hop or rap culture including the city "uniform" of baggy clothes, jeans, t-shirts, hoodies and sneakers (Anderson 1999). The baggy clothes hide the form and create size. The stranger is unable to know if the frame they are approaching is muscular, lithe, flabby or thin. This uniform applies to girls as well. They hide their form for safety on the street. It is only on special occasions that they might opt for a more form fitting style. Sneakers are also essential for all urban teens. A large city requires a lot of walking, especially for a group of teens without access to vehicles. One might theorize that sneakers allow more mobility, easy escape – but they would need to have the sneakers tied; which is not always the case.

This urban culture requires a certain attitude and behaviors. Others, especially strangers, need to see individuals as strong, tough, bold, fearless and well connected. The attitude is embodied through dress that communicates "don't mess with me".  Teens show a general disinterest or a go ahead make my day approach to those they do not know. Many of the behaviors and attitudes are taken from videos and movies, as teens use and buy the stereotypes of a knowledgeable urban dweller. Anderson's idea of being

streetwise can help us understand this aspect of teen's presentation of self (1990). It would seem that expressing these ideas would allow city living to go more smoothly.

There seem to be two extremes to behavior, loud and rambunctious or quiet and invisible. These choices allow teens to navigate the streets in safe but drastically different ways. Those that choose the loud behavior often will need to resort to violence to survive. Those who choose the quiet may become victims of violence. They must act as if they are tough and cannot be rattled. There is no crying in the city. This behavior and attitude is not gendered. All teens express the belief that they can take care of themselves and they know best.

In the city, strangers learn to identify and categorize each other and are disturbed when individuals do not fall within their constructed categories. For young American Indians this poses a problem, as many people are only familiar with the stereotyped images of American Indians. Therefore, many of the teens are mistaken as some other race. Many of these teens are also biracial or multiethnic; they even have optional ethnicity in some cases. Many can and are mistaken for other ethnic or racial groups.

**Pop Culture**

Pop culture really is a double-edged sword for American Indian's, teens especially. A working knowledge of current popular culture is a necessity and part of the fun of growing up. At the same time, the stereotypical images are harmful to self-esteem and to understanding their own culture. Most teens participate in pop culture. In fact, teens are a large focus for most of our entertainment. The top books, games, movies, and music is all geared to teens. American Indian teens are no exception. They recognize top

songs from the radio, play the latest videos on Youtube and enjoy video games and movies, watch TV on Hulu. Pop culture is one way that teens from all walks of life are united. They follow the latest trends in fashion, movies and music. I will examine how pop culture is an important source of entertainment and identity for a majority of teens and for the teens at the organization where I volunteer. I will then examine the ways in which pop culture stereotypes and exploits American Indian culture. This exploitation is harmful to American Indian self-image and self-esteem. Yet, teens reappropriate the stereotypes of American Indians in pop culture to express their own form of ethnic pride. They do note when images, symbols and other American Indian ideas are presented in pop culture and are active consumers. They were unhappy with Andre 3000 from Outkast when he donned a pseudo American Indian costume for the Grammies, yet are excited that one of Twilights main characters is Native.

Youth culture is very dependent on pop culture. Cultural capital for teens is based on knowledge of the latest trends in all areas of pop culture. A lack of knowledge about these things can cause the teen to loose status and prestige. American Indian teens are no different. Yet, they are also faced with stereotypes that their peers are unlikely to acknowledge or even understand. So, while Jacob (from the Twilight series) might tell his people's stories as myths or just scary stories, American Indian teens are faced with their own people's stories being judged as the same, as just myth or fairy tales. Many of the teens understand that their people's stories are an important and vital part of their culture and are not fictional or merely told for pleasure. Their stories carry important knowledge and guidance for their people.

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Additionally when American Indian culture or ideas are presented in mainstream culture, it is often used to express the exotic, mysterious, spiritual or ecological. Jessica Biel was recently described as having high cheekbones that are attributed to her Choctaw heritage. To be American Indian is to look exotic, to be the other. American Indians should be the Pocahontas or an Indian princess (for girls) or the strong silent type, stoic warrior (for boys). There are high expectations for the way that American Indians should look. The belief is that American Indians should and do resemble the Hollywood Indian. This is quite difficult for many of the teens as they are multi-ethnic and or multi-racial and who can live up to Hollywood anyway. In fact, American Indians are a highly exogenous group of peoples in the US. Half or more of American Indian's marry outside their race. In fact the teens I work with have a wide range of" looks" or appearances, many could be mistaken as African-American, Latino, white or Asian; and some have what may be considered a traditional American Indian look. This expectation that American Indians look a certain way causes some problems for the teens. On many occasions, they have gone out of their way to tell strangers that they are American Indian. Many of these teens must work to indicate to outsiders their cultural identity. This leads many teens to use the very stereotypes that pop culture presents, such as the use of Indian sport team mascots. Those teens that look less like what outsiders would see as Indian seem to work harder to prove and establish this identity. They do worry about their place in the culture and whether others accept them as Indian.

**The Research Question**

This raises a question of central importance for my study. How and why do these teens choose to construct an American Indian identity when so many identities are available to them? Latino or African-American identities are more common and more easily recognized in this particular urban environment. Yet students who pass as African-American or Hispanic attend AIYP and identify themselves and to others as American Indian. For these teens, I argue, it is not enough to claim an identity that presents only one part of them; they need to express a more fully developed identity that includes their entire racial background.

While volunteering at AIYP, I have had conversations with many of the staff members about the teen's interest in American Indian culture. The staff and I are on friendly terms as we are all about the same age. In our conversations, they have mentioned that the teens do not really care about American Indian culture or Identity (a sentiment I believe is echoed in the wider community). However, I argue that the teens are interested in their culture, though they do not have the resources, the experiences or knowledge, to practice their culture. They adopt what they can and seem genuinely interested in learning more. Many have lamented to me that they do not have the opportunity to learn their language. When given the opportunity to make American Indian themed art they jump at the chance.

The boys are interested in making drum sticks and learning more about the drum circle. Many boys and girls attend or are interested in learning more about Pow Wows, but participating in a Pow Wow takes a certain amount of cultural knowledge, or at least

access to that knowledge, and money. The regalia are hand made and it is an honor to make it yourself or have it gifted to you. The regalia take hours of work and require an understanding of the dance style you will be participating in. While it is not a true requirement to have a particular style of regalia for a dance, one is missing the point if they are dressed as a Shawl Dancer (a style of dress associated with a particular dance style) and participating in the Jingle Dance, (where the dress makes part of the music). It is inappropriate to participate in a formal dance without the right regalia. It would be like wearing a football uniform to a swim meet.

In sum, I see expressions of American Indian identity among the AIYP teens. It is a form of identity construction that is shaped by the urban experience, popular culture and the ethnic enclave of Minneapolis. Previous American Indian research has not looked at how the urban environment affects American Indians youth identity. Because of that gap literature on urban culture, pop culture and ethnic identity construction has been most useful. I concluded that what is happening with these youth is not the construction of a strong tribal identity, but the construction of a Pan-Indian identity. One that is appropriate to and shaped by the environment (urban enclave) and their life stage (teen/youth).

Few cultural groups can escape the acculturating process in America, and the way these teens express being an American Indian does, in some way buy into the ideas and expectations that other American's have of American Indians. However, this is not the whole story. While the teens express an American Indian identity, this does not mean that they have assimilated into the wider culture. It is important to take seriously these teens' intent to learn practice and express a version of American Indian identity that works for

them. They have created the identity and they place a great deal of meaning on being American Indian. While it may not look like other expressions of American Indian identity, this does not make it a lesser form. Rather, it forces the analyst to understand American Indian identity as dynamic and creative and allows the teens the freedom to interact with outsiders who are not American Indian.

The construction of an American Indian identity is a complex one, one that takes many roads. For urban American Indian teens there are many facets to address, the popular culture of the time both hinders and provides sources of identification, the urban landscape requires deft maneuvering, and the creation of a Pan-Indigenous identity requires the use of all available resources to establish to themselves and others that they are American Indians. It would be too simplistic to simply expect that urban teens adopt a tribal identity simply because they are American Indian. Instead, they work to create a unique, malleable and applicable Identity for their place and time.

**Chapter two: Minneapolis Indian Country Today: Where to be an Indian**

American Indians have been living in the area that is now Minneapolis well before settlers reached the plains. Minneapolis itself has been home to both Ojibwe and Dakota peoples. In 1849, the area that is now Minneapolis and the surrounding area were opened up for white settlement. Before this time the Dakota who had several settlements in the area. The Dakota had settlements and trade routes established through most of south Minneapolis. Before that, the Ojibwe had made several encampments along the Mississippi river. One of the most sacred sites for the Dakota and other peoples, Coldwater Springs, is located in Minnehaha park, which is located in south Minneapolis. American Indians are not immigrating to the cities as much as they are returning to ancestral homelands.

It was not until World War II that larger numbers of American Indians began moving to the cities in search of jobs and to escape the poverty of the reservations. Because of the war effort, American Indians were able to find jobs in cities like Minneapolis. Most American Indians still faced discrimination in housing and many found it difficult to rent or buy homes in the cities. Ignatia Broker recounts facing desperate housing conditions, "I remember living in a room with six others. It was a housekeeping room, nine by twelve feet in size and meant for one person. It was listed with the price agency at five dollars a week, but the good landlady collected five dollars from each of us this week" (1983, 4). She goes on to account being offered illegal rooms for exorbitant prices. Broker notes that it was not a problem of housing shortage but that property owners did not want to rent to American Indians (1983).

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Despite the struggles and adjustment of living in the cities the population of American Indians in Minneapolis grew. By the 1970's, many American Indians were born and raised in the city and did not have experiences with the reservations. Urban American Indians began to organize to address their needs. The Upper Midwest American Indian center and the Division of Indian work opened in the early 1950's and 1960's providing emergency assistance, social support programs, social services, food bank and child services to the urban American Indian public.

The greater area of South Minneapolis is home to a large American Indian ethnic enclave. An ethnic enclave is a site that is predominated by a particular ethnic group and includes small businesses and services that fill the need of the community (Sanders 2002). South Minneapolis is such an ethnic enclave; it is where the majority of American Indian social services, businesses and organizations are located. This part of south Minneapolis is know as the American Indian cultural corridor "the Native American Community Development Institute (NACDI) has launched a new website for the American Indian Cultural Corridor district in south Minneapolis on Franklin Avenue. The Cultural Corridor is Minneapolis' new destination for food, art, and culture. Located along East Franklin Avenue from Cedar Avenue to 11th Avenue" (http://www.nacdi.org).

**Current Statistics**

Of the many neighborhoods in Minneapolis, Phillips neighborhood located in south Minneapolis has the largest population of American Indians over 2352 individuals according to the 2000 census. It is this neighborhood that the American Indian Youth Program (AIYP) predominately serves. While American Indians make up a small

percentage of the population of Minneapolis and even South Minneapolis they make up the largest portion of those living in poverty. According to the 2000 Census, statewide 36% of American Indians live in poverty; the highest rate of all races. 35% of American Indian children in the state live in poverty. In the Twin Cities, 29% of American Indians live in poverty while 41% of American Indian children live in poverty. Only African-American children have the same level of poverty in the Twin Cities (Census 2000). Many American Indian children, in the twin cities, live in a female-headed household (57%) (US Census 2000). American Indians make up 4.5% of the Minneapolis Public School System and 2.1% of the state's total students (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

**American Indian Movement**

In the late 1960's and early 1970's, many American Indians began to take notice of the Civil Rights movement and its success in securing rights and dignity for African-Americans. Many American Indians in Minneapolis were fed up with police harassment, housing discrimination and the prejudice they faced. In order to address these issues American Indians began to organize and work for better treatment and more respect. One of the biggest organizations at this time was the American Indian Movement (AIM). The story of AIM begins in the 1960's but exactly when is not agreed upon, nor is who started the organizing or where the organizing started.

In one version of the story, AIM began July of 1968 when a community meeting was called to "get the Indian community in Minneapolis behind an effort to begin making the changes that we needed" (Wilkins 2004, 61). The meeting drew a number of citizens

and quickly grievances started to air. According to Banks, the top priority quickly

became police brutality (2005, 62). A series of American Indian bars on Franklin Avenue

were targeted and patrons arrested with little cause (Banks 2004). The group decided to

organize an "Indian Patrol" similar to the Black Panthers. The patrol painted three cars

red and followed police vehicles to make sure that American Indian citizens were not

arrested without just cause and were not generally harassed by the local police

department (Banks 2005). AIM soon began to address other needs such as legal aid,

communication between American Indians and non-American Indians, setting up a

school and helping with housing concerns.

While many agree (Banks, Deloria, Wilkins) that 1968 was the year that AIM was

formed, others argue that the organizing began much earlier. Rich and Paquette argue that

the organizing began in 1962. Paquette begins her story in Minnesota's Stillwater State

Prison where Clyde Belcourt and Eddie Benton-Banai organized an Indian study group.

After their release from prison Bellcourt, Banai, George Mitchell and "another ex-convict

named Dennis Banks" founded the Concerned Indian's of America or the CIA, which

was quickly changed to AIM (1998:10). The organizing that had occurred in Prison was

now being utilized for a much larger purpose; American Indian rights. However, the early

organizing was not just in the Prison system, but happening at the same time in

Minneapolis. Rich states that Mary Jane Wilson began organizing urban American Indian

women in the Twin Cities to discuss the issues, problems and concerns of urban

American Indians (1998). Wilson's organizing in the community helped lead to the

formation of AIM.

It was in Minneapolis that the eventual AIM movement rallied. Much of its efforts were fought in Minneapolis. Even today, it has a lasting legacy in the city. As part of an American Indian art project on Franklin Avenue in Minneapolis, there is a power transformer box that has been posted with pictures of AIM alumnae. While AIM is no longer as active as it once was it is still an inspiration to many in the American Indian community.

**Little Earth**

One of AIM's big mission's was to secure housing for American Indians. This leaves Little Earth as one of AIM's lasting legacies. Little Earth is also an important cultural center for the community. Nevertheless, Little Earth is a low-income housing community with its share of problems.

The mission of the Little Earth Community Partnership is to unify a culturally strong and healthy Little Earth Community. The partnership works to achieve this mission through 24-hour-a-day programming for residents—from pre-school education to crime prevention, from housing advocates to teen mentorship projects. (http://www.littleearth.org)

Founded in 1973, Little Earth is an affordable American Indian housing development in Minneapolis. As the first urban housing complex with American Indian preference in the US, Little Earth continues to be a leader for both local and national American Indian communities.

Little Earth of United Tribes community housing in Minneapolis, MN is the only American Indian run and preferred housing cooperative in the country. It was founded in

1970 as a project of the American Indian Movement (AIM). In 1975 AIM was given control over the housing project and allowed to keep it American Indian preferred housing.

The neighborhood surrounding little earth consists of apartments, condominiums and homes. Little Earth itself is made up of apartment complexes. An outside company runs the Housing authority, but the neighborhood association runs the daily activities and is consulted on any major decision for the community Little Earth remains a vibrant community that helps situate American Indians who have moved to Minneapolis (from either a reservation or another city) by finding them housing, jobs and a community where they can feel at home. Little Earth's mission statement states that American Indian cultural values are an integral and important aspect of their community development. While AIM may be in the cycle of decline, Little Earth remains as a cultural institution working to support American Indians in Minneapolis.

Little Earth, while a happy home to many American Indians is not without its share of problems. Currently little Earth has problems with poverty, crime, gangs and drugs. And while there has been some updating and renovations done to housing, much of the housing remains underdeveloped and is in need of serious updating. Residents themselves have referred to the housing project as the "rawest native hood in America" (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HX1ATTwj02k).

Little Earth management is working to address their current problems and have a number of programs in place to alleviate some of the issues. While I mention the problems that are faced in this community, I do not want to linger on the problems, but to

look at the ways in which these issues contribute to the teen's urban American Indian identity.

**American Indian Organizations and Services**

There are a number of American Indian owned businesses and centers all located in the south side of the city. Many new buildings have incorporated Ojibwe design into the building's exterior. One strip mall is home to several businesses, art store, café, a Native owned Bank and an extension office for a tribal. There were 2,742 American Indian businesses in Minnesota (2002 US Census bureau).

In the following section, I will briefly discuss some of the American Indian organizations and services available in Minneapolis. This is not an exhaustive list but is meant to illustrate the strength of the American Indian community and to illustrate how this community organizes as American Indians versus tribally specific organizations.

*The Circle,* an American Indian newspaper, since 1980, calls Minneapolis home. The newspaper is well known for its stories that describe American Indian lives. The paper covers local community news as well as national and even international stories on indigenous issues. Their website provides a good description of their objective, "*The Circle* is dedicated to presenting news from a Native American perspective, while granting an equal opportunity to community voices" (http://thecirclenews.org/index). *The Circle* regularly covers news on both reservation and urban issues. They feature editorials and cover everything from arts and entertainment to politics and legal news. The Circle is available in print and on-line and is widely read in the American Indian community.

Minneapolis has many American Indian focused social services that provide a wide range of resources. The Indian Health Board (IHB) of Minneapolis was incorporated in 1971 to provide for the health needs of the American Indian community. Medical and dental care and counseling services are provided by the IHB to American Indians in the community. They sponsor regular events to promote healthy lifestyles, prevent diabetes, address obesity and provide services for alcohol and drug recovery. The services are provided "through special funding sources,…, To ensure services are accessible to all, a sliding fee scale is offered to private pay patients based on their income level" (http://www.indianhealthboard.com). The IHB is an important provider of healthcare in the American Indian community.

Another program that addresses health issues in the American Indian community is the Native American Community Clinic (NACC). The NACC was founded in 2003. On their website they note "although eighty five per cent of our patients are Native American we do not receive Indian Health Service funding" (http://nacc-healthcare.org). The NACC receives it funding from a number of resources such as; the Bureau of Primary Health Care, Minnesota Department of Health, Medtronic Foundation, Healthier Minnesota Community Clinic Fund and the City of Minneapolis Family and support Department. The clinic was founded "to promote wellness and regular health maintenance in Native American families and to decrease the health disparities of Native Americans in the Metropolitan area" (http://nacc-healthcare.org).

Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center (MIWRC) works to support American Indian women in times of crisis, need and healing. They offer support services

to victims of sexual and domestic violence, those suffering from drug and alcohol abuse and offer training on early childhood learning and development. The programs are all culturally based and work to alleviate the symptoms of cultural trauma or "cultural co-occurring disorders (loss of culture, language, family roles and grief, shame" (http://www.miwrc.org). The MIWRC is the only Minneapolis based organization that addresses the needs of women in a culturally based program.

The American Indian Community Development Corporation (AICDC) focuses on the need for affordable housing in the American Indian community. They have completed several projects and have several projects that are being developed. One completed project is "Niibiwa Siibin" or Many Rivers. It is located on Franklin Avenue in what is known as the "American Indian Corridor". Many Rivers has 78 units of affordable housing and offers many other residential services such as heated parking, laundry facilities and a playground. The building is decorated in Ojibwe floral design tiles that rim the top of the building (http://www.aicdc-mn.org). Another project is "Anishinabe Wakiagun" which is a housing unit that is culturally specific housing for late stage chronic inebriates. The facility is not a dry program so the residents may drink, but are encouraged to participate in the many cultural activities alcohol free. The housing unit is not temporary housing but is meant to be a long-term solution to a population in need (http://www.aicdc-mn.org). The AICDC is working on a project that will offer permanent housing to the working homeless. The project "Anishinabe Bii-Gii-Wiin" or "The People Coming Home", will offer several single bedroom apartments to enable working poor to have a safe and comfortable place to call home. The AICDC is an organization that is

working on the housing needs of a wide selection of the American Indian community and has done great work to house a number of vulnerable populations.

Two churches serve American Indian congregations: All Nations Indian Church and All Saint's Episcopal Indian Mission. All Nations vision is "an integral part of the life of the United Church of Christ. We maintain out Indian traditions by employing out Native values and vultures to witness in our communities through authentic and postcolonial Indian expressions of the Christian faith. We are a gathering 'place' for all UCC Indian people who seek such a place" (http://www.caimucc.org/allnationschurch.html). This church also offers childcare and does a great deal of volunteering and donating to the local American Indian community. All Saints' Episcopal Indian Mission runs the First Nations Kitchen, which serves meals, every Sunday, to American Indians and other underserved populations. The meals are organic and based on the First Nations diet that includes "buffalo, wild rice, elk, fish, deer, and turkey" (http://firstnationskitchen.org/). Both of these churches work to bring not just spiritual resources but also social resources to their communities.

In Minneapolis, there are two large organizations that offer a number of social services; The Minneapolis American Indian Center (MAIC) and the Division of Indian Work (DIW). The MAIC, founded in 1975, is one of the oldest American Indian community centers in the country and offers services ranging from chemical dependency, youth programs and senior citizens meals and transportation (http://maicnet.org). The services offered to senior citizens is quite broad.

"Any person age fifty-five and over is eligible to utilize our services. We provide assistance that is often vitally important to remaining independent. Transportation: Medical and Dental visits, Prescriptions, Grocery shopping, other appointments. Advocacy, Information & Referral: Social Services, Social Security, SSI, V.A., Medical Assistance, legal problems, income tax. Homemaker/Home Chore: Light housekeeping tasks, meal preparation, shopping, escort for medical care, personal care not requiring medical supervision. Social/Recreation: cultural outings, transportation to social events and functions" (http://maicnet.org). In many ways, the MAIC is the heart and center of the American Indian community. Its location in south Minneapolis in the cultural corridor makes it centrally located as well. The MAIC is a community meeting place that hosts a number of cultural programs and community meetings.

The other large American Indian organization, the Division of Indian Work (DIW), is based more on social services than community organizing. The DIW has been offering services, advocacy and counseling since 1952. This program is a division of the Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches, but is run and directed by American Indian community leaders. They run a food shelf, a youth winter coat program and holiday meal baskets. They also have a youth program and several counseling programs to help American Indians with various social and personal problems. The DIW notes that, "To rise above poverty, American Indian families living in the Twin Cities need a connection to their sacred cultural past. It is that link, combined with education, mentoring and support that will empower them to proudly claim their place in this world"

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([http://diw.gmcc.org/](http://diw.gmcc.org/)). Many members of the American Indian community rely on this organization for its material and social support.

