

**DIABETES AND GLIMPSES OF A 21ST CENTURY EEYOU (CREE)
CULTURE: LOCAL PERSPECTIVES ON DIET, BODY WEIGHT,
PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND 'BEING' EEYOU AMONG AN EEYOU
YOUTH POPULATION OF THE EEYOU (CREE) NATION OF WEMINDJI,
QUEBEC.**

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ABSTRACT

The Eeyou (Cree) populations of Northern Quebec are not unfamiliar with disease. During the last two centuries, Eeyou communities have experienced epidemics with high rates of morbidity due to infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, whooping cough and measles. In the last three decades, Eeyou and non-Eeyou medical experts have observed the recent emergence of Type 2 diabetes mellitus among Eeyou populations. Excessive body weight, changing diets, and sedentary lifestyle concomitant with historical, political, social, and economic changes are believed linked to the illness. In Eeyou Istchee (people's land), the availability and increasing, daily consumption of certain types of "whiteman" food is deemed a major factor leading to high sugar and cholesterol levels. While "whiteman" foods are popular sources of daily diet, this fact poses potentially dangerous health risks for current, Eeyou youth generations. On another level, "Eeyou" foods (wild game) promote an individual and collective sense of health, balance, identity and history of experiencing, maintaining, and integrating Eeyou traditional hunting culture within contemporary non-Eeyou culture.

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GLOSSARY

Eeyou: A person, neither referring to male or female; but a person living in Eeyou Istchee. Also used to define other aboriginals or First Nation people.

Eeyou Istchee: Literally “the people’s land” and the “bush” (local environments outside of the community) that Eeyou people utilize for hunting, fishing and trapping.

Whiteman: Refers to a “white” person male or female. From an Eeyou perspective extends to those person(s), entity(s) (Hydro Quebec, Church) institution(s) (Government, residential school) or food(s) (French fries, processed canned foods, milk, butter, etc) that are not from Eeyou Istchee and represents all that is “southern” and “authoritative” in orientation.

“South or Southern”: In literal terms understood as one of the four directions that geese may fly towards; that the wind blows from or that one will travel. Symbolically, and in lay terms, also refers to some spatial reference real or imagined that represents the “whiteman” who is located in distant “southern” or “south” cities, towns or regions. Val’dor, Ottawa and Montreal are “south.”

Biculturalism: Of, relating to, or including two distinct cultures.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Eeyou (Cree) Nation of Wemindji is one of 10 Eeyou communities in Northern Quebec (see Appendix A). It is believed that Eeyou peoples are descendants from ancient hunting peoples who have probably been living in this region for at least 9,000 years (Grand Council of Crees¹ 2002). Since the 17th century, Eeyou peoples have been in a variety of “pre-post contact” relationships with English fur traders, whalers and French Jesuits including the arrival of Anglican missionaries in the 19th century (ca.1850). Eeyou groups have experienced, accommodated and participated in numerous non-Eeyou social, cultural, economic (fur trade) and religious activities over the span of 300 years (Francis and Morantz 1983). However, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Eeyou communities faced different economic and political challenges due to Subarctic resource development including logging, mining and hydro-electric development. Within these societal processes and at various eras of “post-contact”, it is thought that epidemic diseases such as influenza, gastroenteritis, measles, typhoid and tuberculosis became prevalent (GCC 2002; Preston 2000). In more recent decades (last 30 years), Eeyou communities have experienced the emergence of new, chronic diseases such as Type 2 diabetes mellitus (GCC 2002).

The study presented here is the result of qualitative research on Type 2 diabetes mellitus conducted during the fall of 2004 in the Eeyou (Cree) Nation of

Wemindji, Quebec. The study articulates the current social and cultural expression of Eeyou youth populations of the Eeyou (Cree) Nation of Wemindji², Northern Quebec. As minimal research exists for this group, this research study offers some basic understandings of youth attitudes, beliefs and behaviors concerning ‘body weight’, ‘body image’, ‘physical activity’, and contemporary Eeyou (Cree) identity issues associated with Eeyou/non-Eeyou foods and lifestyle.