The Anishinabe Academy and the American Indian Opportunities Industrial Center (AIOIC) serve many of the educational needs of the American Indian community. The Anishinabe Academy serves kindergarten through 12th grade students in a culturally enriched environment. While the school is named after one of Minnesota's tribal groups the school works to offer cultural traditions in both Dakota and Ojibwe (the two main tribal groups in Minnesota) and centers on a broad look at American Indian culture and history. This school is a magnet school that welcomes all interested students (http://anishinabe.mpls.k12.mn.us).

The American Indian Opportunities Industrialization Center (AIOIC) serves both high school students and the adult population through its GED services and its adult basic education. The AIOIC serves as a high school alternative for teens and as a learning center for adults. The school also offers vocational training in a variety of business skills and health related training. The center also works to place its graduates into full-time employment and has several dedicated counselors who work toward finding students good placements. The AIOIC is a great resource for the American Indian community. Its location in the American Indian Cultural corridor allows students to be in close contact with other American Indian social and cultural services, thus making the AIOIC an important member of the American Indian Community ([http://aioic.org](http://aioic.org)).

**American Indian Youth Program**

The organization that my research focuses in is just one of the many programs that serve Minneapolis' American Indian community. The American Indian Youth Program (AIYP) happens to be where I volunteer, but they work with other organizations to ensure that American Indian culture and knowledge is passed down through the generations and that American Indian people have a place to share and practice that knowledge.

The AIYP is located in south Minneapolis like so many other American Indian organizations. Moreover, they are not alone in their work. The presence of so many American Indian organizations, located so closely geographically, makes Minneapolis a rich location for American Indians and work to support the creation and maintenance of an American Indian identity. American Indians who live in Minneapolis do not have to look very far to find services and support. Minneapolis is a unique center of American Indian identity, whereas other cities might be unique centers of more tribally based identities. Minneapolis has a long history of American Indians living and working in the city and organizations and services that have supported the community. Unlike other midwestern cities, American Indians have a strong presence in Minneapolis, which makes it an interesting and important location for exploring urban American Indian identities.

Because of the historical and institutional support of an American Indian identity in Minneapolis, it is no surprise that the AIYP teens utilize this conception of American Indian identity to construct their own identity. The social and cultural predominance of

American Indian identity work (versus a more tribally based identity) become a template for the teens as they work to create their own ideas of what it means to be an American Indian. The teens have little access or institutional support for tribally based identities. The AIYP teens are located in the American Indian cultural corridor and are surrounded by a community that has decided to work together and create a community based on shared similarities as American Indians. The teens also work to create a community based on shared similarities. While the teens come from different tribal backgrounds, the focus, for them, is that they are all American Indian and often face similar instances of discrimination and improper recognition. In order to fit in the community and offer an identity that outsiders might recognize the teens have followed the path laid before them and have constructed an identity based on their shared status as American Indians.

Statistics show just how vulnerable American Indian teens are and despite their small numbers, it is important to learn more about this population. How do poor inner-city American Indian teens come to express their racial identity? Despite the lack of money they face they are still able and willing to express a racial/cultural identity that is not a mainstream concept. They are able to use the resources available to them to enact an American Indian identity. In fact, they use their scarce resources to purchase items that will reflect their identity to the outside world, when they could be using those resources for other, more mainstream, purposes. The teens do not necessarily have the latest fashions, phones or technological gadgets, but they do have items that reflect American Indian culture.

That many of the teens face poverty or live in financially unstable homes affect the construction of their American Indian identity. The teens not only use precious resources to purchase American Indian paraphernalia but also use American Indian based social services. Because of their financial status these teens are tied to the larger American Indian population through the use of culturally based social services. Through this use they are further exposed to identities based on American Indian's shared historical and cultural similarities. While the teens construct a unique American Indian identity it is through the communities expressions of American Indian identity that the teens learn how to construct their own identity.

Labors of the Spirit
My children, my children,
I take pity on those who have been taught,
Because they push on hard,
Says our Father.
-Songs from the Great Plains, the Ghost-Dance Religion
From *American Indian Poetry*

## Chapter three: Methods: How it is done

This project began inductively as part of a class assignment in 2003. It was a course on ethnography and we were sent into the field with the general question of how the group constructed identity. I choose the American Indian Youth Program[4] because I have a personal and academic interest in American Indian issues. Growing up in North Dakota, I witnessed first hand the discrimination and injustice faced by American Indians. That experience taught me about racial injustice and motivated me to work to end the injustice that American Indians face.

I was initially unsure about the idea of working with teens, but proceeded with becoming a volunteer and have continued to volunteer. By spending the first few years experiencing the American Indian Youth Program (AIYP), I was able to develop an initial research question. Do these teens care about an American Indian identity? While training for the position, I was told that part of the program was designed to teach the students about their cultural heritage. I asked how I, as a white woman, could facilitate that goal. I was told that the teens did not care about their culture so I would not have to worry about instilling cultural knowledge. After a few months, I noticed that the teens did show signs of interest in their cultural heritage. These signs were not overt but subtle and

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[4] Pseudonym

could easily be missed. The teens did not have the same way of expressing their American Indian identity as the staff. Many of the staff were raised in rural settings and have a more traditional expression of American Indian identity. The teens have a very different experience growing up in the city. The staff and the teens are experiencing two different forms of American Indian identity.

I gained entry to the sight by applying, passing a background check, and accepting the volunteer position. My position at the AIYP is a tutor/mentor. I attend weekly sessions during the school year, for two hours. I also accept all invitations to family nights, outings, or the weekly fun night. I usually attended an extra session a month. I found that I really enjoyed working with the teens, staff and the organization so I continued volunteering after I fulfilled the course requirement. In December of 2008, I obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for my participant-observation. Starting in January of 2009, I began taking extensive field notes that were greatly informed by my prior experience and familiarity with the program.

In 2009, I asked to be a part of the reward night where they learned/practiced American Indian culture and then did a fun activity like bowling, going to a movie, roller skating or something like that. While volunteers are not usually a part of these evenings' activities the staff had no problem with me attending on a regular basis. I then attended the program for 14 weeks, two hours a day. In total (including extra parties and activities)

I put in 120 hours. Then in 2010, I totaled 58 hours. If I include the hours before I received IRB as knowledge building, I totaled 514 hours in the field.[5]

I am still currently a volunteer at the American Indian Youth Program (AIYP) and plan to continue my work here as long as I live in the Twin Cities. Because of issues of confidentiality, I am not disclosing the name or the specific location of the program. The center is located in South Minneapolis and serves only that part of town. This area of Minneapolis is the most densely populated with American Indians and is where a majority of American Indian social services, businesses, housing projects and tribal headquarters are located. The AIYP is just one of the programs that are run by the American Indian Services Building (AISB)[6]. The AISB has a long history of offering social service to the American Indian community. It is one of the oldest programs in the Twin Cities. The AIYP part of the program is designed to offer tutoring and mentoring in a culturally sensitive environment. There is a large kitchen attached to a large meeting room. The meeting room is filled with round tables and folding chairs. It is used for the teen tutoring program and for other events and special occasions for the AISB. The room can hold around 100 people.

While the room is large, the teen group only takes up a small section of the room. The teens tend to take up to four or five of the tables when we meet. Rarely, do more than three teens sit together and when they do, they often are broken into smaller groups so they can focus on their homework. Some teens prefer to work and sit alone.

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[5] From 2003-2008 I totaled 312 hours of volunteer time and 24 hours of attending parties, events and extra sessions. I totaled 336 hours over these years.
[6] Pseudonym.

The building also hosts the youth program for children from 6-12. They have a smaller room with square tables that are surrounded by Apple computers. The room looks more like a classroom with American Indian themed posters and messages about Native culture. There are many signs for Ojibwe words and most of the objects in the room are labeled in Ojibwe. The staff's offices are connected to this room. There is a small office for the director that has a window into the classroom. On the other side of that office, the rest of the staff share a small room packed with five desks and computers. While the youth have 8-9 working apple computers to use during free time, the teens must share the five staff computers if they want internet access during free time.

The teen group includes ages 13-18 (though, there have been two teens who turned 19 before graduating). The teens are a voluntary group. They are not sent to the program as part of a disciplinary or academic problem. The teens must get consent from their parents but there is no evidence of coercion.

Because the teens voluntarily chose to attend the program, they are a self-selected group. This study is using a case study approach; the use of a convenience sample that is purposely chosen is in keeping with this approach. Because of the non-random sample, I cannot assume that these teens are representative of all American Indian teens in Minneapolis. In fact, I assume that they are more interested in their culture than other American Indian teens who do not participate in cultural programs. It is possible that these teens then resemble other American Indian teens who participate in one of the many other cultural programs, but I cannot be sure. However, I am not attempting to generalize about American Indian teens or even Minneapolis American Indian teens. I am focusing

on part of the Minneapolis area American Indian population best suited to develop a theoretical framework for analyzing the possibilities of identity construction for urban American Indian teens. I am seeking to expand theoretical ideas about the expression of race, the impact of a preexisting pan-ethnic identity on the construction of teens identity, the difficulty of the construction of a racial identity in the urban environment, the use of pop culture as a tool to create identity, and the assimilation of or the boundary making of the AIYP teens American Indian Identity.

**What Am I Studying?**

I am interested in how and in what ways AIYP teens express an American Indian identity through everyday expressions, actions, language and material goods. I explore the way in which the AIYP teens use pop culture to create an American Indian identity. As teens in the contemporary world they are surrounded by the pop culture world. Like most teens, they consume pop culture, but do they consume it in ways that create, establish, and extend their identity as American Indian? I also investigate how urban American Indian teens navigate an American Indian identity. Does living in an urban environment influence their ability to establish or interest in establishing an American Indian Identity? In the multi-cultural city do the teens make an effort to establish an American Indian identity or do they work to blend in with their classmates? I am also interested to find out how and in what ways they create a racial identity of an American Indian. Does the identity "American Indian" have meaning and use for them? Do they seek to identity themselves as American Indians to those around them? Finally, are these

teens assimilating into the broader culture or is this best seen as expanding the boundaries of what it means to be an American Indian today?

The teens all have some American Indian heritage but many of the teens are multi-racial and/or multi-ethnic (more than one American Indian tribal heritage). While they are American Indian, many of them "look" African-American, Latino/a, Asian and white. Some of the teens would fall into the phenotypical norm of what an American Indian looks like, but most of the teens do not pass a visual test for being American Indian. Of the tribal groups represented at the AIYP Ojibwe and Dakota are the most common. However, other tribes are also represented through multi-ethnic teens. These teens often identified with one of the two most populous groups, but were also some other tribe such as Cherokee or Navajo.

Most weeks, between 6-12 teens attended the program. Girls usually outnumbered the boys 3 to 1, though currently there are only two girls out of the group of 12, so the gender distribution varies by year. The retention of the teens varies. Some of the teens have been coming for years and started out participating in the youth group for ages 6-13. Some of the teens come and go as their work, athletic and school schedule changes. It is common for us to lose a few students during basketball season. There are those students who came for only a few sessions or a semester, but most of the teens sign-up and stick around until they graduate. In all of the years I have volunteered, I have worked with around 70 students.

**Anonymity and Consent**

As part of my IRB approval and in an attempt to give the teens some protection from being recognized, I did not collect any personal information and did not use real names or specific unique indicators in my field notes. In this way, the teens should maintain their anonymity. I also did not obtain consent from the teens. There are three important reasons for this. First, obtaining consent would link the teens, by name, to my study and would not allow me to maintain anonymity. Additionally, I would have to obtain consent from parents, which would cause me to collect more names, and information that could link individuals to my study. The second reason I did not obtain consent is to protect my role as a volunteer. I have worked hard to be a trusted person in the teen's lives and felt that disclosing that I was doing a research study about the everyday behaviors and conversations would put a wedge between the students and me. As a tutor/mentor, I did not need to change my role in order to collect this observable data; rather I was able to collect my data through the fulfillment of my role as volunteer. I felt that ethically the role of tutor/mentor was more important than collecting the data. Finally, I worried that disclosing that I was studying their expression of an American Indian identity would affect how and in what ways they expressed themselves. The importance of seeing how they naturally and in an everyday way present themselves was an important piece of the research.[7] The use of anonymity and decision to not inform the teens were chosen in order to minimize harm to the teens.

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[7] That is not to say that they teens did not work to explicitly express an American Indian identity for the days they attended the program. The teens are picked up from school so whatever they wear to the program they wore to school. Nevertheless, it is still likely that

Some might argue that this study raises ethical questions because of the decision not to collect informed consent. In some ways, this research violates the Belmont principle of respect for persons (Childress, Meslin and Shapiro 2005). However, my data collection was obtained while fulfilling a role I had previously established. I did not invade the privacy of the teens, which is especially important, as they are aware that we (volunteers and staff) are there to ensure good behavior and are figures of authority. The teens did not disclose anything that they would not want a responsible adult to hear. I also did not ask any specific questions that related to the research and there were no leading questions or probes for more information. I took seriously the natural and everyday expressions of the teens. While I did not obtain direct consent from the teens I did receive institutional consent from the AIYP. The director of the program signed a consent form and all of the staff was informed of my research agenda. There was little reaction to my announcement of the research project. Staff did not show much concern or interest in the project and when I would mention the fact that I was doing research, they would tell me they had forgotten all about it. I feel comfortable that my position at the AIYP allowed me to collect data without any threat to the teens and allows me to capture the everyday expressions of racial identity.

**Developing the Themes**

After spending a few years as a volunteer, I began to question the staff's belief that the teens did not care about their American Indian culture or identity. I noticed that the teens expressed a pan-ethnic or racial identity of "American Indian" while in contrast;

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attendance to the program has an impact on their expression of an American Indian identity on those days.

the staff presented a more tribally based identity. I concluded that the staff might not recognize the more pan-ethnic[8] expression of the teens. These observations lead me to focus on the theme of pan-ethnic identity. In spending time with the teens I began to see how important pop culture was to them and how they used pop culture in ways that expressed their pan-ethnic identity as American Indians, leading me to focus on the pop culture literature and to think of pop culture as a tool for identity creation. In doing background research for the project I realized that there has been little research done on urban American Indian teen identity, yet there is also some concern in the community that urban Indians have not retained their Native identity and do not care about American Indian culture. This led me to focus on the unique challenges of establishing an American Indian identity in an urban environment. The urban environment is said to be the site of pan-Indian identity (Nagel 1996, Shoemaker 1998). Pan-ethnic influences on the AIYP teen's identity became a major focus of my research. Overall, my research allows me to engage with a much larger question, has the identity these teens created been an assimilating force or a form of expanding the definitions of American Indians?

**Mechanics**

I took extensive field notes throughout the time I had IRB approval. Initially I took notes while at the tutor/mentor sessions but I quickly realized I was not focusing on the students and they became more curious about what I was doing than what they were supposed to be doing. I then switched to taking notes as soon as I got home. I would sit

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[8] Pan-Indian and pan-ethnic refer to the same construct of groups of people. American Indian and Native American are used interchangeably. More on these ideas in Chapter four.

down at my computer and write as much as I could remember and worked for several hours recreating the scenes, discussions, and events. (However, occasionally when a significant event or discussion took place, I would excuse myself and take notes on-site in the bathroom; I carried a pen and notepad in my purse for these occasions.) I knew that I had collected enough data when I reached the saturation point that is, when the data began to repeat itself and the same concepts, discussions and material goods appeared repeatedly.

I then explored the themes further in theoretical and analytical memos. I prioritized the themes on which substantial data was collected, what is important to members and what is theoretically important. Once the themes were established and I had worked some data into the themes, I went back to the literature to find out what others have found and how my findings fit with previous research. This allowed me to place the themes and data in the wider conversations about pan-ethnic identity, urban environment, pop culture, and assimilation versus boundary making. Once I developed the themes, I went over my field notes using focused coding looking for events, discussions, conversations and material goods that fell into each theme (Emerson 1995). I went through the field notes several times to make sure that all the data was placed into a theme and that the data fit the themes. I went through the data again after I had written up the chapters to make sure all the data had been accounted for.

**Why Ethnography?**

I am looking at the ways in which the AIYP teens express their identity in the everyday world. Ethnography not only allows the researcher to study the everyday world

but also asks us to take seriously the constructions of identity based on everyday interactions. Ethnography also allows me to explore how others live their lives in a more natural setting (Lofland 2005). It is important to observe what people do not just what they say they do. By being a participant-observer, I was allowed access to the "reality" of the teen's lives (Lofland 2005). I was able to hear for myself how, unprovoked, the teens expressed themselves and their views on their own life. What was significant and important to them at that time and place? Ethnographic methods are useful for understanding the lives of individuals in context. How in specific settings individuals act and react. While other methods may be useful for generalizing findings to a wider audience, my goal is to understand this group of people in a specific context and to expand our theoretical knowledge of identity construction, pan-ethnic formations on racial identity, the way in which urban environment affects expressions of identity, the impact of culture on ethnic formations, and the ideas of assimilation in America.

Interviews would have given me another interesting view into these issues, but would have taken away from my ability to witness everyday conversations and behaviors. By asking the teens about what it means to be American Indian and how they express an American Indian identity, I would have gotten a better understanding of their worldview but I would not have seen the organic expression of that identity. In many ways, these questions just do not make sense. I have no idea how I perform my whiteness. Why should I expect a teen to have the answers? After many years interacting with these teens, I have not come up with a good way to ask the types of questions that would illuminate my themes.

**Why does this research matter?**

There has been some excellent research on urban American Indians, but the topic of identity formation and expression is often only peripherally dealt with (Lobo and Peters 2001, Lobo 2002,Shoemaker 1998, Weibel-Orlando 1991). My research centers on how and in what ways urban American Indian teens in the AIYP create, maintain and express an American Indian identity. While there is research on Urban American Indians there is little to no research on urban American teens, much less how they express an American Indian identity. It is interesting that little has been done on American Indian youth identity as there is much discussion around the fear that youth are losing interest in American Indian culture and identity.

My research provides some evidence of what is going on in the American Indian youth community. My research also problematizes the idea of assimilation. American Indian voices are often left out of the conversation of assimilation even though they were forced into numerous programs aimed at directly assimilating them. After all this time are urban American Indians showing signs of assimilating? I think it is important when studying urban American Indians to look at the impact the city has on how, and in what ways, they create and express an American Indian identity. I found that looking into the impact the city has on identity formation is an important yet understudied aspect of urban studies. In cultural theory, there is an idea that culture is hegemonic and constrains the way that people understand and read culture. While there may be a hegemonic use of American Indian stereotypes in pop culture, the teens do not react in conforming or accepting ways. The teens use pop cultural expressions to create a new meaning and

establish an American Indian identity that reflects and appropriates contemporary culture.

Finally, this work attempts to reveal some of the stereotypes and misconceptions that

many have about American Indians and to expand our knowledge about the

contemporary culture of American Indians.

"One of the principle problems for urban Indians is how to remain Indian: in spite of the various difficulties, they do remain Indian by keeping together through a network of communications, by getting together for kinds of celebrations and powwows. There's greater unity among Indians today. Kiowa, Los Angeles, California, 1976[9]

## Chapter Four
## Pan-Ethnic Identity in Minneapolis AIYP Teens

When it comes to race and ethnicity, social scientists have taken many approaches; to treat them as interchangeable, as related, or as distinct categories. Many recognize that individuals may identify as a member of both a racial group and ethnic group, and that these self-identifications do not work the same for all. In my work, I find that American Indian identity is both ethnically and racially based and the two are interrelated yet distinct. The American Indian Youth Program (AIYP) teens assert both a racial and ethnic identity but express a racial identity as their primary identity. This is not surprising given that the programs and services available in Minneapolis construct a racialized American Indian identity. In this chapter, I discuss how the teens have constructed an American Indian identity (a racialized identity) through their ethnic (tribal) identities. These teens have found that a racialized identity is more useful to them and their location as teens in an urban environment.

The teens self-identify as American Indian, but must work to convince others that they are American Indians. Because of the need for external as well as internal identification of racial identity the teen's identity as American Indian is fragile. There is a need to convince others of their ethnic identity (Liebler 2001). I believe one of the reasons the teens attend the AIYP program is because of the institutional support that the

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[9] Found in Fixico, Donald L. 2000. *The Urban Indian Experience in America*. University of New Mexico Press. Pg. 123.

organization lends to their identity. It is assumed that they must be American Indian,

given that they attend a program for American Indians. Additionally, no one at AIYP

questions the teen's American Indianness. Because the teens identify as American Indian,

it is assumed that all students are American Indians. I seek to understand what this means

to them. Why choose an American Indian identity over a tribal identity or a non-Indian

identity? How and in what ways do they identify themselves as American Indian? These

are the questions I address in this chapter. I argue that the teen's interest in and practice

of American Indian culture is an expression of American Indian identity.

**The use of the Term American Indian**

There are many terms used to describe the Indigenous peoples of North America;

First Nation peoples, American Indian, Native American and even Indian[10]. Each term is

fraught with problems. In this project I use the term American Indian. The term is not

without its problems. Michael Yellow Bird asserts:

> "Recently, the labels "Indian," "American Indian," and "Native American" have
> been criticized in academic scholarship. I have suggested that these names are
> oppressive, counterfeit identities of Indigenous Peoples and undermine their right
> to use tribal affiliation as a preeminent national identity. I assert that these labels
> are highly erroneous for tribal groups who continue to resist European American
> colonization and that Indigenous scholarship must be decolonized through the use
> of more empowering descriptors" (1999:6).

I agree with Yellow Bird and believe that it is important to use tribal affiliation when

referring to individual American Indians who identify tribally, but "indigenous" is too

vague and includes groups outside the United States. "American Indian" indicates they

are in the United States and the subject of my topic is the descendant's of its original

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[10] I use Indian in two contexts. The first is when I am discussing historical issues, topics
or ideas. This is to emphasis the orientation to American Indians at that time. The second
is when a teen or staff member directly used the term.

inhabitants. The AIYP teens are of multi-tribal descent and represent many different tribes, when discussing them as a group I need an inclusive term. One that they themselves use, American Indian incorporates their use of Indian with a more formal, and non-offensive term, American Indian.

I have chosen to use the term "American Indian" versus other common terms such as "Native American", "Indian", or "Indigenous Peoples" as it is a common inclusive term. There are many reasons why I choose American Indian here are four of the most important reasons. One is the American Indian community in Minneapolis commonly uses it. Many of the organizations, services and programs use the term as well as the use of American Indian Studies by the University of Minnesota. Two, I find that it most directly correlates with the teens' use of the term "Indian" when defining themselves and those like them. [11]Three, American Indian is the legal designator used to allocate resources and goods. And Four, it avoids any confusion with new groups that refer to themselves, as Native Americans in reference to the fact they were born in the United States yet have no affiliation to a Nation, Tribe or Band of American Indians.