In Wemindji, the number of people with known diabetes is 65, out of a total population of 1,200. The population over the age of 15 is 767 and the percentage of the population over the age of 15 with known diabetes is 8.5% (Eeyou (Cree) Nation of Wemindji; 2001). Diabetes prevalence varies by age group, however, becoming more prevalent in older adults. Thus, the percentage of the population with diabetes ranges from 0.7% in the 10-29 age group, to 9.5% in the 30-49 year old group, 23.0% in the 50-69 year old group, and 21.2% in the relatively small 70+ age group. According to one community nurse, the individuals in Wemindji who have type 2 diabetes mellitus are generally over 30 years of age, less active and overweight, and diabetes in the community most commonly takes the form of gestational diabetes in pregnant women (Blackned 2005). Despite this, contemporary Eeyou like the Wemindji youth have been recognized as critical, local-

¹ From this point forward, the Grand Council of Crees will be referred to as the GCC.

² The Eeyou (Cree) Nation of Wemindji is a coastal community situated along the Maquatua River that empties into the eastern shore of James Bay, Northern Quebec and has a population of 1,200. The majority of the population in Eeyou Istchee (People’s Land) reflects fast growing young and middle age groups (Appendix B) that are expected to top 25,000 by the year 2028 (Appendix C).

community populations at risk for developing Type 2 diabetes mellitus by the onset of adulthood (24-34 yrs) (Dannenbaum 2004; Robinson 2003; Craik 2004).

Type 2 non-insulin dependent diabetes mellitus (NIDDM) worldwide, has become recognized by the World Health Organization as a problem of epidemic proportions (PAHO 2002). While Type 2 diabetes mellitus is prevalent amongst non-indigenous peoples, the consistently higher rates of incidence for indigenous populations such as the Maori of New Zealand, Ojibwa of Sandy Lake, Canada and the Pima Indians of Arizona, United States has perplexed health specialists and public health personnel (Mercer 2001; Waldram, Herring and Young 1995).

Historically, indigenous populations worldwide who have lived in hunter-gatherer societies closely tied to unique land and animal relationships have in the last two centuries experienced rapid transition from hunting and gathering subsistence to wage economies as a result of global social, cultural, economic and political influences (Abonyi 2001; Atkinson-Bobbish 1990; Brassard 1991; Young 1988). Consequently, for many indigenous groups, profound changes have occurred in their social and political organization, cultural lifestyles, hunting practices, traditional diets, spiritual-religious beliefs, physiology, cultural identity and retention of languages.

In the Canadian political context, government-supported northern resource development has often marginalized and subordinated many Canadian aboriginal groups such as the Eeyou Nations (Cree) of Northern Quebec (Coon-Come 2004;

Craik 2004; Fisher 1999). In Eeyou Istchee, obligations for government housing, education and health administration arising from signed agreements (such as the JBNQA³) have been neglected over the years. Concomitantly, slow funding processes have constrained Eeyou communities in terms of adequate housing, quality living conditions, meaningful employment opportunities, full access to health care and chronic illness prevention (Morantz 2002; Moses 2003; Niezen 1998).

The Eeyou Nations of Northern Quebec are not unfamiliar with disease. During the last two centuries, certain Eeyou communities have experienced illnesses and epidemics from such infectious diseases as tuberculosis, whooping cough, and measles (Louttit, A 2002; Scanlon 1976). In the last three decades, nutritionists and the medical scholars from the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay (CBHSSJB) staff have associated excessive body weight with new eating behaviors, community lifestyle change and increased consumption of “white food⁴.” These are considered to be the prime factors for the emergence of Type 2 diabetes mellitus as a new health phenomenon in Eeyou Istchee (Willows 2003; Robinson 2003; Linton 2004).

While medical research and knowledge construction is developing concerning the epidemiological, dietary, and physiological nature of Type 2 diabetes

³ The James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (1975) included the GCC and the Northern Quebec Inuit Association that contained 30 sections to deal with compensation procedures and funding agreements for health, education, employment and housing (GCC 2002).

⁴ “White food” refers to diet that is not considered Eeyou food such as French fries, fried chicken, hamburgers, hot dogs, beef, and other processed or canned products. Moreover, these food products are associated with originating from the “south” (large, urban cities) and being “whiteman” in orientation and identity.

mellitus among Eeyou adult male and female populations, minimal anthropological, qualitative research has been devoted to youth. Therefore, the main objective of this research study was to conduct ethnographic research in order to provide a “glimpse” of contemporary youth in one Eeyou community – Wemindji, Quebec. Initially, it is hoped that the ethnographic research and the story it tells will contribute to improving communication and understanding between youth, parents, Elders and Band Council members at the Wemindji community level.

In a larger context, this research study will contribute to the corpus of health and anthropological literature that may be useful to academics and students. In addition, this study should be of interest to government policy-makers at Health Canada, leadership at the GCC and Cree Regional Authority (CRA), medical staff at the CBHSSJB, and other Provincial First Nation Health Units experiencing, investigating, and desiring more information on similar aboriginal health issues.

Lastly, this study is about Wemindji youth perspectives of themselves in their world within health and diabetes discourse as the backdrop in the years 2004-05. Since this study surveys and interviews a group of Secondary 3, 4 and 5 students at the local elementary/high school and various adult professionals in Wemindji, its aim is to be educational and holistic in many aspects. As such, it will contribute to the education literature and should be of interest to the Eeyou (Cree) School Board⁵

⁵ The Eeyou (Cree) School Board has full jurisdiction and responsibility for education within the Category-I and Category-II lands of all Eeyou communities in Eeyou Istchee.

administrators, principals, vice-principals, teachers, teacher's aides, and curriculum developers who create school programming for the Eeyou (Cree) Nation of Wemindji. Moreover, on a macro level, this study should be of interest to the Ministry of Education (Quebec) that develops education policies that affect Eeyou Istchee community school systems in the curriculum content and guidelines they must adhere to.

Diabetes and Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus⁶: Diabetes Among Aboriginal Peoples

Diabetes is not a single disease, but a heterogeneous group of disorders associated over the long term with a complex of secondary complications⁷ as the result of one common feature: abnormally high levels of sugar or glucose in the blood stream (Brassard 1991: 5). In 1875, diabetes interest emerged from the work of Parisian physician Apollinaire Bouchardat, who recognized two forms that existed in humans that eventually became known as “type 1” and “type 2.” In 1921, the clinical practice of measuring blood sugar or blood glucose level developed into a

⁶ Diabetes mellitus comprises a group of metabolic disorders whose collective outcome is a condition of hyperglycemia or high blood sugar or glucose levels (Abonyi 2001). Type 2 diabetes mellitus is the condition in which the beta cells of the pancreas are normal and produce adequate insulin. While the insulin is present in the blood system, receptor cells are abnormal and cannot absorb the blood sugar/glucose and therefore starve body cells of valuable energy (Bogardus 1987).

⁷ Secondary complications refer to heart disease leading to heart attacks, stroke, high blood pressure, and other macro vascular (various organ dysfunction) complications leading to nephropathy (kidney failure), impaired nerve conduction, retinopathy (inflammation of the retina) leading to vision loss and blindness, risk of foot ulcers and amputation, autonomic neuropathy (degeneration of autonomic nervous system) resulting in gastrointestinal, genitourinary, and cardiovascular symptoms as well as impotence and depression (Health Canada 2000; Abonyi 2001).

systematic procedure, and eventually the discovery and isolation of insulin⁸ to reduce hyperglycemia⁹ (Banting 1921). Over the last 80 years, Type 2 diabetes mellitus has emerged as a significant chronic disease among indigenous groups that was virtually non-existent in aboriginal communities before the 1940s (Smith 2004). As such, the appearance of diabetes research about North and South American aboriginal groups in the last three decades has produced a vast literature from geneticists, medical researchers, and social scientists.

One of the objectives of this research is an increasing interest in developing epidemiological theory on the interplay between genetic endowment, prehistoric gene adaptation, gene mutation and expression of maladaptive factors among indigenous populations (Savage, Bennett, Senter, Miller 1979; Young, McIntyre, Dooley and Rodriguez 1985; Ritenbough and Goodby 1998; Sellers, Triggs-Raine, Rockman-Greenberg and Dean 2002). Some scholars, such as Tuhiwasi-Smith (1999), argue that such epidemiological research and literature is often biased. It is indicative of a biomedical, scientific ideology that “hints” of evolutionary-biological notions by scholars who endeavor to isolate genetic solutions to Western diseases among indigenous groups. In this context, the current biomedical approach is seen as an ongoing extension of 300 years of medical and biological knowledge rooted in

⁸ Insulin is a hormone created in the pancreas that allows the metabolism of carbohydrates, proteins and lipids. These energy sources are converted into glucose by the process of metabolism during digestion. The glucose in turn becomes the “fuel” that is distributed into the bloodstream where the body’s cells can use it for energy. The transfer of glucose into cells is carried out by insulin that the pancreas produces. However, defects in either or both processes of insulin secretion or insulin receptor action results in high blood sugar/glucose levels characteristic of diabetes mellitus (Abonyi 2001).

17th century European conceptions of cell structure and chemical functions of the human body (McKeown 1978: 6-1), which tends to under-emphasize the social origin of disease.