It is true that these terms were created by the colonizers and the terms American Indian, Native American and Indigenous and are inaccurate in describing the tribal peoples of the America's. Yet these terms are commonly used by members of the American Indian community; academic journals, newspapers, books, songs and even social movements. These terms are all problematic but many people associate and identify with these terms.

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[11] I use American Indian unless a teen has used the term "Indian". Indian is not a term that should be used by non-American Indians.

The teen's use of the word "Indian" can be seen as a form of assimilation or as an attempt to reclaim a term. The teens only use "Indian" among themselves and to refer to others of the same race. To me it is similar to the African-American use of the word "nigga" as an insider term reserved for use among those who belong. The African-American community, similarly, has many who feel the word has no place and many others who use it as a sign of friendship. The word Indian comes with the same stigmas and problems but it also is a way for the teens to reclaim a power-laden term thereby engaging in resistance. I take seriously the worldview of the AIYP teens and believe that their use of the term "Indian" is not simply assimilating to the dominant culture but a way of communicating their racial and ethic identity to outsiders. To call oneself an "Indian" or American Indian is to tell outsiders, in terms they can understand, who you are.

**Ethnic Identity**

Ethnic identity is a combination of self-identification and the perceptions of others (Weaver 2001:243, Garroutte 2003, Gonzales 2001). Some argue that it is not enough to identify as a particular ethnicity, ones ethnicity can only be confirmed by those who share that identity (Hanson 1997, Liebler 2001, Weaver 2001:245). Because ethnic identity is a process that involves both internal and external opinions, ones ethnic identity can vary and becomes fluid. However, the fluidity of ethnicity varies by race, among other things. Not all individuals can choose to be a particular ethnicity or opt out of an ethnicity. The AIYP teens struggle in different ways with their ethnic identity in part, because they vary in racial backgrounds. Those who appear to be African-American or white would likely have the most difficulty in being perceived as American Indian by

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strangers, as historically people who fall into those racial categories are only considered African-American or white.

To have an ethnic identity one must be aware of the cultural legacy of the people. To have an ethnicity is to know about the religion, food, clothing, arts, language, practices, and norms of that group of people. While this knowledge can be minimal at best, it is the knowledge that such things exist which truly matters. Ethnic identity and culture are connected through their mutual necessity. Because culture and ethnicity are linked, I use cultural practices as evidence of an ethnic identity. It is possible to equate cultural practice and knowledge with ethnic identity. But it is a mistake to assume that ethnic culture or identity is a static entity that was created and is now enacted by current generations. They are in fact entities that are in constant flux and are changed by each generation as they face new and diverse situations and problems and successes. In fact, Nagel notes that ethnic culture and identity are "emergent and problematic features of ethnicity" (1994:153).

I will focus on racial and ethnic identities. In this case, ethnic identity is equivalent to tribal identity such as Pima, Ojibwe, Dakota, or Lakota. In addition, a racial identity is equivalent to Pan-Indian identity such as Native American, American Indian, or Indigenous Peoples. The question then becomes how do theories of ethnic identity apply to this case? While it is not a prerequisite ethnic identity, in this case, is a building block of racial identity. An American Indian Identity is at once an amalgamation of ethnicities and a distinct identity.

In my analysis, I make sure not to ignore the new ways in which the teens express their identity, as new cultural expressions are no less important than historical cultural practices. I argue that it has been a concentration on historical ideas of American Indians and their cultural practices that has lead some to believe that American Indians are loosing their ethnicity and culture. As American Indian culture has grown and changed our perception of what it means to be an American Indian has not changed. We have been missing the new ways in which the teens express their cultural identity. Here American Indian culture includes not only those more general beliefs and practices of American Indians but also the more tribally specific cultures and practices. As I will argue, later in this Chapter, an American Indian identity incorporates both the tribally specific and the more global American Indian culture.

**Theories of Ethnic Identity**

The issue of ethnicity is an important one in the American Indian community. As Nagel notes "American Indians are an ethnically plural population. Native Americans are geographically dispersed, linguistically diverse and culturally varied" (1996: 7). Therefore, to speak of one tribe as representing American Indians in general would be a reductive fallacy. As is true with other ethnic groups "Indian ethnic boundaries and identities are continually socially constructed and negotiated" (Nagel 1996: 9) making cross- tribal comparisons tricky. Because of the complexity of American Indian ethnic categories, I emphasis that ethnicity is not the basis for analysis in this work. Ethnic identification is studied to the extent that it is part of the racial identity of being American Indian.

That is not to say that an ethnic identity or tribally based identities are essential categories. They too are socially constructed and change over time and place and cannot be viewed as static and rigid categories. Even within tribes there can be great differences. While playing a Canadian designed indigenous game a staff member remarked "those Canadian Ojibwe are so different." The social construction of racial and ethnic categories means that we cannot make broad statements about any group.

Most Americans think of ethnicity as an inherited biological trait (Cornell and Hartmann 1998, Nagel 1994), yet there is nothing biological about it. Though Gonzales defines ethnicity as a "shared historical and political past that is based on family ties" (2001), this definition is much to narrow. Cerulo argues that ethnicity is the " 'we-ness' of a group stressing the similarities or shared attributes around which group members coalesce" (1997:386). Ethnicity often involves separating those who "belong" from those who do not "belong" (Sanders 2002). To fully understand ethnicity, it is important to look at "the ways in which ethnic boundaries, identities, and cultures are negotiated, defined, and produced through social interaction inside and outside ethnic communities" (Hanson 1997, Nagel 1994:152). This emphasizes the fact that ethnicity is both optional (something one can choose to participate in or enact) and mandatory (others will designate an ethnicity for you based on certain characteristics) (Nagel 1994).

Ethnicity is also a mechanism for disseminating goods and services through legal/governmental agencies and through social capital of the ethnic group members. Ethnic groups then provide their members with the goods and services they desire/require (Sanders 2002). Ethnicity is a means for creating and disseminating political access and

power. For example, The American Indian Movement (AIM) was formed to consolidate concerns of all American Indians into a movement where their numbers were great enough to gain attention. In this way, groups seek to use ethnicity as a base for movements and political access. "Ultimately, the degree of ethnic-boundary closure and the extent to which intense ethnic identity persists in plural societies rest on the capacity of ethnic networks to provide valuable resources that benefit a cross-section of the ethnic community" (Sanders 2002 350-351). Therefore, while ethnicity may be a personal choice, it is also a collective agreement in order to access power and materials.

**What is a Pan-Ethnic Identity?**

Pan-ethnic identity is usually based on racial categories. Some racial categories are made up of many smaller distinct cultural or ethnic groups. Asians, Latinos and American Indians are examples of races made up of distinct cultural groups. For example, an Asian identity is an example of a pan-ethnic identity, whereas a Korean-American, Chinese-American or Japanese American identity is simply an ethnic identity. Some researchers argue that pan-ethnic groups are built on a web of associations between ethnic and pan-ethnic organizations (Epiritu 1992, Okamoto 2003, Padilla 1985). Ethnic organizations build the foundations for pan-ethnic organization (Epiritu 1992, Okamoto 2003, Padilla 1985). It is through the ethnic organizations that groups learn the need for a wider political base and seek to join forces with groups with similar historical struggles. "Pan-ethnicity does not subsume the ethnic identity, instead it is another layer of identity" (Nagel 1994). It is necessary to develop an ethnic identity to form a pan-ethnic identity, but a pan-ethnic identity is not just an ethnic identity it is more and different.

The AIYP teens express both an ethnic identity and a pan-ethnic identity at various times. In this way, these identities are "situational," depending on whether they are relating to another American Indian or to another member of their tribe. For example, when a teen is talking to another Dakota he would refer to himself as Dakota. However, the same teen would likely refer to himself as American Indian when talking with an Ojibwe, as that is how the two teens are similar.

Again, culture plays a crucial role in constructing a pan-ethnic identity. By constructing an overarching culture it is easier to socially construct a pan-ethnic identity that incorporates diverse ethnicities into one overarching racial identity. Nagel has pointed out that pan-ethnic culture is "borrowed, blended, rediscovered and reinterpreted" (1994:162). A pan-ethnic culture is created from the various ethnicities, which are treated like a toolkit or a source from which to construct the culture (Swindler 1986). Pan-ethnicity is also described as being a "politico-cultural collectivity made up of peoples of several, hitherto distinct, tribal or national origins" (Espiritu 1992: 2). Nagel points out that a pan-ethnic identity is needed to create a unified identity for the group so they may work towards shared social and political goals.

Many pan-ethnic groups are created to overcome the minority position they occupy in a given location, i.e. city or state. The American Indian Movement (AIM) grew out of the political and social need for all American Indians to come together across tribal lines to create a larger political group. In Minnesota, the Ojibwe and the Dakota (the two largest tribal groups in the state) have historically had a contentious relationship. Nevertheless, the social and political situation in the 1960's required that they work

together to create change. Many ethnic groups have worked to create a pan-ethnic culture "Latino ethnic-conscious behavior, represents a collective-generated behavior which transcends the boundaries of the individual national and cultural identities of the different Spanish-speaking populations and emerges as a distinct and separate group identity and consciousness" (Padilla 1985: 61). Latino's use of a common language is one way to construct a pan-ethnic identity. American Indians rely on a shared history and a constructed pan-Indian culture.

**What is Pan-Indian?**

There is no group "American Indian" other than the constructed idea. The identity of American Indian is constructed through shared cultural practices and shared common histories.  Pan-Indian refers to the social construction of a pan-ethnic identity that is specific to the indigenous peoples of the US. "Pan-Indian" and "American Indian" or "Native American" are often used synonymously. The concept of pan-Indian has many different terms supratribal, American Indian, Native American and Indian, though the term pan-Indian is rarely used by American Indians themselves.  Pan-Indian is the collection of diverse tribes and bands from throughout the United States i.e. Ojibwe, Dakota, Pima, Shoshone, Navajo etc, which are themselves socially constructed identities. A pan-Indian identity is a racial identity, whereas a tribe specific identity is an ethnic identity (Hertzberg 1971). Hertzberg defines pan-Indiansim as "The effort to find common ground beyond the tribe, a broader identity and unity based on shared cultural elements, shared experiences, shared needs, and a shared common fate" (1971:6). It is important to note that a pan-Indian identity is dependent on a tribal identity (Liebler

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2001). It would be very difficult for an individual to be accepted as pan-Indian without having a tribal identity. While a tribal identity is a building block for pan-Indian identity, pan-Indian identity is different from tribal identity. A pan-Indian identity means that you have knowledge of the shared historical and political struggles of American Indians and the institutions and organizations have been created and maintained (Lobo 2001).

While pan-Indianism is often seen as a contemporary occurrence, Fixico points out that pan-Indianism was common in different historical periods as "different tribal nations crossed tribal barriers for unique situations or particular needs, for political reasons second, social concerns third, and then for economics as the last significant reason" (2000: 124). Wilkins (2002) argues that pan-Indian organization was a result of the boarding school experiences that brought different tribal members together and gave them a common language (English) with which to organize. In more contemporary times, Hertzberg argues that pan-Indian organizing was a result of American Indians moving to cities and towns where they were met with racial tension and American Indians from different tribes. There is general agreement that pan-Indian organizing is centered in urban areas where members of different tribes have worked together to garner the political, legal and social resources their communities are due and need (Hertzberg 1971, Fixico 2000, Lobo 2002, Nagel 1996).

Because of the suspect nature of the pan-Indian identity many urban American Indians are left in a precarious position in relation to their "Indianness". They may have their identity as an American Indian called into question because tribal enrollment is necessary to establish a legal identity of American Indian. In order to qualify for tribal

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enrollment the individual needs to meet certain guidelines (proof of ancestry). To appear

American Indian helps to establish an American Indian Identity (Gonzales 2001, Lobo

2001, Nagel 1995). In this way, playing with stereotypical symbols and images of

American Indians can garner one an American Indian identity. Lobo notes "tribalness is

not lost in urban contexts" (2001:71). Therefore, while pan-Indian identity may be

common in urban areas individuals still recognize and are recognized by their tribal

affiliations.

While pan-Indian identity is argued to be an urban occurrence it is also argued

that pan-Indianism is drawn heavily on stereotypical images and ideas of Plains Indians

especially Lakota and Dakota (Gonzales: 2001). Cornell defines pan-Indiansim as "a set

of symbols and activities, often derived from plains cultures, that had come to be

considered by many Indians and non-Indians as expressive of Indianness: ceremonies,

styles of dress and dance, social events" (1998). If pan-Indianism is heavily defined by

plains Indian culture, it fits the stereotypical idea of American Indians popular in the

media and the general American imagination. In this way, pan-Indianism becomes a

symbol of American Indian stereotypes and limits the possible ways of expressing an

American Indian identity. The continued belief in stereotypes about American Indians

leads to the invisibility of American Indians in society (Lobo 2001). For example if

"Indianness" looks and acts like a historical plains figure, and we are unlikely to see a

man with long braided hair feathers and a bow at the corner store, then real Indians do not

exist. At the same time, pan-Indian Identity helps to garner governmental support,

resources and political gains that are necessary for American Indians. It also allows

American Indians of various tribal backgrounds a platform to work together.

**How to be Pan-Indian**

Several scholars note the importance of appearance in establishing an American

Indian identity, yet that appearance aligns with stereotypes of American Indians.

Gonzales, Lobo and Nagel all point out the importance of appearing as an American

Indian or, as Nagel states, one's "visible 'Indianness'" (1995:950). Gonzales goes on to

describe the "essential Indian," one that American Indians and non-Indians alike expect

to see when introduced to an American Indian, as "stereotypically identifiable Indian

features or style of dress: long, straight black hair, dark eyes, brown skin, "chiefly looks"

or "doe-eyed, comely beauty," leather moccasins, ribbon shirt, beaded, silver or turquoise

jewelry (2001:175).  In this way, appearance plays a large role in expressing a pan-Indian

identity. The appearance of an American Indian can be phenotypical, it can also be

achieved through other stereotypical symbols, jewelry, hairstyles and clothing.

It would be overly simplistic to say one must look like an "Indian" to be an

American Indian to outside observers. Gonzales also notes that ancestry (does a person

have Indian relatives and ancestors, and function as a member of an Indian extended

family) is also an important part of the equation (2001:81). In many cases, having

relatives that are American Indian allows one to be acceptance as an American Indian.

Nagel points out that being "recognized as an "enrolled" member of a tribe, pueblo,

nation by a tribal, state or federal government" gives one an even more solid claim on an

American Indian identity (1995:950).

Cultural knowledge and community participation are also important components to an American Indian identity. It is important to be "knowledgeable of the culture of their People and of those pan-Indian values and social expectations shared within the urban Indian community" (Lobo 2001:81). Gonzales gives other examples "publicly practicing what is believed to be American Indian spirituality– powwow dancing, drumming, "sweating", or burning cedar, sage, or sweetgrass" (2001:175). Participating in the wider American Indian community is important in establishing an American Indian identity to those in the community. As Lobo notes contributing to the American Indian community and to the well being of that community confers status, that of an American Indian community member.

Like many other identities, one can self-label as an American Indian. Nagel notes that considering oneself American Indian is "largely a matter of individual choice" (1995:950). While one can claim to be American Indian, that does not mean that anyone else will accept or recognize that label. It is largely a mater of both internal and external attribution. Those who self-label as American Indian are often deemed suspect if they cannot "back-up" that claim with cultural knowledge and/or ancestry. There is always some disagreement as to who counts as an American Indian and there is fear of ethnic fraud. Here "ethnic fraud" is a claim to American Indian identity without external agreement to that claim. Many American Indians and tribes are suspect of those who would claim an American Indian identity for material or personal gain (Gonzales 2001:169).

In sum, pan-Indian identity is a complex and diverse expression of a constructed group culture. An American Indian identity can be expressed in many ways and incorporates many different cultural ideas. Forms of pan-Indianism have been utilized historically in times of need and currently to form a social, political, legal group that works for community needs and goals. Who counts as an American Indian is up for some debate and is an argument best settled by American Indians themselves. In my research, the teens fit the definition of American Indian in that they self-label as American Indian and they participate in a community program where they are externally recognized as American Indian. As I will discuss later they also "appear" American Indian in a number of ways (physically and through decoration), not all of which are traditional pan-Indian ways or stereotypical ways. As Hertzberg noted "Pan-Indianism served to define new dimensions of Indian life, to create other ways of being Indian" (Hertzberg 1971: 300). I argue that the teens at AIYP are continuing this tradition and expanding the boundaries of what it is to be American Indian, while weaving in teachings, traditions and traditional practices as they acquire and learn them.

**Examples of Pan-Indianism**

Pan-Indianism is a topic that has been researched in many forms starting with Hertzberg's work in 1971 when she first coined the term pan-Indian. The concept of pan-Indianism has mostly been linked with urban Indians and the organization of pan-Indian organizations like the Native American Church, the Society of American Indians and the American Indian Movement (Cornell 1988, Fixico 2000, Hertzberg 1971, Weibel-Orlando 1991). Hertzberg is an exception in that she also studies the historical origins of

pan-Indianism through religious organizations and early political organizations like the Society of American Indians, which were not based in urban areas or focused on urban populations. Therefore, while many authors equate urban and pan-Indian, it is not necessarily the case.

In my work, I investigate the ways in which an American Indian (pan-Indian) identity is enacted by a group of urban American Indians in Minneapolis. Like Gonzales, I explore the complexities and difficulties of expressing an American Indian identity in urban contexts (2001). I expand this look at how teens specifically create and enact that identity, whereas her piece looked more generally at the complexity of American Indian identity. In an important piece on pan-Indian identity, Cornell examined how the rise of pan-Indianism leads to resurgence in political activities and power (1988). Cornell looked at "Supratribalism" or pan-Indianism as an "effort to adapt to social and political reality, an effort rooted in a logic that is at once organizational, political and phenomenological" (1988:136). In his work, Cornell focuses on the political aspect of pan-indianism. I focus on the social and cultural aspect of pan-indianism. How do these teens work to create and enact an American Indian identity? In her work, Lobo also investigates the characteristics of the urban American Indian community and she finds "the physical grounding of the community is not as important as the relationship dynamics present" (2001: 83). So, while there is much work done on the ethnic enclave or the proximity of a social group, here Lobo points out that it is the interaction and the presence of "we-ness" that makes a community. In my work I am looking for the ways the teens express their belonging to the American Indian community through their expression of an American Indian identity.

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Fixico focuses his work on the first and second generation of urban American

Indians and the problems and difficulties they face in adjusting or "assimilating" to life in

the city. While his work is significant in describing the situation 10 to 20 years ago, it is

no longer relevant. The generation in my study was born in the cities, their parents were

born in the cities and in some cases, their grandparents were born in the cities. The teens

in this study have no problems adjusting to the city. It is the only life they have known.

Of the work done on pan-Indiansim most of it has been done at the organizational or city

level. Not much work has been done on the small group level. This is where my work fits

into the research done so far. I explore how the American Indian Teen Youth (AIYP)

teens construct and express a pan-Indian identity in an everyday context. They are not

working to create an organizational image or constructing a political message, they are

however working to express themselves as part of the larger pan-Indian community. How

and in what ways they do that is an important part of the pan-Indian process.

### AIYP Teens Express Ethnic (Tribal) Identity

The fact that the teens express a pan-Indian identity, instead of a specific tribal

identity, is not all that surprising when one looks at the structure of the city they live in.

Minneapolis is predominately composed of pan-Indian organizations. That is not to say

that there are no tribe-specific organizations, just that the majority are American Indian

centered. I argue in Chapter 2 that Minneapolis has an American Indian identity built on a

number of organizations and services and Nagel argues that these types of organizations

"were important building blocks in the development of a supratribal level of Indian

identity and the emergence of a pan-Indian culture (1996:121). It is no surprise then that

the AIYP teens would also adopt an American Indian identity, as that is what they see being expressed in their own community.

The focus of the AIYP is not on one specific tribe though most information is Ojibwe, Dakota or Lakota. The program tries to maintain an American Indian focus but many of the staff members are Lakota, Dakota or Ojibwe and speak the language and practice those particular cultural beliefs. It is through the staff that the more ethnic based language, culture and identity is mostly dispensed. The teens are also aware of their tribal background and many (if not most) are familiar with the stories of their people. Many of the teens have their Indian names, given to them by an elder and learned in the native language. Besides their names and where their tribe is from most know some elements of their native language. Even if they cannot speak it they can recognize words. At one meeting the staff was quizzing the teens on words they knew. The teens repeated back the words they had been learning and then began to work out words they remembered. One young girl stumbled over the word for blueberry pie[12] (a particularly hard Ojibwe word, the longest in the language) and the staff helped her with the pronunciation. One young girl then under her breath said a word. The male staff member asked in mock shock "what does that word mean? Do you know what that word means?" The young girl laughed and said "beer, my uncles tell my mom to get them (Ojibwe word) all the time and I figured it out." The staff member just laughed and said, "That isn't a word you need to know." But he laughed at the ingenuity of the young girl to figure out the word. So for some of the teens their native language is spoken at home even if it is just as code to keep

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[12] "Miin-aan baash kimini-sij-i-gan bitooyin sij-i-gan-i bukwayszhiigan " The Ojibwe word for Blueberry pie.

the children from over hearing adult conversations (what better excuse to learn a language?) They also often visit relatives on their home reservation or have relatives who come visit the city. The connections to family from the reservation links the teens to generations of family and a wider extended family. During these visits, the teens catch up with family gossip and often hear stories and learn cultural activities such as maple sugaring, wild riceing, or storytelling. While the teens do have ties to their ethnic/tribal identity they more commonly express themselves in the city and at AIYP through an American Indian identity.

## How the teens express a pan-Indian identity

In almost every visit to the AIYP, I saw the teens expressed their American Indian identity in various ways. The teens often wore their identity in some way, on a t-shirt or button on their backpack or they spoke of American Indian culture, knowledge or practice. And sometimes, they just talked about being an American Indian. While not every teen, every time expressed an American Indian identity, all of the teens did at some time express themselves as American Indians. While this is not wholly surprising given that the teens are voluntarily a part of an American Indian program, it is interesting the depth of the expression of American Indian. I will provide examples of the teen's expression of a pan-Indian identity through Pow Wows, arts and crafts, drum circles, pan-Indian traditions, American Indian class project, and current news.