Similarly, a sample of American and Canadian literature on Type 2 diabetes mellitus suggests that research knowledge is generally constructed from such genetic and adaptationist models of diabetes etiology. For instance, African American, Mexican American, Hispanic American, and Canadian Ojibwa research often cite factors such as genetic predisposition, obesity, high carbohydrate and fat intake, age, body fat distribution, generalized ethnic group characteristics, gene mutation, and insulin resistance against which epidemiological transition and adaptation models are discussed (Young, McIntyre, Dooley, and Rodriguez 1985; Brown 1998; Sellers, Triggs-Raine, Rockman-Greenberg, and Dean 2002; Haffner, 1998; Campagna-Fagot, 2000; Campagna-Fagot, Pettitt, Englegau, Burrows-Rios, Geiss Linda, Valdez, Beckles, Saadine, Greggs, Williamson, and Narayam 2000). Such adaptationist models fail to take into account the social and cultural context of disease patterns among various populations.

In recent theorizing vis-à-vis the historical, cultural and epidemiological nature of Type 2 diabetes mellitus in North and South American Aboriginal populations, the main point of contestation is thus between understanding diabetes from an autonomous, scientific-biomedical perspective or a much broader socio-

⁹ Hyperglycemia refers to the abnormal condition of high blood sugar or glucose levels in the blood stream.

cultural-historical context perspective. James V. Neel's (1962, 1999) popular "thrifty genotype theory" posits that an adaptive gene utilized for storing fat energy during historical periods of famine is contemporarily maladaptive and represents the main risk for Type 2 diabetes mellitus among current populations that were formerly hunter-gatherers. On the other hand, a socio-cultural perspective argues that this adaptationist ("thrifty genotype theory") perspective ignores important social, cultural, historical and psychological contexts. Moreover, factors such as group history, poverty, socio-economic status, and world-view explain more about how body weight, eating habits, physical activity, cultural belief, and identity affect the emergence of chronic disease (Loustaunau and Sobo 1997).

The socio-cultural-historical perspective asserts that no single fundamental biochemical basis for Type 2 diabetes mellitus completely explains this chronic disease (Urdaneta and Krehbiel 1989; Hegele 1999; Bennett 1999). Instead, what is called for is an etiology of diabetes and secondary complications that examines all determinants such as *historical factors* (colonialism, assimilation policy, missionary activity), *environmental factors* (geese migration changes, animal depletion, processed foods), *socio-economic status* (poverty, unemployment, housing conditions), *socio-cultural meanings* (perceptions of "whiteman" disease, indigenous medicine and community healing concepts) and *socio-psychological conditions* (alcoholism, family violence, suicide, depression) (Loustaunau and Sobo 1997; Waldram, Herring, and Young 1995). Particularly, the importance of understanding cultural-spiritual beliefs and perceived

constraints on everyday life that impact directly on the individual in Aboriginal societies simply cannot be overlooked.

From the perspective of other researchers, genetic and biomedical research remains controversial, problematic, and incomplete. It also perpetuates categories or terms that inadvertently stereotype cultural groups, bias medical knowledge, and lead to overgeneralization of conclusions (Geiger 2001: 4). For example, Szathmary (1990) has claimed that critical or diagnostic glucose level should not be taken to be uniform across populations, including aboriginal groups. She argues there has been a good deal of false diagnosis in the Canadian north, where a higher level may be acceptable. Moreover, according to medical anthropologists, current diabetes research about Type 2 diabetes mellitus tends to “lump” together all Canadian Aboriginal groups under one “umbrella” that typically treats them as a single unit rather than seeking a better understanding of diverse, local, culture-specific groups (Waldram, Herring, and Young 1995). Similarly, it has been argued that “application error” can occur from time pressure and the complexity of chronic disease that promotes inappropriate application of epidemiological data to an entire group (Geiger 2001: 4).

Bias among health care professionals is also an issue that can limit medical understandings of the context of chronic disease in aboriginal communities. Physicians, health care workers and patients are the ‘contested sites’ at which communication between these parties is either inhibited or bridged (Geiger 2001;

Ellerby, McKenzie, McKay, Garipey, and Kaufert 2000). Moreover, physicians and health care workers, it is argued, are not simply “empty jars” into which new, cultural knowledge and attitudes are just poured (Geiger 2001: 4). Largely, medical professionals continue to be reared in two cultures: mainstream society and the professional medical discipline (Geiger 2001: 5). Physicians, health care workers and medical researchers must recognize that a certain degree of bias and historical images of indigenous groups may already be present in the social orders and ideology of mainstream society (Young 1988: 660). Likewise, the ‘culture of medicine’ itself is informed and reproduced by its own system of values, assumptions and understandings of the content studied, the framework(s) used and the type of action(s) taken (Geiger 2001: 5).

In Wemindji, during an interview session with a non-Eeyou health professional, I was disturbed to learn of the individual’s many negative assumptions and attitudes about Eeyou history and the society of Wemindji. As an anthropological Eeyou researcher whose discipline requires sensitivity to local culture, it was extremely difficult for me to remain silent during ethnocentric comments that described Wemindji Eeyou as wasters of energy and no longer attuned to the land. My opinion was that the health professional did not recognize the value of understanding the local culture’s historical, social, cultural, religious and contemporary milieu of community living that could augment a medical understanding of the problems occurring in Wemindji. Moreover, I came to believe

that health, education, legal and government professionals operating in Eeyou Istchee need to incorporate more historical, holistic, environmental, socio-economic concepts and self-reflexive understandings of themselves into their overall framework when working with Eeyou peoples. Science, physics, chemistry, biology, law, religion, and medicine can no longer “objectify” indigenous groups and simply provide Euro-Canadian policies/solutions to the groups they minister to.

Aboriginal Youth

In Canada, according to the 1996 Census, the aboriginal population was shown to be a much younger group than mainstream Canadian society. The average age of 25.5 years in Aboriginal populations compared to 35.4 in the Canadian population is clearly representative of a salient young population of Status Indians (see Appendix D). Moreover, according to census data, children under 15 account for 38% of all Aboriginal peoples compared with 20% in the overall Canadian population. Significantly, at least half of all Aboriginal peoples in Canada are now less than 24 years of age and their numbers are expected to continue to rise quickly along this demographic trend (Smylie 2001: 11; Smith 2004).

For Eeyou Nations of Eeyou Istchee, similar census data on overall population trends depict a fast growing young population. Moreover, it is expected that the overall present Eeyou population of 13,000 in Eeyou Istchee will double to top 25,000 by the year 2028 (CBHSSJB 2001). Parallel with these demographic

trends, there is apprehension among public health workers that Eeyou youth in all 10 communities will experience many transitions that will see them internalize many contemporary “southern or outside” commercial and environmental influences. In some cases, these influences are considered unhealthy such as increased community access to southern processed foods, high-fat content foods, and high-sugar foods, as well as inactive lifestyles and changing social behavior. If this trend continues, we will see the emergence of a young, obese Eeyou Istchee population that is unhealthy and diabetic prone in the next decades.

Fortunately, body image perceptions of urban American aboriginal youth have provided some preliminary information on the views of youth (5-18 years) and what they consider to be an ideal body figure (Rinderknecht and Smith 2002: 315). These writers have investigated body size, height and weight associated with expressions of satisfaction or dissatisfaction among Minneapolis, Minnesota urban aboriginal youth. The study concluded that native urban youth are dissatisfied with their body size and that most of these urban youth acknowledge the diabetes risk associated with overweight (Ibid: 315). Indeed, other studies have shown similar results of youths who are dissatisfied with weight and “the way my body looks” (Nowak 1998: 6).

However, these perspectives are of urban aboriginal youth and suggest the need for additional similar research for rural, reserve youth populations. In fact, Eeyou studies on youth are few. Among these, two studies concerning the eating

habits among Eeyou school children and youth in grades four, five, eight, and nine show that a significant percentage of overweight individuals exist (Bernard and Lavallee 1993; Bernard, Lavallee, Gray-MacDonald and Delisle 1995). Another study attempts to understand the reasons for overweight in Eeyou (Cree) children to determine growth patterns (Willows 2003). Moreover, in general, the study states that overweight among children leads to poor body image and negative self-esteem issues (Ibid). While these studies are important, much debate has surfaced about the theoretical approaches that are effective for understanding and controlling diabetes.

Eeyou Ethno Concepts

Before “contact”, the Eeyou of Eeyou Istchee lived a relationship with their local environment that included intricate and expert forest knowledge of land geography, animal behavior and spirituality that reflected an interconnectedness and social responsibility for everything that grew and lived in Eeyou Istchee. Indeed, there are Elder oral histories in addition to a diverse literature that discuss Eeyou symbolic notions, worldview, hunter power, women’s roles, land and water use, starvation narratives, animal spiritual beliefs and the social organization of Eeyou Northern Quebec groups (Richardson 1991; Preston 2002; Scott 2001; Morantz 2002; Feit 2001; Neizen 1998; Tanner 1979; Flannery 1995).