### Example 1: Pow Wow

One way the teens have acknowledged their identity as American Indians is through discussions of Pow Wows. Pow Wow's are an intertribal meeting space where

members of different tribes compete at different dance styles. Many of the teens have participated in Pow Wows in the past. Most of the teens do not participate in the Pow Wows currently. It seems, as they get older, they get busy in other activities and stop formal participation in Pow Wows. By formally participating, I mean that the teens talk about the "old days" when they were dancers and registered to perform in the Pow Wows. While several of the boys are interested in and practice native drumming, none of the boys have ever been a part of a performing drum circle or played a drum at a Pow Wow.

But many of the teens talk about their attendance at Pow Wows. They reminisce about all the fun they have and all the family they see. Most of the talk is not about specific Pow Wows but about the Pow Wow scene. There was not much talk about specific events or Pow Wows but just general talk about wanting to go to a Pow Wow or having attended Pow Wows. It is important to note that attending a Pow Wow is also being a part of the Pow Wow. While there are formalized roles at a Pow Wow, attendees and guests are as much a part of the scene as the dancers. There are many ways that viewers participate, such as voting with dollars which dancer should win, dancing during open-tribal dances and cheering on the dancers. I have also attended several of the area Pow Wows and have seen many of the teens at the events. Often I am surprised to see the teens as the teens I saw never talked about attending the Pow Wow and we did not discuss the event when back at AIYP. I have been witness to the teen's interest and participation in the Pow Wow culture.

**Example 2: Arts and Crafts**

The teens also practice American Indian culture through a number of artistic and craft activities. Most of the girls and several of the boys practice beading jewelry and other items. The teens have been taught (some at home, others by AIYP staff) to loom bead, straight stitch and peyote stitch. These styles are all American Indian traditions, but the patterns that the teens use are not always traditional. While some of the teens create traditional patterns many of the teens make their own designs and especially with the loom beading they will often write out their names. While the projects they create at the AIYP can only be worked on at the program, several of the teens also bead at home. Beading is one traditional activity that the teens take and make their own. They use traditional skills to create contemporary pieces.

One other traditional project they have worked on at AIYP is a dreamcatcher. A dream catcher is used to catch bad dreams. "Even infants were provided with protective charms. Examples of these are the "spiderwebs" hung on the hoop of a cradleboard. These articles consisted of wooden hoops about 3½ inches in diameter filled with an imitation of a spider's web made of fine yarn, usually dyed red. Historically, this netting was made of nettle fiber. Two spider webs were usually hung on the hoop, and it was said that they "caught any harm that might be in the air as a spider's web catches and holds whatever comes in contact with it"(Densmore 1979:113). The teens usually make them out of sinew, beads and feathers. This is a less common activity, and the teens seem less interested in making the dreamcatchers. The dreamcatcher is fairly common and it could be that the teens have all the catchers they need. I have received two dreamcatchers to

thank me for my volunteer time. When I see cars with dreamcatchers hanging from the rearview mirror I wonder to myself, "do they sleep in their car?" I cannot see why people would place a dreamcatcher anywhere but above their bed. It would seem that maybe some of the traditional meaning has been pushed aside. On the other hand, that it has become a symbol for being American Indian and is used to signal to others "hey, I'm American Indian".

**Example 3: Drum Circle**

In American Indian culture, a drum is a female spirit. It is necessary to have all things in balance, so only men can play the drum. It is only the boys at AIYP who have worked on making drumsticks and practiced in a drum circle. During free time, the boys use leather and other materials to create a stick to play the drum. The boys then use the newly made drumsticks when they play a drum circle. Most of the boys participate in drumming by either making a drumstick or playing. Some nights certain boys may not feel like playing or singing in the circle. While it is only the boys that can play the drum, a drum circle often involves singing and in some traditions women and girls can form a second circle around the boys and men drumming and sing. The girls sometimes grumble about not being able to play the drum. One young girl asked a staff member if she could make a drum stick as was told that only the boys do that. There was no more protest from the girls. While the girls could participate in the singing, they are almost never invited and only one young girl has ever asked to participate by singing. They staff discussed the issue, and eventually let the young girl join the circle.

**Example 4: Pan-Indian Traditions**

The teens also use traditional ideas, images and rituals to express their American Indian identity. At AIYP, the teens have been asked to practice a few traditional rituals such as smudging, the spirit plate, and the naming ceremony. While all of these ceremonies are practiced in a culturally specific, Ojibwe, manner they are ceremonies that are practiced in many tribes and have become pan-Indian in their acceptance and use. Occasionally a staff member has prepared a smudge to start the program and at many of the family dinners a smudge is done. The smudging ceremony is a purification ceremony. The ceremony consists of one of the four sacred medicines (sage, tobacco, sweetgrass, cedar) being burned in a shell though it is usually sage. The smoke from the sage is waved or washed over the room and individuals can wash the smoke over themselves using their hands to push the smoke over their bodies. The fist time I witnessed the ceremony at the AIYP I was impressed by the fact that all of the teens seemed familiar with the ceremony and when approached with the shell and burning sage they knew what to do. This ceremony is not that common at the AIYP but brought our for certain occasions or when staff decide to do the ceremony.

The spirit plate is something that is now done at every meeting. After the students are settled and the staff makes announcements they ask for a volunteer to help with the spirit plate. The students are shy and many resist volunteering but eventually they all help in the ceremony. To make a spirit plate a little bit of all of the food that is offered at that meal is placed on a plate. Then the person/s making the offering take some tobacco in

their hands and then say a short prayer. The teens usually do not want to speak aloud so they just think something. The staff has started to say an offering in Ojibwe and is planning to teach the teens a prayer in Ojibwe. Usually the prayer thanks the Creator, asks for a good evening and a safe trip home. We end with Migwich, the Ojibwe word for thank you. Because most of the staff and teens are Ojibwe there is a focus on this language and particular ways of practicing these ceremonies.

The last ceremony that the AIYP has practiced is the naming ceremony. In this ceremony, the teens and a few staff members receive their spirit name, which is given to them by a respected elder. I did not attend the ceremony and have no direct knowledge of this practice. I only knew about the ceremony because a staff member and a teen were talking about the ceremony at an AIYP session. The teen was excited about having a spirit name and the staff member said, "It's about time I get my name." It can be difficult for urban American Indians to find an elder willing or able to give a spirit name. The teens that participated were pleased to have such an honor. Because of the deeply personal and spiritual nature of this ceremony I did not ask many questions and will not give more detail about this ceremony out of respect for the belief  "some information on ceremonies cannot be discussed or printed" (Swan 2011).

**Example 5: American Indian Class Project**

Maria a student at the AIYP took a mix of American Indian culture and Latino culture as part of an assignment at her Bilingual High School. While Maria went to a bilingual Spanish/English school she had transferred there as a junior and had not had Spanish before attending the school. Maria did not speak much Spanish at all. In late

October, her Spanish class was gearing up for Día de los Muertos, or Day of the Dead. The assignment was to build an altar, or La Ofrenda for a deceased loved one. Maria chose to honor her Uncle who had passed away earlier that year. For her altar she had a picture of him wearing a full headdress. I ask Maria about his tribal background and she does not know. He had left her a turtle rattle that she used in the altar and the four sacred medicines, sage, sweetgrass, tobacco and cedar. She also included an eagle feather and a medicine wheel and added objects that are more traditional offering for a La Ofrenda, such as flowers, fruit and candles. The assignment was for a Spanish class and Maria took the opportunity to use pan-Indian objects of meaning and significance. We worked on the paper that was part of the assignment. She was asked to explain the significance of the objects in the altar. Maria knew that the objects had a deep meaning but she only knew that they were sacred and special. So, while the objects may have had more culturally specific meaning (the turtle rattle for instance) she only knew that it was American Indian and that it reminded her of her uncle.

**Example 6: Current News**

The teens are also aware of current American Indian news and events. The AIYP often has the American Indian newspaper *The Circle* available for the teens to read. I will often read the paper while teens are doing their homework and sometimes comment on the news. While Obama was running, in 2008 he stated that he would work more closely with the tribes to honor treaty rights and make an effort to address the problems and issues in Indian Country. I mentioned this to the teens and Vicki said "I know isn't that great! I hope he's elected President!" I asked her how she had heard about this issue and

she said she had already read the paper. Another young girl at the table stated that she had heard her family talking about it. This instance illustrates the interest that the teens have in American Indian issues and news.

**Expressing an American Indian Identity to Non-Indians**

As part of the AIYP, we take the teens on a variety of outings. During these outings, the teens are sometimes confronted with others who interact with them as if they are another racial or ethnic group, such as Latino/a. Each time this confusion happened the teen or teens in question worked to explain to the individual that they were incorrect and that the teen was an American Indian, though usually referring to themselves as "Indians."

One day as we were walking back to the AIYP building from a walk around the park two of the young girls, Marcia and Terri were walking a few feet in front of us. It was a nice day so both of the girls were wearing shorts and t-shirts (The outfits were neither baggy nor tight, but age appropriate). They were talking and giggling as they walked. A car approached and slowed down; as the driver got closer to the girls, he honked and leered at the young girls. As he drove by I noticed that he appeared to be a young Latino man. I expected that the girls would react with laughter and maybe take it as a complement. I figured the unwanted attention would be seen as a positive and I was wrong. The two young girls caught a glimpse of the young man and started yelling at him. "We're not Mexican's! We're Indians." " Go find a Mexican girl!" They both yelled at the young man and were furious, not that he had tried to hit on them, but that he had assumed they were Latina. They were very offended by the misrecognition and yelled at

the young man long after he drove off.  They were determined to establish their identity as American Indian and not as Latina. Surprisingly, I know for sure that at least one of the young girls is part Latina herself and many of her family members are Latino/a.

The staff and I barely had time to react. I had thought of yelling at the young man that they were inappropriately too young and the woman staff member I was walking with agreed. But we were both stunned by the girls' reaction. I was surprised that they saw it more as a racial thing then a gender issue. The offense was being mistaken for the wrong race not the sexual element. I do not believe that the young girls exclusively date American Indian boys (Terri was trying to learn Spanish for a crush on a young boy), but just that they wanted to be recognized as American Indian. This is just one incident that highlights the importance of their American Indian identity. This is not the only time that a teen relied on a popular image of or associated with American Indians as a way to establish an American Indian identity.

Another young girl, Tracy, also recounted a similar incident that happened at school. Tracy attended a Bilingual Spanish High School. One day in the hall a young boy approached her and began speaking to her in Spanish. While Tracy takes Spanish and does know a little Spanish she told me that she responded by saying "No, No es en Hispanic. Es Indioso."  While telling me what she said Tracy raised her hand behind her head and used two fingers in a slight v-shape to imitate feathers. She laughed after she finished the story. I had to ask her "did you really do that feather thing?" "Yeah." "How did he respond?" "I don't know he left." I said but you can speak Spanish. "Yeah, but I

couldn't understand what he was saying." She then told me she wished she could take Ojibwe. "It would be nice if I could speak my own language."

Tracy assumed the young man thought of her as a Latina girl and she reacted by correcting him both in Spanish, Indioso, and by using a stereotypical image associated with American Indians. If the young boy did not understand the Spanish, he was likely to understand the visual cue. Once again, one of the teens reacted strongly to being misidentified and worked in many ways to try to establish her identity as American Indian. In this case, she felt the need to incorporate a stereotypical image to enforce her identity as American Indian.

## Pan-Indianism and Race, Class and Gender

### Race

Many of the teens are multi-racial and or multi-ethnic. By multi-ethnic, I mean that they belong to more than one tribal group. Many of the teens look like other racial groups. Several of the teens have dark skin and dark course hair and most people would consider them African-American. One young man who appeared to be African-American stated that all of his friends were black. It is likely that he is seen as a young African-American male and not recognized outside the AIYP as an American Indian. Several of the teens are part Latino as noted earlier they prefer to be recognized as American Indian. Vincent once complained that he did not feel very Hispanic because he cannot speak Spanish. Another young man who appears African-American responded, "I'm Black and I can't Speak Black. It don't matter." The teens struggle to be recognized for the multiple identities they have and often struggle to be recognized as American Indian, but that does

not mean that they do not know who they are. They work to express the full range of

identities even if it is a struggle to get individuals to understand that they are American

Indians. While some of the teens are multi-racial, some of the teens are not and I did not

find any difference in the type, level or form of expressing an American Indian identity

between teens of different racial backgrounds. It seems that if teens are a part of the

AIYP they are likely to express an American Indian identity and to do so in similar ways.

This is likely through the kinds of support that the teens received when expressing their

identity in particular ways. They all outwardly expressed an American Indian identity and

worked to have people recognize them as American Indians.

**Class**

Most of the teens are working class. There is not much class variation, so there is

no way to compare class-based expression of American Indian identity. Instead it is clear

that what is being expressed is a working class version of American Indian identity.

Many of the teens receive free or reduced lunches, many live in apartments and share

bedrooms with siblings and many have moved at least once during the school year.

During family nights, I met many of the parents and they talk about their jobs as night

security guards, home health aids and auto mechanics. If the teens were more middle-

class they may have had more opportunity to purchase American Indian clothing and

jewelry and may have been more involved in Pow Wows. Pow Wows can be expensive;

between making and/or purchasing Regalia and the travel involved its cost may be

prohibitive to some of the teens. Because the teens live in the inner city, it does not come

as a surprise that they come from working class backgrounds. The inner city is often

home to those who cannot afford the outer rings of the city or the suburbs. Their class background affects the ways in which they can express their American Indian identity but not in their desire to express themselves.

**Gender**

The expression of an American Indian identity was as likely for girls as it was for boys. Both genders wore their identity on their sleeve, whether it was jewelry, t-shirts, sweatshirts or pins on their backpacks that said Native Pride. While both boys and girls were likely to dress the part of American Indian, girls were more likely to vocalize their identity. The girls were more likely to support expressions of American Indian identity by admiring and in some ways congratulating others for the outward expression. "I like your shirt. The design is cool." "I love your jewelry. I need to finish my beading project." They were also more likely to talk about being an American Indian and the difficulty it sometimes brings. They voiced frustration over stereotypical thinking, mistaken identity and general ignorance of American Indians.

Research shows that women are more likely to be held responsible for the retention and future of their culture. Are the girls reacting to the pressure to be culture keepers? Or is it that the small number of boys does not allow me to see a full representation of the boys' experiences? From indirect observations of the boys (eavesdropping) I believe that the boys also struggle with being identified as American Indian but they are less likely to discuss these issues. There are gender differences in the discussion of American Indian identity, but overall the expression of that identity skews to gender neutral.

**Conclusion**

A pan-ethnic identity such as American Indian is not itself an ethnic identity, yet it requires the presence of an ethnic identity. In this case an American Indian identity is a racial identity one that links differing groups of people together for social, legal and political purposes. I have found that to enact an American Indian identity one must first identify ethnically (as a particular tribe or band). Therefore, we see that race and ethnicity are deeply entwined and interactive. The AIYP teens do not find an ethnic identity to be a useful way of self-identifying to most people. It is likely because a majority of Americans does not know the difference between Lakota or Ojibwe and so the meaning is lost on them. To identify as an American Indian is one way to reach others whose knowledge and understanding of American Indian culture is limited. By assuming an American Indian identity the AIYP, teens avoid cultural or ethnic differences in favor of the shared culture and practices of American Indian. In this way, they expand the group of people to which they relate and belong. The AIYP teens treat American Indian identity as inclusive. There are no questions about how "Indian" one is or about which tribe one belongs to. It is assumed that if a teen is part of the group they are American Indian. This inclusiveness give the teens a space to practice their culture without question; while still being able to ask questions about their culture. As I will discuss in the next chapter the urban environment in which the AIYP teens live makes an American Indian identity attractive for a few reasons. One, Historically Minneapolis has developed and enacted an American Indian identity. Two as a minority in the city it is easier to band together as one

group, American Indian, for social, legal and political reasons. Finally, most Americans do not have enough knowledge to differentiate Dakota from Ojibwe. I argue that the teens enact an American Indian identity for a number of reasons. The community they can build by establishing a pan-ethnic identity, the need for a pan-ethnic identity in an urban environment and the use of American Indian culture in the pop culture they are surrounded by.

For many, establishing a racial or ethnic identity is not something they need to work at; they are ascribed the race or ethnicity that they view themselves as. However, the AIYP teens often struggle to match the ascribed ethnic/racial status with the one that they recognize. Many of the teens are misrecognized as Latino/a or African-American when they most closely identify with being American Indian. Many of the teens are multi-racial and so face the difficulties of multi-racial identity in America (how can you be American Indian? You're black!). Despite the complexities of multi-racial identity, it is difficult to establish an American Indian identity in an urban space that relies on individual's racial knowledge. Few Americans know much about American Indians, their culture, history or contemporary issues. What many Americans do know about American Indians comes from popular cultural ideas and the few interactions they may have had with American Indians. In Minnesota, American Indians do not always appear, phenotypically, they way American Indians are represented in the media with brown skin (or in the worst case red), long dark hair, high check bones and thin noses. This is of course only true if American have any idea what an American Indian might look like. It is unlikely that Americans would be able to distinguish between Dakota or Ojibwe

designs, much less if an individual was one tribe or another. It is in many ways useful to use the more Meta-identity of American Indian to establish an identity at all. The work of racial identity is simplified to the more generalized American Indian in order to get the average American to recognize the teen's racial identity.

*I am The Syntax Savage riding a prayer in search of the cumulative litany of sin and salvation, looking for forgiveness that is a promise of wind and rain, a look into the depths of my own soul, a look of darkness as I don a game face for the streets of south Minneapolis.* Martha Redbone, from the album Skintalk.

## Chapter Five
## Street style, Buffalo Stance: Being American Indian in the City

Each city brings unique cultural experiences to its citizens. In fact Kennedy argues that "places are charged with emotional and mythical meanings; the localized stories, images and memories associated with place can provide meaningful cultural and historical bearings for urban[13] individuals and communities" (2000: 7). As I argue in chapter two, the history of American Indians in Minneapolis gives a special meaning to American Indian current residents. While each city is unique, they are also different from rural spaces. Simmel (1908) notes that rural areas constrain an individual and exert pressure to conform to certain identities, values and beliefs, while urban spaces promote diversity and individualization (in Levine 1971: 325). In this case, American Indians in Minneapolis will have a different experience and identity than those who live on the reservations[14]. The reservation experience grants more access to tribal American Indian culture. The reservation can constrain individuals' identity in that they may be asked to conform to the ideals of the band or tribe of the reservation. In the city American Indian have a more multi-cultural experience and are in the minority. They can develop an identity that may not be American Indian or an American Indian identity that is uniquely urban.

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[13] I define urban as a concentration of people, buildings, and economic and social activities.

[14] When I refer to reservations I am not restricting the definition to the reservation proper, but expanding it to include the area near the reservation.

In his work on urban youth, Elijah Anderson has underscored the importance of recognizability or the need for individuals to categorize strangers into particular categories such as black or white, safe or dangerous (1999). In his work, Anderson stresses that the individuals need to be streetwise or recognize who is a dangerous person by sight (1999). This process involves racial identification and a more subtle understanding of the variety of racial expressions. Because it is necessary, in the city, to be able to visually identify the race and possible threat of an individual, phenotype and racial self-presentation is an important part of navigating the city. American Indians complicate this picture of the city, as many American Indians do not conform to stereotypical ideas of what an American Indian should look like. This can make American Indians difficult to visually identify, potentially making them invisible as a race and possibly suspect as a dangerous individual.

Males are particularly prone to being mistaken for a "street" person or a person who is not to be trusted (Anderson 1999). American Indian males might find that they are viewed as a threat because their racial classification is indeterminate and thus suspect. Anderson's work focuses on how Black males maneuver the street and how they are viewed by others. By examining the experience of American Indians, both boys and girls, I expand on Anderson's theory of street life and how race is played out and viewed in the everyday world.

People have many beliefs about the city. Some people believe the city is alienating that it creates pockets of isolated individuals (Anderson 1990, Kennedy 2000, Simmel 1971). Many see the city as divided into black and white sections where

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interactions are infrequent and awkward (Gunn 2004, Jones 2004 Ogbu 2003, Venkatesh 1997,Wacuant 1994). Others see the city as a masculine place, where a woman should not be alone after dark (Anderson 1999, Taub and Scneider 1993, Young 1990). And others believe that the city is a violent and dangerous place for all residents (Ceballo 2001, Kubrin 2005, Low 2001). These ideas about the city are common and even researchers make these assumptions about the city. How do the teens at AIYP deal with these common views of the city?

## City as Alienating

The city is full of so many different groups of people that it is difficult for individuals to connect; people can be left isolated from each other. The city is also alienating because it is so full of strangers (Simmell (1908) in Levine 1971). In small towns and rural areas we are likely to know everyone and have some sort of personal connection. In the city, we are surround by others who, based on appearance, may not be like us. In the city, we have individual autonomy at the expense of social interaction (Simmell (1908) in Levine 1971). Civil inattention is used to avoid interaction and to pretend others are not there. Anderson notes that city dwellers, "move about guardedly, dealing with strangers by employing elaborate facial and eye work, replete with smiles, nods, and gestures geared to carve out an impersonal but private zone for themselves. Defensively, they "look past" or "look through" the next person, distancing themselves from strangers and effectively consigning their counterparts to a form of social oblivion" (2004:15).

Being a stranger to others in the city is a different experience depending on your race, class and gender. Anderson points out that, " The anonymous black male is a person apart until he proves he has a connection, and therefore he is more persistently a stranger in the streets" (1990: 189). As an unknown entity American Indian boys may also face similar reactions on the street. Individuals who are unable to quickly categorize an American Indian may find themselves unsettled, making interactions with American Indians difficult. This becomes a problem for the American Indian in the city as interactions are based on quick and superficial observations that allow individuals to sort out what they "know" about an individual based on the category they occupy. The unknown or unknowable is scary to people. In fact, "We must also recognize that the desire for legibility is a powerful animus in representations of urban space where the presence and meanings of race may be very obliquely recorded" (Kennedy 2000:10). In other words, our racial identity is important but may not be easily recognizable to others, thus making us indeterminate.

The question is do the AIYP teens feel alienated from the wider society? Are they mistaken for other races and if so how do they react? If the teens were alienated, they would be less likely to have connections with others and would feel isolated by society. The teens are a unique group in that they are self-selected member of an American Indian cultural program, which means they are tied in to the wider American Indian community in the city. This indicates that these teens are unlikely to be isolated but do they find themselves alienated from the rest of society?

**City as Black and White**

In many peoples' minds the city is "divided" into black and white neighborhoods and even life worlds (Low 2001**).** It is in the city where the worlds of blacks and whites collide. In reality, the city is full of many different groups but in the media and even in some scholarly research the city is treated as black and white. Elijah Anderson's work has focused on this black and white divide as well as other researchers such as Kubrin (2005) and Masey and Denton (1993). Other researchers have focused solely on the African-American community in the city; including Gunn (2004), Jones (2004), Ogbu (2003), Venkatesh (1997), Wacquant (1994). This focus on race as a dichotomy has minimized knowledge of the urban experience of other racial groups, but many other racial groups occupy the urban landscape. Chinatown is just one example of how other racial groups have contributed to a cities cultural atmosphere. American Indians have been living in cities, in large numbers, since the 1920s and in the 1950s more came as the US government began an American Indian relocation program (Cornell 1988).

While American Indians have been living in Minneapolis since the 1920s, they remain a small and often invisible part of the urban landscape. As discussed in chapter six, the stereotypical idea that most Americans have of American Indian makes being recognized as an American Indian individual problematic. As Anderson points out, in urban encounters we make split-second decisions about people we do not know. We categorize them as "decent" or "street" depending on our previous knowledge and skill at recognizing the difference (1999). If this is true, then American Indians are at a disadvantage as strangers will have trouble placing them in the appropriate category. As

Fixico notes, "without wearing some identification of traditional cultural apparel, Indians seem invisible in urban society" (2000). I argue that the teens use both traditional cultural apparel and contemporary cultural objects to signal their racial identity and to combat being an invisible American Indian. Living in the city forces American Indians to take extra care in expressing themselves as American Indians. Those on reservations are less likely to have to do this type of face work (Goffman 1967). Urban American Indians must work to fit in the urban space. My research will expand the racial profile of the city and explores how American Indians fit in the urban experience. While their have been a number of works on the urban American Indian experience, few researchers have looked at how and in what ways American Indians produce their racial identity.

**The City as a Dangerous Space**

The city is viewed as a violent and dangerous place where individuals are likely to be victims of crime (Ceballo, Dahl, Aretakis, and Ramires 2001, Kubrin 2005, Low 2001). Ceballo, Dahl, Aretakis, and Ramires note "It is an unfortunate yet all too common fact that many poor, inner-city children are continuously and chronically exposed to community violence" (2001: 927). Even inner-city schools are characterized as violent (Devine 1996). Some researchers investigate how young women and girls deal with violence in their community. Some have found that girls are likely to participate in and commit violence in order to protect themselves and their reputations (Jones 2004, Ness 2004).

While the city is depicted and viewed as a violent and dangerous place, the inner city is seen as the focus of the problem. Despite reductions in crime and gun violence,

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people who receive housing assistance remain twice as likely to be victims of gun violence. Nearly one person is killed each day by gunfire in the nation's largest 100 public housing communities (Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, February 16, 2000). Many of the teens in the AIYP are residents of the inner city and face the issue of violence on a regular basis. I explore the occurrence and impact of violence in the lives of the AIYP teens. I am also interested in the ways in which boys and girls experience violence in their lives.

**The city as Masculine Space**

Women in the city are constantly reminded to be aware of their surroundings, watch their drinks and not to walk alone at night, while men are more free to move about the urban space without fear. Secluded to the private sphere, women were often excluded from the public sphere legally and socially (Taub and Schneider 1993). While this was most pronounced during the nineteenth century, many argue that the foundations of the public sphere do not leave any room for women or other excluded groups even today (Young 1990). Urban spaces are often synonymous with the public sphere and men are freer to use these spaces. Many researchers such as Anderson focus on boys and men and their interaction with the city. Other researchers have also focused more on males (Gilmore, DeLamater, and Wagstaff 1996,Gunn 2004, Sullivan 1989a and 1989b). This focus on men and boys in the city ignores the ways in which women and girls interact with the city. What impact does living in the city have on American Indian boys and girls? In what way are their experiences the same or different?

**Streetwise Teens**

Elijah Anderson's work on urban youth has informed much of my work in exploring the lives of the AIYP teens. His concept of being "streetwise" is especially intriguing. To be "streetwise" is to be a person "who understands 'how to behave' in uncertain public spaces" (6: 1990). Anderson argues that living in an urban environment places groups of people who may have little knowledge of each other in close contact and "because public interactions generally matter for only a few crucial seconds, people are conditioned to rapid scrutiny of the looks, speech, public behavior, gender and color of those sharing the environment" (208:1990). I explore the ways in which American Indian teens maneuver the world of "decent" and "streetwise". The teens all come from "decent" homes. Their parents care about their academic work and about being American Indian otherwise they would not enroll their children in the program. But all of the teens display "streetwise" behavior.

Many also fail to understand the "code of the street" or the "informal rules governing interpersonal public behavior, particularly violence" (Anderson 33:1999). Anderson argues that at the heart of the code is respect, who to defer to and who to give it too. Much of this is negotiated through street etiquette, which involves behaviors such as eye contact, body movements, and verbal cues to establish the difference between dangerous (those that deserve and require respect and deference) and non-threatening individuals (those who do not require explicit etiquette). In an effort to avoid conflict many teens take on an "urban uniform" unisex clothing that is not expensive. This allows the teens to avoid being robbed for their material goods. In addition, many of the teens

exhibit a tough exterior in order to signal to others that they are not to be messed with. Individuals who exhibit weakness send a signal that they can be taken advantage of. The AIYP teens have adopted the "urban uniform". They follow the "code of the street" yet can also invoke a "decent" status. While the teens seek to establish an American Indian identity, they do so on the streets and must ensure their safety by following the code.

Because Anderson's work focuses on African-American and white communities, we do not have insight into how other minority groups fit in the concepts of streetwise or how they may follow the code of the street. Are the AIYP teens recognized as American Indians or do others have trouble categorizing them? Since American Indians still make up a small minority of the American population it is not unlikely to assume that many individuals have little to no knowledge of American Indians or their culture. And if respect is an important part of the code of the street do the teens get the respect they need to be safe? Or are they required to explain themselves as American Indians? Anderson found that many residents of the urban area were streetwise. If this is true then many of the AIYP teens may feel the need to enact a "streetwise" image while still maintaining an American Indian identity. Are the AIYP teens streetwise in the same way as African-American urban residents? Do the AIYP teens enact the code of the street? How does respect and violence play out in their lives?

**Urban Youth Racial Identity**

I use Anderson as an exemplary piece on race in the urban environment but many others have also contributed to this line of work. There are few studies on youth racial identity, especially work that focuses on youth racial identity and little work on urban

youth and race. In the studies that do address urban teens racial identity it is often an auxiliary focus and treated as such. There is much more literature on urban teens, social stratification based on race, and issues of juvenile delinquency. I have found that urban youth racial identity is generally covered in one of three ways in prior research; no focus on urban context, a focus on race as an unimportant identity of the teens, and a focus on juvenile delinquency.

First, authors often fail to take the city environment seriously. They may be studying urban teens but the issue of the city never enters the study or the discussion (Deutsch 2008, Greene 2000, Hemmings 2000,Vigil 1993). I believe the location, i.e. the particular city one is doing research in, and the unique organization of cities in and of themselves means that we need to take seriously the impact of the city on teens. In addition, from Anderson's work, we can see the need to explore how and in what ways ethnic and racial identities are distinctly displayed in the city. It is also important to consider the ways in which urban life affects the teens on a daily basis. It is important to know if they are segregated or living in a multicultural setting. It is not enough to do research in an urban area. It is necessary to give historical and social background so the reader can place the teens in a context. Failing to take seriously the issues that come with living in a city means the authors are not really conducting urban research. Instead, they are doing research that happens to be in an urban environment.

The second issue is that the concept of race is either not fully addressed or treated as unimportant (McLaughlin 1993, Stritikus and Ngyen 2007, Thomas 2005). Ball and Heath in their study claim, "when the majority of those attracted to such organizations

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coincidentally might have the same ethnic background, youth did not consider common ethnic membership as a necessary part of belonging" (1993:23). Heath and McLaughlin go on to say that ethnicity means little to the teens they have talked to and that other identities, like the girlfriend of a prominent gang member were more meaningful (1993). In fact all of the authors in Health and McLaughlin's book found race and ethnicity were unimportant to the teens in their studies and treat race as an ascribed status that holds little meaning for the teens. Others do not address the youth's identity or their ideas on identity, instead they investigate the socially constructed categories into which the teens fall (Centrie 2000, Tilton 2010). These authors are not interested in how the teens identify and instead reify existing racial constructions. They discuss the teens place in the racial hierarchy but do not delve into how race is experienced by the teens.

The third way urban teens are examined in the literature is through a "problem" based approach (Jang 2002, Ness 2004,Peguero 2011, Pyrooz 2010, Shihadeh and Shrum 2004, Sullivan 1989a and 1989b, Tilton 2010, Wilkins 2004). By this, I mean that teens are studied to find a solution to some social problem like teen drinking, pregnancy, or educational failure. The teens are often narrowed down to their type of delinquency, which then becomes the focus. These studies ignore the life of teens or the positive things going on in their lives. In these works, teen's lives are investigated for ways to measure, explain or overcome these problems. Race is used as one factor that may play a part in their delinquency, but race is not investigated as a possible source for a positive impact in their lives.

I believe the city is more than a place to do a study. It brings with it ways of acting, ways of interacting and particular issues of crime, multiculturalism and gendered space. Each city is its own unique entity and its citizens learn the codes, rules and structure of their city. These codes and rules may be similar across cities but there are nuances to each city and even each neighborhood. On campus, I know that I will pass everyone on the right. When I enter Cedar-Riverside a predominantly immigrant neighborhood I know to pass on the left. I have learned to enact the behavior of the people in each neighborhood. This is part of city living: learning to interact with people, you may have little in common. How that interaction is done depends on the city.

My own work contradicts the idea that race/ethnicity does not matter to teens. I have found that it is very important to these teens and something they work at presenting on an everyday level. Though they are a select group, it is important to note that they could choose to do other things with their time and yet instead spend it at the program. It is likely that both perspectives are correct and some teens may not see race/ethnicity as playing a significant role in their lives (as far as they know) so far. For others race/ethnicity may have significant meaning in their everyday lives.

I am not alone in finding that race and ethnic categories still hold significant meaning for teens (Anderson 1990 and 1999, Back 1996, Deutsch 2008, Waters 1990, Weiss and Fine 2000). Racial categories help teens understand who they are, who they should spend time with, who to avoid and how to act. In the urban context, people make split second decisions about each other. Race is one of the categories used to decide if an individual is "street" or "decent" (Anderson 1999). While the categories, "street" and

"decent" are more complex than race; Tilton, in her work, found that African-American teens were more likely to be viewed as delinquent based solely on their race and had to work harder to be seen as a harmless teen (2010). This is just one-way in which race informs teens about whom to avoid and how to act. In my own research, I have found that the teens have learned to enact an American Indian identity and have found ways to express that identity to the strangers they meet in the city. This expression of American Indian identity takes some work. Strangers are not always perceptive to the expressions of the teens; thus, the teens often work out new ways to identify themselves in the multicultural city.

## Urban Culture Theory

Much of urban theory, the study of the political, social, and economic structure of cities, is interested in the political economy, the social geography and urban ecology of cities. While these theories give us great information about how cities are run, built, governed, segregated, integrated and designed they do not cover the idea of the city as a culture or the importance of place. Urban studies does not seem to be interested in culture and the ways in which cities themselves have and create culture. The way that we experience space is different between cities and rural areas and even different between cities. The way in which individuals experience a city may vary based on their social position (race, class, gender for example) and yet cities have their own identities and cultures. Unfortunately, many of the researchers interested in urban culture either treat the city as structure that imposes its culture on citizens and visitors alike, or as an entity

that has no cohesion and individuals' experiences vary widely depending on their social position.

**City as a Structural Force in Citizens Lives**

Cities like Paris and New York have a particular vibe, feel and ambience that differentiate them from other cities. Each city has its own set of values, attitudes and cultural tastes. Cities vary in the way they are structured, organized, governed and lived in. The city's structure constrains citizens' behaviors and experiences. Citizens' lives are organized through a particular city's structure. In this way, individuals and theorists have treated cities as having a "universal" experience. One can have a New York experience or a Los Angeles experience and the idea is recognizable to others. Simmel (1908 and the Chicago School have treated cities in this way, as an organizer of individual citizens' lives. Simmel argued that urban residents needed to adopt a "blasé attitude" to cope with life in the city (in Levine 1971). These authors recognize that place matters and has an influence on individuals' attitudes and behaviors. Anderson too fits in this camp, as he argues that all inner-city residents must be "streetwise" (1999). That the inner city has its own code that must be followed.

However, do all residents of a city have the same experience? Does Race, class or gender vary the experiences of urban residents? In what ways do individuals' experiences differ? Are there similarities across cities? Can we claim there is an urban experience? If a generalized urban experience exists then I expect that the AIYP teens should behave and act similarly to those in Anderson's study. And if the structure of a city is unique and contributes to individuals' experiences and values, then Minneapolis, with its history of

American Indian organizations, services and activism would affect the way in which the AIYP teens express their racial identity.

**City as Unique for Citizens**

While some researchers and theorists treat the city as a structure that imposes particular outcomes on citizens, others see the city as a mosaic that is interpreted and experienced very differently depending on one's social position (Davis 1990, Dear and Flotsy 2002, Soja 1990). Race, class and gender, to name a few, all mediate the experience that individuals have in the city. There is no universal experience because a city is determined by individual interactions and small group behavior. The city is created by social interactions, and issues of power and privilege govern social interactions. Not all citizens have the same access to the city. For example, the LA school of urbanism has focused on the multidimensional and multicultural experience of the city. They argue that each city has many stories to tell (Dear and Flusty 2002). This understanding of the city does not allow for a universal city experience that applies to everyone. In fact, the city could be made up of many little cities and neighborhoods that do not interact with each other and do not function the same. If the city produces unique experiences that vary based on such things as social position, it is likely that the AIYP teens will have an experience that is not so similar to Andersons population, which was African-American youth in Chicago. The teens' experiences will not be similar to other teens' experiences in other cities. And the unique character of Minneapolis will not have an impact on how they interact with the city.

In the end, both views are likely to be right. As I argue in chapter two the historical, geographical and social background of Minneapolis allows for individuals to tap into a well-defined and locationally specific American Indian identity. The structure of the city of Minneapolis means that the AIYP teens can rely on community cues for their expressions of American Indian identity. Yet, the presence of an American Indian community also means that they experience the city in different ways than other populations. I believe that the AIYP teens are likely to have some similar experiences to Anderson's teens when it comes to dealing with the city. But because of their identity as American Indian it will take on different dimensions and be enacted in different ways. I expect that the teens experience the city in a "streetwise" way, but must work to alert strangers to their American Indian identity (Anderson 1999). It is unlikely that strangers can quickly notice basic cues that would allow them to classify the teens as American Indian without visible cues. In this way, the teens in my study will differ from Anderson's teens in their interactions in the city. They may have to make more active and outward attempts to get others to label them as American Indian. While the city may have structural elements that can influence their lives and experiences, individuals also have the ability to make changes to the city to accommodate their own interests.

## Evidence of AIYP Teens in the Urban Environment

The AIYP teens live in one of the tougher neighborhoods in the city according to police statistics (http://www.minneapolismn.gov/index.htm).  The teens are skilled urban dwellers. They have learned how to maneuver through there environment and maintain an American Indian identity. While the city may provide many obstacles to expressing an

American Indian identity the teens have found ways to incorporate urban life into their American Indian Identity.

**City as Alienating**

While alienation is one possible problem for the teens, they are for the most part well connected to their community and maintain a wide group of friends. The teens attend Pow Wows in the Twin Cities and the surrounding region as well as other American Indian events. We loose teens to other programs that cater to inner city or American Indian teens. This means that the teens keep up with community information and opportunities in order to stay connected with their community. When another program offers a better fit they continue to participate in the community but through another organization.

The AIYP teens show an interest and seem to care about American Indian culture. The teens practice their language skills, attend cultural events, and explain to outsiders about their culture and their identity. One specific example is from the student who was reading, "Bury my Heart" (Brown 1970). During class discussion the student was called on to give an American Indian perspective. The teen first tried to explain that she was Lakota and not Dakota. Therefore the story was not about her people and she could not speak for them. But the teacher pushed her for more information and the student told me she felt that the teacher either did not understand that their was a difference or did not care. The student finally relented and gave a general answer. In this case, the student had to work hard to get the teacher to recognize her and failed. If the student had felt alienated from her community she would have avoided the discussion and given an

answer the teacher wanted to hear. Instead, she engaged the teacher and established her identity as a Lakota young woman.

**More Than Just Black and White**

In Andersons work, the white/black dichotomy represents the way in which most city dwellers base their micro-interactions with strangers (1999). Yet, what happens when we expand this idea to include other minority groups? It is likely that the dichotomy becomes white/other but the confusion that citizens are faced with when confronting unknown strangers might make interactions strained and inaccurate. Teens are faced with explaining/displaying their American Indian identity to outsiders. The white/black dichotomy of the city leaves them disadvantaged. They are not easily identifiable and are often misidentified. This means the teens must work at expressing their American Indian identity. In chapter four, I discussed in detail how the AIYP teens work to embody and outwardly express and American Indian identity that is easily (or more likely) recognized by strangers. They do so by the use of contemporary images of American Indians; stereotypes of long hair, beads and feathers, and more pop culture ways such as buttons and stickers and hoodies that say Native Pride. They also use some traditional symbols through wearing traditional jewelry and medicine bags. But all of the teens work in some way to signal to outsiders that they are American Indian.

While the teens at AIYP are a self-selected group and are composed of "decent families" they do follow the idea of being "Streetwise" (Anderson 1999). They need to adopt the "urban uniform" in order to not draw attention (Anderson 1999). For the most part, they do not have flashy things that could make them a target of theft or bullying.

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The difference in their urban uniform is that the t-shirts often have an American Indian theme, organization or design. This is their twist on the uniform, one that allows them to claim their identity. Most of the teens adopt a tough exterior. Those that do not can be the victims of violence as can be seen in the story about the shy boy who was victimized by a girl. While the teens develop a tough exterior it is clear that the AIYP is a space in which the teens feel safe and often let down their guard to talk to us about school and other issues impacting their lives. In this case, the tough exterior goes only so deep.

**Violence in the Lives of AIYP Teens**

The issues of violence became a common theme at the AIYP. However, it was not the boys who were perpetrators of crime; it was girls. In one telling incident a girl, Lisa, who often hides behind an innocent façade but showed an underhanded mean bent when she turned on a fellow classmate. A sensitive boy, Henry, had taken to doing some of his work with Lisa. He seemed a bit smitten by her and was shy and awkward around her. In a hallway, there was an incident where she hit him over the head. It was traumatic/painful enough for Henry to cry and seek adult supervision. Lisa was given a talking to and returned to group steaming and pouty. The relationship between the two was never quite the same thought she continued to lightly tease him and he cautiously avoided her.

As slightly more serious case of violence occurred off the site but the two girls (Stacey and Marni) who were involved in a fight on the same side ran to the center after the fight. It seemed that a large (was not defined but sounded like 5-6) group of girls meet up after school and some problem broke out. Stacey and Marni were in the middle of this fight but ran when the Police were called and came to campus. Stacey arrived first shaken

and out of breathe. She talked to the staff and explained the situation. Shortly after Marni showed up, they were sequestered from the rest of the students as staff called parents and decided what action should be taken. I was asked to watch the two girls while staff worked on the problem. Stacey was very angry with Marni. It seems that at the first sign of Police Marni had fled leaving Stacey to fight for herself. Stacey looked at Marni and yelled in frustration, "I thought you had my back?" Marni seemed more embarrassed and frightened and mumbled something about having to get out of there and being scared. While this incident was not common, it illustrates the presence of violence in the teen's lives and the need to adopt a "streetwise" manor in order to manage violence in their lives. The AIYP teens must negotiate their identity as American Indians through the urban experience.

Another off-site incident was a discussion of "what they did over the weekend." Two girls were talking and I over heard "she was just standing there bleeding". I asked what they were talking about and was told "oh a fight at the Pow Wow" as if this was no big deal or any reason to be concerned. They continued to discuss the situation as the older girl said, "yeah I don't know what they was thinking I had my homegirls just around the corner. I called them. She was gone by the time they got there." The younger teen that was listening to the story was a witness to the attack and seemed to be admiring the older girl, possibly for her ability to take care of herself. It was obvious by the conversation that the two girls had not talked at the Pow Wow but were bonding over this fight.

Interestingly enough, the younger girl in this story has just been suspended from school for pushing another girl into her locker. While I tried to talk to her further about the school situation she did not seem to think it was a big deal or anything worth getting suspended over. Violence seems to be commonplace enough in the lives of these young girls that it is not even taken seriously. I suspect that they young boys in the program face as much if not more violence but do not bring their stories to the AIYP. I am sure the AIYP teens know to keep these kind of stories to unsupervised times.

**Gender, Race, and Class and the City**

**Gender**

There are more girls involved in the AIYP than boys, which may indicate that girls are less integrated into mainstream culture than boys are. Research has shown that women are the cultural bearers in the American Indian community especially in the city (Lobo 2003). Girls are as likely as boys to be involved in violence-in fact so far no evidence of boys' involvement with violence. Girls are as likely to wear the "urban Uniform" as boys are. Boys are more likely to wear "bling" such as diamonds. But both wear baggy clothes and athletic shoes on a regular basis. Both boys and girls are equally likely to wear clothing, jewelry or some other embodiment of American Indian identity. They seem equally interested in announcing to strangers their American Indian identity.

**Race**

American Indian Youth Project teens have some similarities to Andersons African-American teens, in terms of clothing style, presentation of tough stance, and experience with violence. They differ in that the AIYP teens must work to create an

identifiable racial identity, one that is identifiable to strangers and one that makes some "sense" to those strangers (meaning those strangers can identify whether or not they are a threat). These teens live in a city that has deep historical roots in American Indian tradition and culture. They have a wide network of associations that they can tie into to develop a sense of self. Many of the teens do not "look" like American Indians. Many of the teens are bi or multi-racial and most work to give off the identity of an American Indian. Few embody the stereotypical markers of American Indian such as red skin, long dark hair or high cheekbones. This exemplifies the fact that both structure and individual agency affects the way in which the teens experience the city.