Most importantly, the content in the literature articulates Eeyou social and cultural values during earlier eras, including “pre-contact”, “contact”, fur trade

economy, post-fur trade, the Depression, WWII, the “Cold War”, hydroelectric projects, and the current, self-government movement of contemporary Eeyou communities (ibid). These social and cultural values of the 19th and 20th centuries facilitate an understanding of how Eeyou relationships with the “whiteman” and other Eeyou peoples were acted out.

Historical relationships are vital because they reflect the central social mores that lie at the center of Eeyou philosophy and institutions. Eeyou individuality constitutes categories such as reciprocity, resource-management, family-hunting territories, proper hunting conduct and acknowledgement of animal spirituality. These categories embody Eeyou ideas of respect, honor, wisdom, sharing, group solidarity, self-reliance, individualism, health, wellness and living responsibly. Moreover, former Eeyou values are what researchers need to understand in order to grasp the complexity of contemporary Eeyou society and its integration/internalization of many Euro-Canadian value systems across time.

Understanding an oral society’s terminology can also inform conscientious and attentive health researchers by revealing the complexity of a single Eeyou word such as *wemistikgusbeeyouch* or *miyupimaatisiun* that contains and embodies multi-faceted meanings. *Wemistikgusbeeyouch* contemporarily refers to “whiteman” but originally described Europeans as the ‘shaped-wood people’¹⁰. In other aspects,

¹⁰ *Wemistikgusbeeyouch* in English means ‘shaped-wood people’ and is found in an Eeyou story about first “contact.” It tells of how an Eeyou husband and wife approached the first ship ever seen in 1610 and described it as a floating island with a tall tree in the middle.

wemistikgusbeeyouch described the “whiteman” as a ‘boss’ that referred to this person’s authority, power and social status developed out of “contact” and trading relationships with Europeans (GCC 2002). Similarly, *miyupimaatisiunaa* is a short phrase that asks, “Are you living well?” This Eeyou phrase is a friendly greeting, but in a deeper understanding speaks of health and wellness in a spiritual sense that was recognized and contemporarily translated into English as ‘being alive well’ by an ethnographer investigating indigenous meanings of health and illness (Adelson 2000). It is my contention that more of this type of linguistic anthropological analysis of local health concepts needs to be undertaken as the Eeyou terms just mentioned and many others like them continue today to be retained and utilized by Eeyou people. Moreover, these concepts serve as important “vehicles” that transmit Eeyou social, cultural values and understandings of the past, but also embody current political and economic understandings of the present and future environments.

Conclusions

The youth of Eeyou Istchee are a growing sector of Eeyou communities. This demographic trend suggests health care and specialized programs may become critical in the future in order to deal with the potentially high numbers of health risks and illness cases likely to overwhelm aboriginal communities as this population ages. Additionally, the aboriginal populations of Eeyou Istchee are living more sedentary

lifestyles with new diets and less physical activity in the community settings. Due to the JBNQA of 1975, these trends and lifestyle patterns have been occurring for the last 30 years as more community wealth and prosperity has increased the amount of services, jobs, material goods and new foods previously unavailable in the communities.

As lifestyle changes and new environmental influences take root in Eeyou communities, it will be necessary for health researchers to re-think the biomedical models and theoretical frameworks that have so far dominated Eeyou health care systems. For Eeyou populations, the need for more holistic historical, social, cultural and political understandings cannot be overemphasized in transforming current health care theory and policy to one that is more inclusive of local Eeyou concepts of health and illness.

For Robert Crawford (1980, 1985, 1994) and Artemis P. Simopoulos (1999), a theoretical shift towards more eclectic integrations of biomedicine, indigenous concepts (holism, land spirituality, local oral narrative, Elder wisdom), and social/cultural context is the ideal synthesis. A new paradigm of this sort would also examine and emphasize culture-specific expressions of contemporary identity as well as other aspects of aboriginal community life that contribute to psychological stress. As these writers suggest, perhaps an eclectic framework will expand a currently narrow research focus and transcend our present understanding and control of Type 2 diabetes mellitus in distinct aboriginal societies.

From an Eeyou perspective, what is needed is an integration of biomedical concepts with Eeyou concepts of living well that will fuse the two conflicting knowledge systems together where possible. Each knowledge system must recognize the value and the importance of relying on each other in unlocking the disease “puzzles” afflicting all human groups.