**Class**

The teens mostly come from working class to lower middle class households. Of the housing that I have observed or been made aware of most live in apartments or rental units. One student had to deal with the family's eviction from their apartment. The teens' style of dress does not suggest much money. Many of the teens wear the same thing to AIYP week after week or wear similar outfits. Many of the teens do have a few pieces of clothing with the latest name brand, but most of the clothing is label free and does not follow the latest trends. The clothing style other than the urban uniform is classic and items that can be worn year after year. The teens' material possessions are not state of the art and are often outdated and worn. One pair of brother and sister shares their phone. Most of the teens do own phones but they are several years old and appear to be second hand phones. This seems to indicate a lack of money to spend on the newest gadget and the latest fads. Many of the teens do not have jobs of any kind; so many of them have

very little expendable cash. In fact, many of the teens have haircuts that look like they were done by themselves or friends/relatives.  One teen girl had a very uneven haircut that was long on the back and sides but extremely short on top. It was cut roughly and was quite obvious some mistake had been made. The girls do not talk about salons or hairdressers and when they do they opt for partial styles or cuts under 20-30 dollars. One girl that is part African-American had only the first few inches of her hair braided for 30 dollars. She wanted full braids but could only afford thirty dollars worth.

**The City and an American Indian Identity**

The need for a "streetwise" demeanor requires the teens to develop certain strategies that are required of urban residents (Anderson 1999). Urban teens must embody and signal to outsiders that they are in fact American Indians. On the reservations, most people know each other and your status are already accounted for. The multi-cultural city makes establishing an identity as American Indian more difficult. As Anderson points out interactions in the city require quick and clear recognition of "others". AIYP teens complicate the traditional ideas of "what an American Indian looks like", how they act and where they live. This makes it difficult for others to quickly label them and understand who they are. While the teens adopt a "streetwise" way of being, they do so with an American Indian twist (Anderson 1999). They literally wear their American Indian identity on their bodies through the use of clothing, jewelry and other material accessories (discussed further in chapter six).

**Conclusion**

The fact that pan-Indian organizing began in the city also illustrates the importance of urban life in the creation of an American Indian identity. The proliferation of the American Indian identity was lead by the residents of urban environments who came together to solve problems and gain rights. The urban environment required that old tribal connections be expanded to include members of other tribes in order to gain the numbers and community support it takes to make change. While inter-tribal relations are common throughout history, the move of many American Indians to the city required a new orientation to being American Indian. The small numbers of American Indians meant that the community needed to be created out of historical and political similarities rather than traditional kinship ties (though kinship ties remain an important source of identity in the city). American Indians fought the possible alienating effects of city life by coming together as a broader community and working together to create resources and fight discrimination.

"*I once heard that culture is what one does without thinking about it*" John Mohawk[15]

"I appropriate Pop Art because it is symbolic of American mainstream culture. This gives me a common language in order to communicate with the viewer."
— Jaune Quick-to-See Smith in *Subversions/Affirmations: Jaune Quick-to-See Smith*,
1996 Heard Museum virtual exhibit http://www.heard.org/pop/gallery.html

## Chapter 6: Pop Culture in the AIYP teen's world

Popular culture is difficult to escape as it permeates our daily worlds in so many ways: TV, Internet, movies, billboards, magazines, newspapers, just to name a few. In the world of teenagers, pop culture is ubiquitous. American Indian teenagers are no exception – they feel the allure of pop culture like other teens. For them, American Indian teenagers, popular culture it is more of a double-edged sword than for other teenagers. On the one hand, it is a source of pleasure, escapism and even identity; on the other hand, it is loaded with stereotypes and negative messages about American Indians. The AIYP teens navigate the pop cultural world with a keen eye to the stereotypes and to the ways in which they can use pop culture symbols to express their personal identity and their identity as an American Indian in positive ways.

Pop culture is defined in many ways. Some see pop culture as hegemonic in that it influences everyone in society and provides one view of the world (Bourdieu in Tanner 2008, Hays 2000, Traube 1996). Others believe that the consumer alters the meanings of pop culture; they are not merely passive consumers (Chambers 1986, Fiske 1989, Hebdidge 1979). Some say that pop culture expresses a class-based culture, which is bifurcated into high culture and low culture (Adorno and Horkheimer 1979). High culture, which is often consumed by the upper class, is viewed as socially significant

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[15] In Indian Country Today, March 23, 2011

where real culture is made. In this view, popular culture is consumed by the masses and viewed as low culture and is not as culturally significant, valuable or important (Adorno and Horheimer 1979). Some argue that pop culture is youth driven and that it is produced with them in mind (Hall and Jefferson 1976).

I find that these definitions are not sufficient for my research. Several definitions are narrow and do not encompass the full social world of pop culture as it is found and used today. Other definitions make assumptions that I simply do not agree with. For example, pop culture is not simply a mass product. In today's Internet world an item can be produced for individual entertainment yet enjoyed by many; here I am thinking of "viral" YouTube videos that are not produced for mass appeal. I also disagree that the distinction between so called "high" culture and "low" culture is a useful concept. I do not accept that idea the pop culture by definition is a lower form of culture.

Many of the other definitions have assumptions about pop culture that I want to explore in this work. Does pop culture have a hegemonic hold over the AIYP teens? Do the teens produce pop culture or do they attempt to do so? In this case, my observations are of teens so one could view this as being a youth based art form, but I believe that a wide audience consumes pop culture in all its forms even if its intended audience is youth based.

In this research, I define pop culture broadly. In this study, if an object, idea, application, video, music, book etc. is available through mass market, new technology or free item way (item is useful but does not cost the user), then I consider it to be pop

culture. I believe this definition captures many of the new technological ways that teens especially consume and use pop culture.

In this chapter, I lay groundwork by discussing four representations of American Indians in pop culture and describing several theories of culture. Then I present five ways in which AIYP teens incorporate pop culture into their self-presentations. I analyze the results of my observations of AIYP teens using three lenses (1) American Indian Pop Culture, (2) Race, class, gender and Pop Culture, and (3) Theories of Popular Culture and American Indian teens.

**Representations of American Indians in Pop Culture**

While pop culture is many things too many people it has yet to be equally representative of minority groups. Historically many groups have been invisible or marginalized through the media. African-Americans, Asian American, gays, lesbians and transsexuals have all been initially absent then marginalized by the media. The same holds true for American Indians. The media has presented American Indians in a number of ways. Originally, American Indians were not represented at all. White actors painted up in "red-face" played the Indians in early westerns, which were the only venues one would see an "Indian." When American Indians were in the media they were often portrayed as a "vanishing" race -- a people whose time had come and gone. Other ways that American Indians have been portrayed in pop culture historically have been as a culture from the past or as a romanticized view (Kipp 2001). There have been few pop culture pieces that portray contemporary American Indians. The most famous piece might be the movie *Smoke Signals*. This movie portrays the lives of a number of American

Indian young adults and was written, produced and acted by American Indians. It represents one of the few times that American Indians produced pop culture.

In the mostly historical pieces, American Indians are often represented as either a dangerous "savage" or the "good" Indian who is quiet, stoic and close to nature. For the most part stereotypes and representations of American Indians in popular culture are not accurate or positive. American Indians are expected to reflect a historic past and a particular tribal lifestyle (most commonly plains tribes). Even when American Indians are attributed "positive" characteristics it is setting them apart from the rest of society as special and in need of rescue. These images and ideas are disseminated in society and are present in the lives of the teens.

### *Representation 1: The Historical Indian Figure*

The average American's idea of an American Indian is someone who has high-cheek bones, long dark hair (preferably in braids), and "red" skin (Mihesuah 1996). They are pictured wearing buckskins, beads and feathers, and screaming and whooping war cries. Most Americans assume that American Indians live on reservations. Students in my classes have asked if American Indians are "allowed" off reservations. All of these images live in people's imagination and in popular culture's representations of American Indians to this day.

There is a mural in the Seven Corners neighborhood of Minneapolis that depicts all of the different ethnicities represented in the neighborhood. While the Somali and Hmong residents are pictured as contemporary peoples, the American Indians are featured in front of a teepee wearing buckskins and feathers. Even in the currently

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popular *Twilight* saga books, which include an American Indian character, the author Stephanie Meyer, describes him as "russet-colored". This is just another way of saying red skin and is deemed an insult by most American Indians (Meyer 2005: 119).

It is no surprise that Americans have these stereotypical ideas of American Indians. Rosaldo pointed out that we develop such ideas when we are "taught about Indians [from]… the vantage point of an anthropological 'ethnographic present': a kind of timeless 'long ago and far away there once were Indians" (in Shanley, Kathryn 2001:28). Many contemporary Sociology textbooks, discuss American Indians in historical terms or a brief description of the problems American Indians face (Giddens and Duneier 2011, Ferris and Stein 2012, Ferante 2011, Kimmel and Aronson 2009, Tischler 2011). In the social sciences, we often use the historical culture of American Indians to show how the world is socially constructed and differ from group, time and place; yet we rarely know how those concepts operate in contemporary American Indian culture. In fact, Weaver argues "Nonindigenous people do not want to see aspects of Native people that do not support their own ideas and beliefs, thus leading to a perpetuation of stereotypes" (2001:247). People who are American Indian but do not "look" American Indian can have a difficult time convincing others of their ethnic and racial status. American's are so used to the historical image that it is hard to displace.

### Representation 2: The Vanished Indian

A common misconception is that American Indians are diminishing in numbers and losing culture (Bird 2001). In fact, American Indian numbers are on the rise (Nagel 1996, Thorton 1990). This misconception is due not only to the lack of media or pop

culture attention but also to the geographic locations of rural American Indians. Few Americans live near a reservation or in cities with sizeable American Indian populations. Overall, many Americans have limited contact with visibly identifiable American Indians and have little to no knowledge of American Indians (Moore and Hirschfelder 1999, Reed 2001). Their physical invisibility and their presentation as historical figures perpetuate the belief that "real" American Indians are vanished (Bird 2001, Garroutte 2003, Steele 1998). There are few representations of contemporary American Indians in the media today. One rare example is the character Adam Beach played on *Law and Order SVU*. While his character was American Indian, he was not asked to play into any of the stereotypes of American Indians and his racial background was just that-background. Because "Indianness" is measured by a historically constructed image, contemporary American Indians "no longer" exist. Vine Deloria has noted, "Real Indian people both had – and had not – disappeared" (1998:91). American Indians had disappeared because they no longer fit the historically constructed image, but have not disappeared because they continue to physically survive.

### Representation 3: The Savage Indian

According to numerous westerns, American Indians are warriors at heart and are uncivilized heathens. The belief is paternalistic and is exemplified in the "kill the Indian save the man" ideology. The Indian as savage had to be killed or civilized for the safety of society. The more paternalistic ideas of "killing the savage and saving the man" sought to force American Indian into the image of the white settlers.

Newspaper reports of the US expansion of the west, from 1800-1910, were full of stories of vicious Indian attacks on poor defenseless settlers. A common storyline was the abduction of some poor white woman by a savage who then forces her to be his bride. These ideas were used to justify the killing of American Indians in the early years of the American frontier.

These myths still exist today and are bolstered by the use of American Indian mascots. Those who support the mascots claim they are honoring American Indians and their fighting spirit. However, what they really do is uphold the idea of American Indians as warriors, thus perpetuating the idea of American Indians as fierce savages who had to be conquered, to win the west. (Purdy 2001, Mcdonald, Mcdonald and Sheridan 2000: 88-93).

### Representation 4: The Good Indian

While many images of American Indians are quite negative, there are some stereotypes that could be seen as less harmful. American Indians are often described as quiet, stoic, humble, and close to nature (Kehoe 1996, Fixico 2000, Steele 1998). This image was described as the "Noble Savage," the Indian worth saving (Bird 2001, Donald 1996, van Lent 1998). While these may be seen as more "positive" stereotypes they are still detrimental because they lock American Indians into a mold that cannot always be filled. Not all American Indians are stewards of the earth or quiet and reserved people. And while being seen as "closer to nature" may seem like a good thing in today's eco-friendly world, those who are close to nature are often seen as "less civilized" and thus less deserving of respect (Ortner 1972, Simard 1996). So while the 1970's TV

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commercial that used the image of a "crying Indian"[16] may represent ecological concern for the earth to many, it is also an insult to American Indians and their culture.

## Three Theories of How Popular Culture Works

There are many opinions on how pop culture works in society (and the AIYP teens worked) and I will discuss three of the most prominent theories; the theory of pop culture as Hegemonic, as Political, and as Reception theory. Each of these theories has a different view of popular culture and offers different ways of explaining its use, meaning and purpose in society. However, Reception theory more closely aligns with what I found among the AIYP teens. The teens actively create their American Indian identity with symbols and imagery from pop culture.

### Theory 1: Hegemonic Pop Culture

Hegemony proposes that the ideas, values and morals of the ruling class which are ingrained in the culture such that they seem to be the morals and values of everyone (Traube 1996, Hays 2000). In this case, pop culture is a "resource used by powerful individuals and groups to establish, maintain, and reproduce their social status" (Bourdieu in Tanner, Asbridge and Wortley 2008: 118). Pop culture depicts the lifestyles of the rich and famous and tells those without power how to fit in and get along. Those who are successful maintain their dominance through the use of material goods and

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[16] The commercial titled "Keep America Beautiful" featured a man in buckskin, with long and hair and feathers canoeing on a beautiful stream running through a forest until he paddles into polluted water and by a ship billowing smoke into the air and finally landing on a trash cover bank. The announcer tells us that "some people have a deep abiding respect for the natural beauty that was once this country and some people don't". The camera then pans to the Indian's face as one-tear streams down. Obviously Indians care about littering.

resources that are unavailable to the average citizen. Pop culture's obsession with the latest and greatest does not allow the general population to ascent to their ranks. Pop culture is also hegemonic in its ability to dominate what is in style. In a highly youth oriented cultural domain; pop culture defines what everyone else should be following. It can also be argued that pop cultures interests are shallow, vain and appearance oriented. This orientation does not inspire individuals to examine the world they live in or to question the status quo. In many ways, pop culture is the "opiate of the masses" in today's world (Marx 1843:1978). Thus, allowing the elites and those in power to distract the public from the greater concerns.

If the teens experienced pop culture as a form of hegemony they would be fully invested in the pop culture lifestyle. They would be forced to follow the latest fashions, biggest stars and newest songs. They would be unlikely to veer from what is current in today's pop culture world. They would be unlikely to express an American Indian identity, as it is not present in the pop culture world. Alternatively, the teens may buy into pop culture's stereotypes of American Indians without questioning the inherent inequality in the stereotypes. They would be likely to believe that American Indians are not relevant in today's world or, for example, that American Indians are lazy, alcoholic, warriors who do not express emotions. On the other hand, they would believe that there is no point in trying to express an American Indian identity because their culture is vanishing.

### Theory 2: Pop Culture as Political

Theorists in this particular paradigm argue that pop culture is a site for struggles over meanings and power. Pop culture is not just produced by those in power, but also

from the public. These differing products and orientations allow the public to participate in the debate over what pop culture means and who has the power to create, use and maintain it. Pop culture is "not completely a form of social control from above, but not purely a form of expression from the masses" (Traube 1996:133). Rap music was often championed by this view because it is often a creative fiction based on real life experiences (Rose 1994). Here people labor to produce works that reflect their own interpretation of the world, while other groups labor to reproduce the dominant messages in the society. Pop culture can be a site for groups to struggle with representing their own truths, but it is also a site for those in power to reproduce their own message.

If culture were in fact a political act, the AIYP teens would have negative reactions to stereotypical images and ideas of American Indians. They would feel that it is important for pop culture to present an accurate and truthful depiction of American Indians. They would also see pop culture as a way to express their culture themselves in ways that are culturally meaningful. I would expect that this would be a political argument similar to the American Indian Movement's effort to end American Indian mascots. The teens would take offense to pop cultural depictions of American Indians and work to end these stereotypes. At the same time, they would work to provide their own depictions of being American Indian and work to represent them in the pop culture world.

### Theory 3: Reception Theory

Those who use reception theory argue that the audience is an active consumer of pop culture and use it for their own purposes and make their own meanings from it (Hall

& Whannel 1965, Hays 2000, Traube 1996). It is less important who makes the culture than it is how the culture is interpreted and used, though Fiske argues: "Popular culture is made by subordinated peoples in their own interests out of resources that also, contradictorily, serve the economic interests of the dominant. Popular culture is made from within and below, not imposed from without or above..." (1989:1). But wherever the meanings and messages originate, the audience reinterprets the messages and imagines them as their own. One example of this is the case of Hip-Hop, which originated in the African-American community as a way of expressing their culture and identity and now is used by many ethnic and racial groups to express their own culture and identity.

Even dominant notions of subordinate groups can be reimagined and used. As Hanson points out "Stereotypes need not be synonymous with 'false notions,' prejudice or negativity. They can provide the necessary motivators of symbol and belief to create unity within a group, form a transcendent identity and garner support from the out-group at the national level" (Hanson 1997:207). Any representation can be reworked to benefit those in subordinate positions. Groups can reshape the representations and messages and reuse them to have positive and real meanings. These can relate to what pop culture says, but become altered and nuanced new messages that support a new understanding.

While those who see culture as political discuss the inherent political struggle in making meaning from culture, reception theory looks at the ways in which actors select the pieces of culture that make meaning for them. Reception theory does not see culture as a site for political struggle but as a source for individuals to use in making meaning in

their lives. If this is true, then teens at AIYP are not passive consumers of pop culture but use culture to express their own identity and their own ideas. Their use of culture is not a struggle for or against power structures but a means of social expression. They will use the symbols, messages and meanings that fit with what they are trying to express regardless of the originating source.

My research shows that the AIYP teens are not passive consumers of pop culture. Instead, they take what they find useful and fight against what they find insulting. The Reception theory best explains the AIYP teens orientation to pop culture. While identity construction is a political act itself the teens do not express a political orientation to pop culture. Instead they find ways in which they fit into the pop culture world and take from many different avenues. While they may find the *Twilight* character Jacob a welcome addition to pop culture ranks, they rant against Disney's Pocahontas as an inaccurate representation of historical facts.

## AIYP Teens and Their Use of Pop Culture

There are many forms of pop culture and I will be discussing the teens' use of and interest in five of these: the Twilight saga, music, jewelry, clothing, and technology. The teens utilized these forms of pop culture while they were at the AIYP and I was able to witness their use.

### Example 1: Twilight

The *Twilight* saga is a series of four books written by author Stephanie Meyer (2005-2008). The series is the story of a young girl named Bella and her vampire love, Edward. In the books, Bella has a friend named Jacob, who is American Indian, and lives

on the nearby reservation. The books have also become movies. Both the books and the movies are very popular with the teen girls at AIYP. One girl stated that *Twilight* was the only book she had ever really read. In fact, most of the girls had read at least one of the four novels. Two of the girls had brought the book to the AIYP to read during free time. The Twilight books were some of the only books brought to read for pleasure.

*Twilight* was also the topic of discussion several times. Many of the teen girls preferred the American Indian character Jacob, but several were still holdouts for the vampire Edward. In fact, during free time two young girls, Alice and Jen, got out the arts and crafts supplies and made posters declaring their love for Edward. One young girl complained that Bella seemed to use her friend Jacob and that Jacob was the most morally upstanding of all of the characters, which is why she liked him. After the second movie, *New Moon,* came out, I asked a table of girls who was their favorite character. In the second movie, Jacob's character is featured more prominently and the Quileute's tribal stories are told. The girls all sheepishly agreed they like Jacob but Edward was not bad either. A female staff member spoke up and said that she like Jacob's father, a tribal leader. She felt he was a good representation of American Indians. They girls all agreed and the conversation died out.

It is interesting to note that the girls were not bothered by the book's use of the American Indian tribe Quileute's creation stories as a delivering device for much of the plot. In the story the American Indian teens become werewolves because of an ancient agreement that their ancestors made with the vampires. It becomes a key point to the story. The teens just thought it was cool that there were American Indian characters in the

book. There was also no notice of Meyer's description of Jacob as being "russet colored"(Meyer 119). I found the depiction to be stereotypical and off-putting. It is very close to the use of the term redskin, which is offensive and incorrect. However, the girls either did not notice this term or did not find it as offensive as I did.

*Example 2: Music*

The teens like a variety of music but most are hip-hop fans and rock music is popular too. What is interesting is the variety of music the teens have on their Mp3 players. While hip-hop and rock are prominent, it is also likely that traditional American Indian music will also be present. In one case, a girl was listening to a hip-hop song and then the random arrangement selected the next song and it was a traditional American Indian Pow Wow song and the next song was hip-hop. This case was not unusual. The teens would listen to a mix-up of hip-hop, rock and traditional American Indian music. Popular music does not mean that the teens forgo their interest in American Indian culture. In fact, they are able to easily move between American Indian culture and pop culture.

The teens also listened to contemporary American Indian music. This was often artist's who use traditional instruments and sounds but mixed with contemporary lyrics, rhythms or melodies. American Indian hip-hop is very popular with the teens. I did not find that they had this type of music on their Mp3 players but instead they would look up groups and acts on YouTube. Here they also favored local groups like Seventh Generation who sing about being American Indian in the city of Minneapolis.

*Example 3: Technology*

The teens are technologically savvy though they may not be able to purchase the latest technological gadgets. Many of the teens have phones, some share a phone with a sibling and a few do not have phones. Those that do have phones do not have the latest models. The phones tend to be a few years old and do not have things like web access or Internet capabilities. They do however have texting capabilities as all of the teens that have a phone that send texts.

Many of the teens bring Mp3 players to the AIYP. Though technically not allowed, the staff tends to overlook their use and allow the teens to listen to music while they study. Here again the teens do not usually have the name brand Mp3 players like the Apple products. Instead, they have Mp3 players from lesser-known companies. One boy brought in a CD player and we were all amazed to see someone using a portable CD player. He said he was going "old-school".

While the teens may not have the latest gadgets, they are very skilled when it comes to using the Internet. The teens are sometimes allowed to use the staffs' computers during free time. The AIYP has a filter on what sites can be accessed and one site in particular is banned from AIYP- MySpace. The ban on MySpace is a particular pain for the teens as it is their preferred social site.

The filter does not stop all of the teens from accessing MySpace. Many of the teens know of a proxy server that allows them to bypass the filter and get access to whatever they may want. For a while, the staff did not know there was a way to by-pass

the filter block. Once the staff became aware of the security breach they paid closer

attention to what the teens were accessing during free time.

The teens can entertain themselves on the Internet within the acceptable

boundaries. Many of the teens use YouTube to find entertainment. Often they are looking

up a hip-hop video or the latest "viral video," but the teens also utilize YouTube to look

up Pow Wow dances from around the country or to listen to local American Indian hip-

hop groups. Here again the teens mix hip-hop and American Indian music during a

computer session. Even in their free time, the teens are interested in accessing American

Indian culture.

### *Example 4: Jewelry*

Neither gender wears much jewelry but they all wear some jewelry. The boys tend

to wear (fake?) diamond stud earrings and girls wear hoop earrings. Both genders wear

beaded necklaces in traditional American Indian designs but with trendy colors. Beaded

jewelry is popular and some of the teens are learning how to make their own jewelry.  In

one particular case a young man, Bill, wore a blue, black and white beaded medallion that

is a traditional form of jewelry. He also wore a matching bracelet. Many of the girls

noticed the jewelry and commented, "I love the necklace," "that's so cool." One of the

staff members began to compliment the young man and said "way to rock the Native

Bling". The teens all chuckled at the term and throughout the session teens commented

about Native Bling. The young man wore the jewelry several times after that event. The

teens also wear the popular rubber bracelets. These bracelets say Native Pride and are

white, red, black and yellow alternately. While not jewelry, many of the teens will wear a

medicine bundle (a small pouch that holds objects of religious value), often one that they have made themselves.

### *Example 5: Clothing*

Most of the teen boys wear baggy over-sized T-shirts and jeans. The girls also wear T-shirts and jeans. The girls' clothes are more form fitting but not tight. Certain brands, such as Sean John, Baby Phat, Ed Hardy, South Pole, are valued. Most of the teens may have only one piece of clothing that is "name brand". As discussed in Chapter 5, the teens tend to conform to Anderson's "urban uniform" theory though they do so with an American Indian twist (Anderson 1999). Often their T-shirts have an American Indian design like a feathered headdress or a medicine wheel. The t-shirts and hoodies often read Native Pride or come from an American Indian event or organization. The teens often have at least one visible sign that they are American Indians whether that is through what their clothing says or the kind of jewelry they wear. A young woman named Mary often wore American Indian themed t-shirts. Her sister bought the t-shirts as presents and Mary was proud that her sister gave her the t-shirts as gifts. She had a classic AIM (American Indian Movement) t-shirt that she wore a few times and a "Homeland Security: Fighting Terrorism Since 1492" shirt that has a picture of Geronimo and three other Apache. The t-shirt highlights Geronimo's role as a political hero protecting his people from the invading settlers. Mary's t-shirts were the most openly political statements made by the teens. I would tell her how much I liked her t-shirts and she would produce a big shy smile and talk about her sister who she looked up to. Mary proudly wore those t-shirts to AIYP.

One interesting and provocative use of pop culture is when teens wear American

Indian mascot hats or jerseys. The first example was when a teen came wearing a

Cleveland Indians jersey and hat. When the staff saw the hat and jersey they reacted with

frowns and scowls. The staff seemed displeased and glanced at each other in

disapproving ways. One staff member shook her head in disgust, yet none of the staff

members confronted the boy about his clothing decisions or commented on the boy's

clothing to each other. The teens treated the hat as a minor sensation. The hat was passed

around so that several of the young girls and a young boy wore the hat. The hat was

creating a scene and there was scuffling over who would wear it and in what order. The

hat was tossed back and forth while the young man leaned his chair back and smiled. The

mascot controversy did not seem to bother the teens as it did the staff. In another

instance, a teen boy wore a Cleveland Indians hat, the logo was less obvious as the design

was black on black. No one seemed to notice this representation of American Indian

mascots and no fuss was made. What makes these instances stand out is most

Minnesotans support the Twins. The teens also favored local teams over other major

league teams.

I found these two cases to be interesting and wondered, "Why would an American

Indian teen wear an American Indian mascot"? Both of the boys had come to AIYP

wearing other clothing or jewelry that signaled them as being American Indian. They

were both obviously proud to be American Indian. I suggest that the teens wore the

mascot clothing to assert their American Indian identity to unknowledgeable outsiders. It

was a signal that clearly was telling people "hey, I'm American Indian. See." In a

multicultural setting, it is often difficult for people to recognize American Indian individuals as American Indian. Most Americans are unfamiliar with what American Indians may look like and many of the teens do not fit the stereotypical image of American Indian. Using the mascot is one way of announcing his or her race for everyone to see while also illustrating participation in pop culture.

**Analytic Lens 1: American Indian Pop Culture**

Teens at AIYP gravitate towards those ideas, signs and symbols that reflect their American Indian Identity. They are team Jacob (the American Indian teen from the *Twilight* series), Indian hip-hop fans, and teens with "Savage Pride". At the same time, they are teens that like the latest hit movie, song, and fashions. The Cleveland Indians mascot is viewed by many adults as a racist symbol and stereotype, however the teens at times utilize popular culture stereotypes in order to express their American Indian identity to outsiders whose conception of what it means to be American Indian is often formed by and expressed through popular culture. The AIYP teens are immersed in pop culture like most other teens but they are actively seeking pop culture that represents them. As Holland notes, "it is perhaps unsurprising that rap is the favored music form amongst Mohawk youth [the same is true for AIYP youth], particularly as their own cultural subordination parallels that of Afro-American youth in the U.S.A." (2004:5.18). So the AIYP teens may feel that rap music speaks to their lives. This is likely especially true when it is an American Indian rap group. As reception theory explains the AIYP teens, then, selectively use pop culture as a way to both fit in to the wider culture and as a way to stand out as an American Indian.

**American Indian-Made Pop Culture**

There is a good amount of pop culture by and for American Indians. Movies, music, art and skateboarding are some of the pop culture forms that American Indians contribute. There have been several movies that have been written, directed or acted in by American Indian artists. A few of these are "Smoke Signals," "Dance Me Outside," "Pow wow Highway" and the most contemporary movie "The Fast Runner (Atanarjuat)." There are even more if we look at other indigenous groups from Canada, Australia and New Zealand. One AIYP activity was to watch the movie "Whale Rider" about a Maori teen who both breaks traditional conceptions and fulfills a traditional prophecy. The teens were quiet during the viewing with only a few "that's cool" and "I didn't think I would like this" thrown in. Afterwards the teens said that they could relate to the character and that it was "cool."

But "Smoke Signals" is the most recognized and discussed American Indian movie of the teens. The students have their favorite quotes from the movie. They will repeat them to each other. One young girl named Wendy liked the story about how one woman feed the whole crowd with frybread. There was not enough frybread to go around and it is not a meal without frybread. So she tore the pieces in half, everyone got a piece, and disaster was averted. Wendy told her friend the scene from the movie, even though her friend was quite familiar with the scene, and then told us how she wanted to open a frybread shop and be like that woman. "I want to feed everybody frybread and they would be happy." Many teens watch this movie repeatedly.

In addition to movies, music is also produced and played by American Indian artists. The teens enjoy both traditional music and contemporary music. Often they like them at the same time. Mash-ups are when two songs are taken and woven together to create a new song. The teens see how contemporary and traditional music have connections. One day while the teens were on the computers one of the teens was listening to Pow Wow and other traditional songs. A young man listening to the songs piped up "this is the Rock n' Roll of back then." He laughed at his own joke and a number of heads bobbed up and down in agreement. The teen points out that traditional American Indian music was the popular music of its time. The teen then played a song that was a mash-up of a traditional hand drum round dance song and a new style of producing vocal tracks that pitch corrects vocals until they are robotic and distorted. The song sounded like house music, with a traditional drumbeat and synthetic vocals. The young man stood up and asked" is this traditional music?" The other teen replied yes. "This sounds like the Black Eyed-Peas."[17]Everyone busted out laughing. The mash-up was a successful example of the combination of traditional and contemporary music.

They especially like local American Indian hip-hop bands (as they come and go there is little use in naming the latest groups), but there is much more to the world of American Indian music. There are old-school artists like Keith Secola, Redbone and Robert Mirabel and more contemporary artists like Blackfire, What Would Crazy Horse Say, Scars and Bars, The Storm and 2009 Nammy (Native American Music Award) winners Rezhogs. Most of the teens get their new music off the Internet at sites like

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[17] This is a group that is well known for using the auto tune pitch correction in their music.

RezKast and from suggestions from family and friends

(http://www.rezkast.com/index.php). The teens are interested in the latest from American

Indian artists.

American Indian artists have broken much ground in the field of art and the

art/sport of skateboarding, but the AIYP teens have not caught on to these new trends. It

could be a regional effect because most of this art is happening in the southwest or it

could be that the teens just did not have the chance to express interest in these art forms.

However, American Indian artists are putting their stamp on pop culture in the art world.

The Heard museum, In Arizona, renowned for its exhibits of American Indian art and

culture recently held an exhibit "Pop Culture in American Indian Art" which is still

available as a virtual exhibit (http://www.heard.org/pop/). The exhibit highlighted various

artists' use of traditional forms, materials and concepts with a pop culture twist.

Examples include a beaded Marilyn Monroe, using a traditional beading technique, a

woven corset that utilized traditional basket weaving and a Pueblo style pottery piece that

unexpectedly has a centerpiece that depicts a man weightlifting. These artists have

creatively integrated pop culture, Native culture and traditional and fine art craftsmanship

to make a statement about contemporary American Indians.

The American Indian skateboard culture also combines traditional ideas with

contemporary styles. Many teams and companies like Apache Skateboards, 4WheelWar

Pony, Wounded Knee Skateboards and Native Skate combine traditional ideas of the

warrior culture (reflected in many of their names and in part by the often outlaw status of

skateboarding) with ollies and nosegrinds. Many of these companies produce boards,

apparel, stickers and gear with American Indians in mind. These designs include pictures of Geronimo, traditional Apache design, and nature designs.[18] As stated earlier there was no evidence that the AIYP teens are involved in or aware of this movement, but it remains an important form of American Indian pop culture.

**Analytic Lens 2: Race, class, gender and Pop Culture**

**Race**

The AIYP teens express their American Indian identity through the use of a number of pop culture references. So called "NDN[19] hip-hop" is American Indians take on the hip-hop world. The teens have discussed a website devoted to American Indian hip-hop and follow groups on YouTube. They also attend shows by local artists like Seventh Generation, an American Indian rap group. They upload American Indian music to their Mp3 players and view Pow Wows on YouTube. For these teens, their racial identity is something that is important to them and they actively seek out ways to express that identity.

**Class**

Class plays a large role in the ways that the teens can participate in pop culture. Many of the teens come from families with limited money to purchase the material goods of pop culture. The teens do not talk about shopping trips or going to the movies. Some have limited access to computers at home; being on-line is a popular and common activity for these teens. They discuss how they were texting each other and their

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[18] Examples of designs are available here http://www.zazzle.com/apache+skateboards

[19] NDN is a shorten form of the word Indian. The use of NDN is likely derived from text messaging shorthand. Texters often shorten words to speed up messaging.

Facebook friends. Class plays a role in how and in what ways the teens participate in pop culture. With limited funds, they must be selective in what they purchase. The teens do not have money for extras and this likely limits the materials available to them and therefore the materials to express an American Indian identity.

**Gender**

There are many similarities in the pop culture interests of the boys and girls. The boys and girls are both into hip-hop and are technologically skilled. The girls are just as likely to know how to access a proxy server as the boys. Hip-hop is universally liked and sometimes a topic of discussion. Even clothing is similar between boys and girls, as they all tend to wear t-shirts, hooded sweatshirts or "hoodies" and jeans. The difference is that girls buy and wear girls clothing. The girls do not buy boys clothes and wear them and the boys do not wear girls clothing.

Another difference is that girls wear clothing that fits. Their clothes are less likely to be baggy, but they do not tend to wear tight fitting clothes. The girls will sometimes dress-up a bit in that they may wear a blouse or colored jeans. Not all of the girls wear make-up. It seems the ones that do tend to wear a lot of make-up especially eyeliner. Also only, the girls are interested in the *Twilight* phenomenon. The boys do not get into the series. The girls bring the books to AIYP and discuss the characters and the story. The AIYP teens have similar patterns of pop culture consumption across gender.

**Analytic Lens 3:  Theories of Popular Culture and American Indian teens**

Does the evidence show that the teens follow a hegemonic pattern of pop culture use, do they use pop culture in a political way, or does the reception theory explain their use of pop culture? In this section, I will examine how and in what ways reception theory can help explain the teen's consumption of pop culture.

There is no evidence that AIYP teens see themselves in common stereotypes of American Indians. They express pride in being American Indian and interest in their culture and language. However, they do use common stereotypes to outwardly express their identity to the mainstream. The evidence suggests that the teens do not buy into the stereotypical images and ideas of American Indians, but use the images to reflect back to outsiders that they are American Indian in a way that is recognizable to most Americans. One example is of the use of the Cleveland Indians gear as a way of identifying as American Indian. Much like Hollands, I do not believe that the teens have been "lost to the seductive power of the western capitalist popular cultural media machine" (2001:6.6). They still actively seek pop cultural references that they can relate to and seek out ways to express themselves as American Indians. The interest in the *Twilight* series is heightened by the inclusion of an American Indian character. They join the rubber bracelet craze but wear ones that express their "Native Pride".

My data and Holland's do not support the theoretical idea for a hegemonic cultural consumption, but instead a more nuanced and strategic use of popular culture. Their use includes a broad interest in pop culture, but also a keen interest in American

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Indians in pop culture. The teens do not take wholesale the popular cultural world. Instead, they artfully mix popular representations of American Indians with other pop cultural interests and traditional ideas to create a bricolage of an American Indian Identity. The spread of NDN hip hop with its sampling of traditional American Indian instruments and sounds and the inclusion of contemporary hip-hop beats and lyrics about reservation life and American Indian pride is one way that American Indian teens blend cultures.

The teens struggle against stereotypical ideas and images of American Indians and work to educate outsiders about American Indian issues. Expressing an American Indian identity is a political action for the teens. They may not work in the typical political arenas but wage a daily battle to be recognized as an American Indian and to clear up misconceptions about American Indians. The teens have had to struggle with ignorance in the schools, the media and in everyday life. Tara told us a story about her history class that was covering the story of Pocahontas. The teacher asked the students what they knew about Pocahontas. Most of the students' answers were inaccurate and the teacher suspected that the students' information was coming from the Disney movie. It turned out that most of the students believed the Disney story to be historically accurate. Tara jumped in and said that Disney was telling the white version of the story and ignored what American Indians knew of the story. Her teacher then decided to challenge the class to a debate; one side would argue the accuracy of Disney the other would challenge Disney's portrayal. Tara came to AIYP frustrated and angry. Why did they have to debate the Disney version when she already knew it was historically inaccurate?

Why was she being asked to prove that Disney had not produced an accurate portrayal of Pocahontas's life? One of the full-time mentors sat down with Tara and began discussing the historical inaccuracies of the movie. Tara's frustration stems from the stereotypical portrayal of an important historical figure.

The teens have also expressed a political approach to the media by criticizing representations of American Indians. During the 2004, Grammy Awards " OutKast performed their hit "Hey Ya" against a backdrop of a futuristic Indian teepee. Singer Andre "3000" "Benjamin came out in a headdress accompanied by scantily clad dancers with feathers in their hair. These may have been costumes to OutKast and the producers of the show, but to American Indians they were the latest in a long line of insults, caricatures drawn from history" (Indian Country Today commentary 2004). This quote illustrates the sentiment of many American Indians and came out a few days after the event. The teens expressed similar disappointment and disgust. The AIYP meeting after the Grammys was abuzz with talk about the performance. A few of the teens had not seen the show so other teens described the performance. "They were dressed up like Indians with buckskin and feathers and a teepee. The women were half dressed and he was wearing a headdress and doing a Pow Wow type dance." "It was so stupid." "I liked Outkast but that sucked." "You know Andre 3000 is part American Indian." "Well he should have known better than." "He looked stupid." Overall, the teens thought he was perpetuating negative stereotypes and appropriating American Indian culture as a costume for his show. The teens resisted and protested the images presented by Andre 3000 even though many of the teens admitted to being fans. They recognized the

stereotype as damaging and voiced their frustration with being represented so insensitively.

In everyday life, the teens have had a number of encounters where they have had to justify or explain themselves as American Indians. The politics of identity is often a daily affair for the teens. The teens challenge stereotypes of American Indians, sometimes by using stereotypes like the Cleveland Indians mascot to self-identify as American Indian to outsiders. One young girl had written "Savage Pride" on her hand. She was attempting to reappropriate a pejorative word and a stereotypical idea of American Indians. By taking pride in the word savage, she was taking the power of the word away from others.

The teens at AIYP are not passive consumers of pop culture but use culture to express their own identity and their own ideas. They actively seek out American Indian culture through pop culture means, whether this is NDN hip-hop or Pow Wow dances on YouTube. The way in which the teens use pop culture helps to reinforce their own identities as American Indian. While they may wear the "urban uniform," they do so with American Indian slogans and symbols. The teens tend to appropriate stereotypical images of American Indians to express to unknowledgeable outsiders that they are in fact American Indians. The use of the Cleveland Indians jersey tells everyone "I am an American Indian." Reception theory's idea, that the audiences is active consumers of pop culture and uses it for their own purposes and make their own meanings from it, fits with the way the teens are consuming pop culture.

**Conclusion**

Popular culture tends to be the vehicle where many Americans learn about American Indians and happens to be one of the tools that teens use to express themselves as American Indians. It is both a hurtful and helpful entity in the teens' lives. It is hurtful in that pop culture tends to replicate stereotypes and negative images and helpful in that teens can find ways to use pop culture to represent themselves as American Indians to others. Since popular culture continues to portray American Indians in stereotypical ways we can see that pop culture presents a hegemonic image of American Indians, but the AIYP teens do not passively accept these ideas, and images and instead adopt what they find useful, retool some of the ideas and reject what is not useful to them. So while the Cleveland Indian logo is a caricature and stereotype of American Indians, at least two of the teen boys used the symbol as a way to externally identify as American Indian. While rap/hip-hop is the popular genre of music the AIYP teens are plugged in to local American Indian rap. They take the genre of rap and make it their own, American Indian rap.

Pop culture produces an image of American Indian with which most American Indians do not identify. In a sense, pop culture has made many American Indians invisible to our society. The historical image of American Indians that is so often presented gives Americans inaccurate ideas of who is an American Indian. Pop cultures' depiction of American Indians is nothing like contemporary American Indians. Yet as teens, it is difficult to remove oneself from the world of pop culture. American society is saturated by it. The teens have learned to maneuver in a world full of negative images,

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ideas and stereotypes of American Indians. They seek out those aspects of pop culture that allow them to express themselves as American Indians.

Pop cultural ideas of American Indians make establishing a modern American Indian identity difficult. Racial identities can be self selected but also require outside recognition. Most Americans are unfamiliar with American Indians and their culture, which can inhibit the expression of an American Indian identity. Most Americans get their knowledge of American Indians from popular culture and popular culture portrays the culture of the American Indian plains. The plains culture depicted as beads and feathers, bison and horses, warriors and Indian princess limits the ability of most Americans to recognize real American Indians and their culture.

For the AIYP teens, pop cultures' emphasis on plains culture and American Indian identity is less problematic than it would be for American Indians of the Pacific and Southwest. As part of the plains culture, pop cultural representations are often similar to cultural expressions they see in their own community. Pop culture in a way aids the teens in expressing an American Indian identity. The American Indian identity is already plains centered which matches with their own cultural traditions and pop cultural representations of Indians are commonly pan-Indian. Because Americans are more familiar with the pan-Indian pop culture representations, the teen's expression of an American Indian identity is more likely to be supported and recognized by the public.

"It is ironic that the 20th century drive toward urbanization that aimed at eradicating tribalism and sovereignty and forcing assimilation, actually served to help Indians strengthen tribal sovereignty and redefine modern tribalism. Tribalism has generally been described as "morals, beliefs, and identity with a tribe or socio-political organization, families, clans or related groups that share a common ancestry."

Modern tribalism however, has been expanded to include members of groups other than familial relatives that share commonalities. In the urban setting, this includes the association of "Pan-Indians" - citizens of many different tribal nations - who also congregate as members of the urban Indian community as a whole." King 2005.

## Chapter Seven: Assimilation or Boundary expansion? Are They Apples[20] or NDN's?

In the previous chapters, I have explored the ways in which the AIYP teens create and express an American Indian identity. I have discussed the ways that popular culture, the urban environment and pan-ethnic identity interact with the expressions of being an American Indian. The question then becomes is their expression of American Indian identity a form of assimilation or a broadening of the boundaries that define American Indian. Does using a pan-ethnic identity detract or take away from their ethnic identities? Does the presence and use of pop culture and the city Americanize the teens or allow them to communicate their identity to outsiders? In other words, are these teens "Indian" enough?

American Indians have suffered from various forms of forced assimilation such as, boarding schools, criminalization of their religion and the allotment act (which transferred land title from the tribe to the government to hold in trust for individuals). It is then important to ask if the AIYP teens are an example of a group of assimilated American Indians. Have the AIYP teens been incorporated into mainstream American culture and lost their American Indian Identity? Assimilation assumes that immigrants would give up their culture and identity and become more Americanized (Golsh-Boza

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[20] This is an insult that implies that an American Indian is "red" on the outside but "white" on the inside.

2006). To assimilate one must break ties with their ethnic group and embrace mainstream American values, beliefs and customs. For many politicians and social activists assimilation is a good thing. It is the glue that keeps the country together. It was this belief that lead to forced assimilation of American Indians and the outlaw of their religions, the forced attendance to boarding schools and tribal termination. Despite all these forces, many maintained and maintain an American Indian identity. Yet, identities are not static and change with the course of history. I am studying the ways in which American Indians have kept and work to keep their ethnic identity in the context of this history of assimilation policies and norms.