Chapter 2: Setting and Method

Local History: Eeyou (Cree) Nation of Wemindj, Quebec

The Eeyou (Cree) Nation of Wemindji is one of 10 politically organized Eeyou communities that have been legally recognized since the 1970s and are represented by the GCC in Quebec. Wemindji is an Eeyou word (*wiimin uchii*¹¹) that refers to the red berries picked, crushed and used as a decorative substance much like red paint to beautify snowshoes and wooden spoons used to clear ice fishing holes of slush (Louttit, A 2005). Wemindji also refers to ‘red ochre Mountain’ originally known as “Old Factory.” “Old Factory” was the first site that current Wemindji families originally arrived from between 1930-1958. The “Old Factory” site is situated along the James Bay coast some 25 kilometers south of present day Wemindji (ibid).

In the 1930s, the families living at the site were originally known as the ‘Old Factory Band’ who in earlier times lived at *Paakumshumwastikw* (Old Factory Bay). Historically, the ‘Old Factory Band’ of Eeyou people participated yearly in the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) fur trade at the nearby “Eastmain Band”¹² on the Eastmain River. Eastmain families migrated from far inland at the beginning of the

¹¹ *Wiimin* refers to ‘red ochre’, a red berry or red hematite found in the hills around present day Wemindji. *Uchii* means ‘mountain’ and together *Wiimin uchii* = Wemindji (English pronunciation).

¹² The “Eastmain Band” refers to the Eeyou community of families that lived near the HBC post called “Eastmain” by the HBC located along the Eastmain River. The “Eastmain Band” has now been changed to the Eeyou (Cree) Nation of Eastmain.

summer months to trade at the Eastmain HBC post. After business was completed, most families would travel the short distance out to the coast of James Bay to *Paakumshumwastikw* (Old Factory Bay) where fishing, camping and visiting with other families were the summer routine. *Paakumshumwastikw* is the Eeyou name of the fishing and hunting area that some Eeyou families used, such as the Stewart families of the “Old Factory Band.” *Paakumshumwastikw* describes literally “where the river spills out” and was a popular spot for catching whitefish, cisco and speckled trout (CRA 2001: 58)

Archaeology: Eeyou Wemindji sites

In the area of Wemindji, archaeological surveying and excavations carried out between 1987-1991 reveal certain sites and charcoal remains to be at least 1,500 years old (CRA 2001: 4). Inland sites are believed to be the oldest and suggest that Eeyou settlement and migration initially occurred further inland towards central Quebec with a time depth on the order of about 3,500 years ago (ibid). Archaeologists excavating and researching local Wemindji history have also relied on local oral history, Elder stories, HBC archives and journals to examine first “contact” narratives (1610-11). Archaeologists have considered the possibility that the “Old Factory” and “Wemindji” vicinities may in fact be the sites of first “contact” and the final, ill-fated Henry Hudson¹³ voyage of 1610-11 (ibid).

¹³ Henry Hudson was the English explorer who commanded the ‘Discovery’ that sailed into Hudson and James Bay in 1610-11 searching for a Northwest route to the Far East (India, China). Hudson was convinced that

Closer to our own time period, many Eastmain and Wemindji Eeyou families, including my mother's family, can be traced to those residents that originally lived at "Old Factory" between 1930-1958 (Louttit A, 2005). Today, many of the family surnames in Wemindji originally descended from the "Old Factory Band" of families. Currently, Wemindji families are either directly or indirectly descended from such original "Old Factory" people as Sam Mayapo, George and Ellen Stewart, Sam and Charlotte Visitor, Charlie Sheshawaskum, John and Sarah Gilpin, John and Minnie Georgekish, Charlie and Nellie Tomatuk, Thomas and Lydia Mark, Willie and Mary Matches, Simon and Mariah Atsynia, and George Kakabat (ibid). These family surnames have multiplied over the years into many extended-family networks in Wemindji along with many other surnames not included here. Of the "Old Factory Band", only three families namely John D. and Hattie Visitor, Sam and Annie Gilpin, and Marianne Gilpin chose not to re-locate north to Wemindji but rather chose to return to their original Eastmain Band (Eeyou [Cree] Nation of Eastmain) located up the Eastmain River (ibid).

such a sea passage existed but did not realize that he was inside of James Bay. As a result, he spent the year criss-crossing James Bay unable to find a passage to the Far East. Finally, the 'Discovery' became jammed in ice and the ship had to winter on the James Bay coast. During this winter experience many of the crew perished of scurvy and malnutrition. After the spring thaw, Hudson repeatedly refused his crew's pleas to return to England and before long a mutiny was staged upon which Hudson, his son John and a few loyal crew members were set adrift never to be seen again. The 'Discovery' and the mutinous crew safely returned to England and were cleared of any wrongdoing (Walnut Park School 2005).