**Assimilation**

Assimilation is a concept that has been defined and debated in a number of ways. What it means to be assimilated, who could be assimilated and how one becomes assimilated were all researched in the search for what it means to be an American. There are arguments about cultural versus structural assimilation. Cultural assimilation, Gans argues, was and is unavoidable due to the proliferation of mass media, while structural assimilation is where individuals and groups might struggle (1997). Gans defines structural assimilation as the process of "newcomers' move[ing] out of formal and informal ethnic associations and other social institutions into the nonethnic equivalents accessible to them in that same host society" (1997: 877). Or as Gordon states more directly "Structural assimilation," on the other hand, refers to the entrance of the immigrants and their descendants into the social cliques, organizations, institutional activities, and general civic life of the receiving society" (1961:279). This definition

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concentrates on the ability of ethnic groups to garner goods and services, become members of organizations and the general acceptance in society, which asks us not to look at what cultural traits, values or activities an immigrant group has adopted but at how the host society accepts the new group. In this definition, the burden is not placed on the immigrant groups' adoption of new culture or values but allows that groups may adopt new cultural practices and beliefs while maintaining an ethnic identity. It looks to the integration of that group into mainstream society and the inclusion or exclusion of that group.

In America assimilation into dominate society means assimilation into Anglo-American society. Gordon uses the term "Anglo-conformity" as "a broad term used to cover a variety of viewpoints about assimilation and immigration; they all assume the desirability of maintaining English institutions (as modified by the American Revolution), the English language, and English-oriented cultural as dominant and standard in American life" (Gordon 1961:265). This idea of assimilation leads to the concept of segmented assimilation or that different groups will have differing abilities to assimilate into mainstream America. As Glazer argues, African-Americans were not even considered for the process of assimilation (1993). For the most part assimilation literature does not even bring up the status or idea of American Indians and assimilation. It seems that assimilation is for immigrants. In fact, most of the literature is about European immigrants. Therefore, especially early work on assimilation focused on English language skills, acceptance and exposure to American values and beliefs and religious beliefs. The closer an immigrant group was to Anglo-conformity the more likely they

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would assimilate. Regardless of the groups ability to conform they were judged on their level of assimilation.

Research on segmented assimilation has shown that not all groups fully assimilate for a number of reasons (Glazer, 1993, Portes and Zhou 1993). However, most groups do acculturate to mainstream American culture. Acculturation "refers mainly to the newcomers' adoption of the culture {i.e., behavior patterns, values, rules, symbols etc.) of the host society (or rather an overly homogenized and reified conception of it)" (Gans 1997). Gans argues that acculturation is so wide spread because of the presence of mass media and its ability to transmit American beliefs and values (1997:877). He goes on to say "American culture is a powerfully attractive force for immigrants even when mass media came in the form of silent movies" (1997:877). Imagine the power mass media has now with its proliferation of American lives via Internet, TV, movies, radio and billboards. The idea of acculturation notes that there are levels of assimilation and that while a group may be acculturated it does not necessitate that they are assimilated.

**History of Assimilation in the American Indian community**

Since first contact, there has been cultural sharing between the American Indian Nations and the settlers. It was in 1880's when official policies regarding assimilating American Indians into mainstream white culture began in full. The policies covered everything from converting tribally held land to individuals, education through boarding schools, religious practice, and self-governance (Wilkins 2002). Despite the Governments hard press to assimilate American Indians, tribal relations still held strong and most American Indians still lived on reservations. It was not until World War II created the

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need for workers that American Indians began to move to the cities for opportunities and jobs. By 1953, the Government enacted Public law 280 Urban Relocation Program that set up relocation centers around the US and enticed young men and some families to move to the city with promise of help in finding housing employment and some monetary compensation. (Wilkins 2002) This program changed the face of Indian country as of 1940 only 8% of American Indians lived in the city, as of 2000 over half of all American Indians live in cities (Census 2000). Urbanization of American Indians lead to a rise in acculturation and in some cases assimilation but did not cut off all American Indians with their ethnic heritage. As Nagel points out "The urbanization of American Indians that began full force during and after World War II is probably the single most important factor in the emergence of supratribal "Indian" identity" (1996: 118). Despite the governments determination to fully assimilate American Indians many in the cities found new ways to express an American Indian identity. As Deloria and Lytle point out "It was better in the cities to forego tribal differences in order to gain some kind of identity than simply to disappear or to associate only with people from their own tribe or reservation" (1984:236). Deloria and Lytle do not believe that an American Indian identity is the same or as good as the "tribal Indian" (Deloria and Lytle 1984:235). Many "tribal Indians" such as Thomas Lame Deer feared that a Pan-Indian or American Indian identity would lead to a loss of tribal identity and therefore was not as authentic or important as a tribal identity (Straus and Valentino 2001:85-86).

My own research supports Straus and Valentio's findings that "Indian (Pan-Indian) and tribal identities were and are sequentially and positively related" and in some cases

"Indian identity was the necessary antecedent to, not the death knell of, tribal identity" (2001:93). I agree with Cornell, Nagel and Straus and Valentio that Pan-Indianism does not mean an end to or a replacement of tribal identity but an expansion of American Indian identity. I argue that the AIYP teens in my study while acculturated are not assimilated or assimilating and I will support that argument with evidence from my research.

**Ethnic Boundaries**

If the AIYP teen's expression of an American Indian identity is not a case of assimilation then is it a case of boundary expansion? Are the teens shifting the meaning of American Indian identity to make it more expansive? In order to answer these questions ethnic boundaries must be defined and discussed.

Ethnic boundaries are how we distinguish one group from another. It is about who belongs in the group and who does not based on the group's own ideas (Barth 1969). Ethnic boundaries distinguish who we are and who we are not (Barth 1969). For American Indians there are a number of ways that membership is decided; tribal registration, blood quantum, family membership, cultural competency and community participation. Ethnic boundaries matter because ethnicity is a way to generate and disseminate resources such as scholarships, grants, government funds and social services (Nagel 1996: 124-126). It also determines access to ethnicity based political groups such as the American Indian Movement (AIM). Hostility and segregation often lead to ethnic boundaries. Lamont and Molnar note that boundaries are created through an "us versus them" perspective (2002). Boundaries are created through forces from outside the group,

such as stereotyping and labeling, and a pull from the inside that requires members to conform to group beliefs, ideas and actions. Ethnic boundaries are then created not only by the members themselves but also but non-members separation from the group. Segregation in the economy and housing has historically led to strong ethnic ties (Cornell and Hartmann 1998).

Ethnic boundaries are created and maintained through both external and internal means. These boundaries are not stable and shift and change over time and place. Membership in an ethnic group can become more regulated or more expansive over time. Immigrant groups often must shift what is required of their members as they adjust to a new cultural climate. American Indians, thought not immigrants, have had to adjust to the invasion of their lands by whites and adjust to the new cultural ideas that they brought. Over time, American Indians have been legally and politically defined by the government and have moved off reservations into cities where they are faced with the dominant culture.

If the AIYP teens were expanding the boundaries of what it means to be an American Indian, they would actively discuss and enact differences between "us" and "them". The teens might establish what "counts" as being an American Indian and would note differences between themselves and outsiders. They would also have to be recognized by outsiders as American Indians. They would need to stand out as American Indians to themselves and others. The teens do work to establish an American Indian identity and correct others when they are mistaken for another group. The teens do not always gain recognition as American Indian but they fight to gain that recognition.

**Oppositional culture as rejecting assimilation**

One-way to reject assimilation and establish a boundary as an ethnic other is to create and practice an oppositional identity. The basic idea of oppositional identity is that minority students define themselves in defiance, to what is conceived of as white. Minority groups draw on their own cultural resources to resist oppression (Martinez 1997). This concept is usually applied to teens and used in educational research. In this setting, oppositional identity is understood as minority students who reject mainstream, read white, culture, which upholds school and hard work, and because of barriers to these goals resist schooling. Oppositional identity can be understood as a "coherent set of values, beliefs and practices which mitigates the effects of oppression and reaffirms that which is distinct from the majority culture" (1995:68). Martinez (1997) argues that popular cultural forms, specifically rap music, are a form of oppositional cultural expression. If this is true then YLDP teens use of and interest in rap music may be read as oppositional identity. Their use of pop culture may indicate an orientation to oppositional culture and identity.

**AIYP Teens and Oppositional Identity**

I did not observe students in a school setting and did not gain much access to their academic achievement. What I did observe were teens in an educational setting, in that, they had to complete homework or worksheets for the first hour of every session. During these observation periods, I found that the teens mostly quietly worked on their materials and rarely avoided doing the work. These teens are an exceptional case because they volunteer to come to a program that requires homework and are likely students who have

a positive orientation towards school. Thought the teens may not have an opposition to school they may have an oppositional orientation to "white" culture. If the teens had an oppositional identity, they would note differences between themselves and mainstream white culture. They would work to differentiate themselves from mainstream white culture and they might talk about "whites" as different from themselves. Do the AIYP teens reject "white" culture? Do they work to make themselves distinct from whites? Alternatively, do they focus on learning about their own culture and not focus on an oppositional identity?

**Is it Assimilation or Boundary Expansion or Oppositional Culture?**

**Assimilation**

While some may argue that the AIYP teens are victims of assimilation and have bought into mainstream and even white culture, I argue that the teens may have acculturated but not fully assimilated. First, these teens choose to attend a culturally based tutor/mentoring program. They have many options to occupy their time. Yet, they choose to attend a program that is centered in American Indian culture. While some urban American Indian teens may be more isolated from their culture and in that way more assimilated, which is not the case for the AIYP teens. I have found that each of the teens that attend AIYP has shown an interest in their culture and traditions and has expressed themselves as American Indians. I argue that assimilated teens would not choose to learn more about American Indian culture and that an American Indian identity would not be important to them. The identities of American Indian and specific tribal identity are both relevant and important to the teen's lives. They express these identities

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interchangeably and hold them simultaneously. They are American Indians first even if

they may not be fully versed in their cultural knowledge. They identify tribally when it

makes sense in that situation to do so, when the other is knowledgeable or when

"categorized" incorrectly. I have found that it is extremely important to many of the teens

that others know that they are American Indian and that take great care in correcting

individuals who misidentify them as non-American Indian. One teen was asked to speak

for American Indians when they were studying the Dakota wars of Minnesota. The teen

explained to the teacher that she was Lakota. The teacher did not see the difference as

important and again asked for her opinion. In this case, the teacher was focused on her

identity as an American Indian and did not recognize the distinction of a tribal identity.

Despite numerous social and political attempts to assimilate American Indians,

their culture continues as new generations practice traditions and create new avenues for

expressing their cultural heritage. Nagel argues "postwar growth of the American Indian

ethnic identification… did not occur *in spite* of increasing assimilation processes…

Rather, it, occurred because of it" (1996: 114). The AIYP teens favor an American Indian

identity because it gives them a sense of community and clearly communicates their

identities to the outside world. However, an American Indian identity is not a substitutive

for a tribal identity it is in addition to a tribal identity.

Pop culture is often seen as a threat to indigenous cultures (Spencer 2006). The

spread of American pop culture has especially been seen as a problem. Some argue that

American pop culture replaces youths' interest in their own native culture. For the AIYP

teens, this is not the case. While the teens are fully invested in pop culture, they are also

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fully invested in American Indian culture. When listening to music or watching you tube videos they often switch between pop culture and American Indian culture. They will listen to the latest hip-hop song and then listen to a traditional American Indian composition. They will watch the latest music video and then watch a clip of a Pow Wow dancer. Pop culture does not replace but mingles with American Indian culture. They may not be fully "competent" actors (know all the ceremonies, speak the language, know the stories) but they work to learn more and participate more fully in their culture.

**Ethnic boundaries**

I believe the AIYP teens are renegotiating the boundaries of American Indian identity. They are not creating fixed rigid definitions or ideas of what it means to be an American Indian, but are expanding the forms of expressing an American Indian identity. This fits with Gonzales' finding that "boundaries that define urban Indian communities are far less absolute, continually (re)negotiated and (re)defined through social interaction between members" (2001:173). Through social interaction in the program, the teens support each other's outward expression of American Indian identity. That expression is done whether it is a "Native Pride" pin or an abstract tribal design t-shirt. The teens work to create a sense of "we-ness" and without question accept that teens that attend the program are indeed American Indian. They do not, however, work the other side of boundary maintenance and construct a "they". I believe that because so many of the teens are bi-racial they avoid placing people outside of the category of American Indian. Any discussion of "that is what Whites are like" or "that is how Black people do it" could alienate one of the teens. It is not an exclusive identity that they create it is inclusive. The

teens may be sensitive to establishing fixed and rigid boundaries when they themselves

fit into many categories. Some of the teens may feel that their status as American Indian

is fragile and sometimes challenged by both insiders and outsiders (Valaskakis 2005).

Because of this, I believe that the teens have created an atmosphere where they can just

be American Indians without question or suspicion. In fact, participation in the AIYP

may give them a platform from which they can claim an American Indian identity.

**Oppositional Identity**

Many of the teens do not have a defiant attitude about school or education. For the

most part the teens did not discuss their dislike or the futility of school. While many of

the teens do not aspire to go to college, they do not completely dismiss school. If what I

have seen in the program holds true, most of these teens will graduate. A few will go on

to tech school or vocational programs. While most of the students go to school, come to

the program and do their work, there are those that exhibit some dislike of school. Two

teen girls once talked about how they would like to drop out of school. When asked what

they would do instead they had no answer. Despite this one conversation, both girls came

to the program each week and did their work with minimal complaints. Another girl,

Joanie, once talked about joining Job Corp when she turned sixteen.   Joanie had done

some research about the program and was interested in earning some money and learning

a skill. Joanie often resisted doing the worksheets that were provided to her. Yet, when

she sat down and worked with a tutor one-on-one she accomplished pages of work

without complaint. Is Joanie lacking motivation or is the school failing to motivate her?

Oppositional identity occurs because of these types of breakdowns in the educational

system. The teens are aware that teachers and curriculum ignores or misunderstands American Indians or their culture. As discussed in Chapter six, Martina was once faced with leading the debate against Disney's version of the Pocahontas story. She felt it was unfair to be asked to speak for American Indians and upset that a Disney story would be treated as a legitimate way to frame the debate. Other teens agreed that they hated to be called on to "speak for their people".  And while this may seem to be an example of oppositional identity Lundy points out that in this case black students are "rejecting educational success or are they rejecting the marginalization of their group and their culture" (2003:460). I believe the marginalization of their culture leads to negative views of particular assignments and classes but does not lead to a general belief that doing well in school is acting white or making them less American Indian.

## Expanding the Boundaries

This is not a case of assimilation. In fact, this is a case of agency. The teens work hard to create an American Indian identity and do so with the tools available to them. Gans's states "any mode of expressing ethnic identity is valid as long as it enhances the feeling of being ethnic" (1979: 204). There is no doubt that the AIYP teens take their American Indian identity seriously and that it has meaning for them. As Cornell points out "Indians in cities were being integrated (not assimilated) as individuals (not tribes) into a new set…of relationships" (1988:136).

In constructing the racial boundaries, the AIYP teens do not rely on an in-group versus out-group orientation. Herring, Jankowski and Brown found that "the cultural milieu in which individuals learn the meaning and value of the group may be more

causative in identity formation than are negative experiences with the out group" (1999:379). The teens focus on what they learn at the AIYP and from their families, relatives and other American Indian organizations to construct an American Indian identity. They do not seek to differentiate themselves from outsiders but to become more fully a part of their own culture. In this way boundary, work is more about inclusion and working to be a stronger member than to exclude others.

They teens rarely even make tribal distinctions. I have only over heard a few conversations about what tribe/reservation/clan a teen was and this mostly came from staff. These types of questions seemed either unimportant or touchy as some of the teens knew a lot about their family background while others know very little.

For the AIYP teens, their identity as American Indian is at times invisible, fragile and contested. At the AIYP, they have created an identity that is not questioned but constructed through everyday actions, exchanges and material goods. They support each other when they express an American Indian identity whether that is wearing a cool skull with headdress t-shirt, debating the depiction of Pocahontas in popular culture or arguing for Taylor Lautner (assumed American Indian teen) as the next action hero. The teens have taken their own twist on what it means to be American Indian but have not turned their back on traditional culture. One evening the teens were told to start eating but we had not done the spirit plate. A young shy boy named Andy shook his Bieber cut hair and said "what about the spirit plate?" "We have to do that first". The staff called for volunteers but no one likes to get up and talk in front of everyone. Eventually Andy said he would do it so that it would be done.

**Synopsis of Pan-Ethnic Identity, Urban Environment and Popular Culture**

The teens are into the latest pop culture but also find ways to pull that pop culture into their own ideas of what it means to be American Indian. They will cheer for Jacob in the *Twilight* series and listen to NDN hip-hop. At the same time, they will listen to traditional Pow Wow music and work to learn their language. It is important to the teens to learn more about their culture. They may not all be "competent" cultural actors but they are young and they are learning. It is important to note again that these teen are self-selected they choose to attend a program that promotes their culture and this means they have a strong prior orientation to their history and culture. However, teens have many ways they can spend their time and many ways to learn about their culture. I think they choose to come the AIYP because they are a part of a cultural group that gives them access to knowledge and practices that then allow them to assert their identity as American Indians.

The move to the city was a cultural shift for many American Indians. It was urban problems and issues that prompted the creation of AIM and other American Indian organizations and service. Through these services and organization a Pan-ethnic identity of American Indian took root. In coming together across tribal boundaries, American Indians were able to find community and political voice, which they used to fight for their rights. This pan-ethnic identity was useful in the multi-cultural city where individuals have to make instantaneous decisions about individuals they meet on the street. Being an Indian versus being Dakota is an easier identity to recognize. Through the growth of American Indians in the city and the new pan-ethnic identity the teens at the AIYP have taken this constructed social category and express it through the medium

of pop culture. As teens pop culture is an important form of entertainment and social identity. Through stereotypical images of American Indians pop culture has continued to define American Indians as stoic warriors and lazy deviants. But pop culture is not monolithic and has presented some of American Indian people's own work, thoughts and ideas. The teens pick and choose elements of pop culture that reflects American Indian culture and use it as a means to express their identity. The teens sometimes take stereotypes and use them to acknowledge the existence of American Indians in the city. Because the teens live in an urban center that has a historically created community of American Indians it is not surprising that they would model their own identities from those who came before. Nevertheless, they do not limit themselves to traditional ways of expressing an American Indian identity. They seek out ways to fit into the broader culture while at the same time making sure to distinguish themselves as American Indians. The teens care about traditional culture and it is important in their lives, but not necessarily in their daily life. In their daily life pop culture helps them to establish an identity and the identity they want to establish is "I am an American Indian".

The expression of a racial identity is indeed a personal action, but if others do not believe that identity is legitimate then the individual will struggle for recognition. In my time with the teens, I witnessed a number of incidents and listened to a number of stories where the teens struggled and fought to be recognized as an American Indian. In these fights, the teens sometimes used stereotypes presented in pop culture to reach their audience. The most graphic was when Jen came to the program with the word "savage" written on the back of her hand in sharpie. An appropriation of a negative slur used to

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insult American Indians, Jen showed that she was American Indian and proud of it. Other examples are of mistaken racial identity and the quick and defiant response that they were in fact "Indian". It is obviously important to many of the teens to be recognized as American Indian. The fact that they attend an American Indian cultural group shows that they see themselves as being American Indian but it is still important to show others that they are proud to be American Indian even if that means using stereotypical images, ideas and expressions to gain the appropriate understanding.

**Contributions to the Discipline**

As a qualitative case study, I cannot generalize to other populations, but this does not mean that the research is unimportant. Taking a close and in-depth look at the social construction of race is an important project for understanding how and in what ways race is constructed. It also gives us insight into why race is still an important social category despite the social stratification that comes with the racial system. A more detailed look at how race is enacted in the everyday world allows us to understand how and where race becomes salient. The AIYP teens actively construct an American Indian identity. It is important to know how they construct their identity and when and where it is necessary to establish their racial identity. There have been many studies on racial identity and my work gives us insight into how another group performs race (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991, Nagel 1995, Omi and Winant 1994, Park 1950, Waters 1990). It challenges ideas that claim race does not matter or that race is less important in today's world. I have found that race is central to the AIYP teen's identity. I have also gained insight into how youth construct racial identities. There has been little focus on youth in the social

construction of race. Assimilation theory points out that youth are the ones most likely to turn their backs on their culture and become more mainstream American. My research shows this is not always the case. Despite the numerous attempts by the US government to eliminate or at least reduce American Indian culture, it remains an important source of identity for the next generation.

The exploration of the everyday world is an important part of sociological study. It allows us to take our theories and explore how social constructed categories such as race, class and gender actually work in the real world. It is not enough to theorize or speculate about how these things work but is important to test them out in action. It is important to learn how many micro acts lead to an important macro category. A micro look at race gives us people's understandings and constructions of this larger macro institution. While we often focus on the institution of race we less often focus on peoples expressions of race.

**Where to next?**

This research lends itself to many further research questions some of which I plan to explore further. I looked at a small self-selected group of American Indian teens. I would like to expand my research to a large High School with and study American Indian teens who do not necessarily participate in a culturally based after school program. Are the AIYP teens unique in their expressions of racial identity? Alternatively, do other American Indian teens express their identity in similar ways? Are there multiple expressions of American Indian identity or is there one unified identity?

I would also like to expand the research to other youth racial groups. How do other minority teens create a racial identity? How does the presence of other minority groups affect the construction of racial identities? Do racial interactions affect racial identities? How important is race to these teens? Do different racial groups express race differently. A high school setting would be very useful for gaining a deeper insight into youth racial identity.

Another avenue would be to do a comparative piece to the work I have already done. It would be interesting to see how teens on a reservation enact their racial identity. Do teens on the reservation express their race similar to the urban AIYP teens? How and in what way do the reservation teens differ from their urban counterparts? What impact does living on a reservation have on the teen's racial identity? Are reservations teens more likely to express an ethnic (tribally based) identity? I believe that living in a community where almost everyone is from the same band would affect the type of identity the teens express. It might not be so necessary for them to use outward expressions of identity as they are known by their community and recognized as American Indian. Yet pop culture now flows all around the world and influences the AIYP teens version of an American Indian identity maybe it has a similar influence on the reservation.

This work would also be useful in other cities. I believe that in other parts of the country we would find differing results. The number of American Indians in an area, whether there are reservations present in the area, the presence of American Indian organizations and services will all impact how and in what ways a community develops

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an American Indian identity or if they express a more tribally based ethnic identity. While there have been studies of American Indians in several cities they do not always focus on how and in what ways an American Indian identity has been created. In addition, few have concentrated on how teens express their identity as American Indians.

In the end, this is a story of urban American Indian teens expressing their version of an American Indian identity. Of teens being NDN and not of teens buying into the mainstream culture and becoming assimilated apples (red on the outside, white on the inside).

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