Eeyou people in transition: “Old Factory” to “Paint Hills” to “Wemindji”

In 1958, the “Old Factory Band”, the local HBC store manager (Marshall Campion) and a Department of Indian Affairs agent (Jimmy Harvey) decided that “Old Factory” would re-locate to Wemindji’s present location at the mouth of the Maquatua River. At the time of the move, the new community’s location and name became “Paint Hills” in reference to the red ochre found in the hills. Eventually over time the name “Paint Hills” was converted to “Wemindji” from the Eeyou word *wiimin uchii*.

The community’s original move was decided and facilitated by John Georgekish, Thomas Mark, the HBC manager and the Department of Indian Affairs agent (Louttit A, 2005). Due to the difficulties the community experienced in obtaining and storing adequate drinking water from the streams upriver, the community’s move to the Maquatua River made sense and was agreed to by all the parties involved (ibid). In addition, the decreasing water levels during tide fluctuations made it difficult for supply boats to enter into “Old Factory Bay” to unload goods (ibid). The HBC store and staff house, the Anglican Church and Catholic Church Missions and about 40 Eeyou *miichivaahps*¹⁴ were all that existed at “Old Factory” (ibid). After the re-location in 1958, “Paint Hills” at the mouth of the Maquatua River comprised 40 *miichivaahps*, an HBC store, Anglican Church

¹⁴ *Miichivaahps* are the traditional Eeyou teepees that are conical with pine poles placed in a circle that are covered by tarp in which two families lived together.

Mission, a Nursing station (built in 1960-61), and the first one-room schoolhouse ever built in 1962.

Wemindji Today

In the year 2005, Wemindji is a very different community than it was 47 years ago. Time-wise, 47 years is not a long period of history for any community to re-locate, emerge, stabilize and build for the future. Indeed, past Wemindji community Elders and leaders made a difficult decision to re-locate to a more realistically sound land resource for basic living needs. Some say the Eeyou are a practical people. Leaving “Old Factory” for the re-located families meant closing a chapter to a time and space embedded in their collective memory. Moreover, long since deceased grandparents, parents, brothers and sisters were remembered as essential participants in the continuity of the hunting history of the land and its water systems. Bringing closure to a sacred place attached to a people’s rich history has not been easy but “Old Factory” remains today an important part of the collective consciousness of many individuals in Wemindji.

Wemindji has dealt with many political, social, cultural and economic challenges in a very short period of time (58 years). These challenges have been met and walking the streets of Wemindji one senses a very contemporary, organized spatial layout with all the amenities, signs and appearances of a community building for the future. Wemindji boasts such structures as restaurants, a shopping plaza,

police station, fire department, child care center, motel, community center, modern school, new airport and town offices that house the Band council administration. In addition, in Eeyou Istchee, it is the community's proud achievement to be known as one of the first Eeyou communities ever to create concrete sidewalks and paved asphalt streets. There is also a 95-kilometer dirt access road that now connects Wemindji to the central Quebec highway that extends north to the Eeyou (Cree) Nation of Chisasibi and south to other distant Eeyou communities and Quebec cities.

From a linguistic point of view, Wemindji's people continue to speak a northern, coastal Eeyou dialect as their first language. It is quite common to hear the Eeyou language daily in almost every sphere of community life from local radio station programming, office environments, school playgrounds to dinner dialogue among patrons in the local restaurants. On the other hand, owing to its long historical relationships with the HBC, Anglican Church and Canadian education system, English has become the second most popular language. Furthermore, Wemindji community members display their ability to converse easily in both languages. Such bilingual circumstances present themselves when Eeyou speak with fellow Eeyou or for example, non-Eeyou schoolteachers working in the community. Moreover, in some instances, it is possible to find Elders with different life experiences that have enabled them an ability to learn and use the English language to a certain extent. The English language has been acquired by some of these Elders

via life experiences resulting from years spent in the residential school system (1940-50s) while others have learned English while working in their youth and adult lives with the HBC, Anglican Church and Band Council.

On a spiritual level, while some Elders today are practicing Anglican or Pentecostal Christians, Elders still embody and symbolize an enduring sense and legacy of the Eeyou language and hunting culture that is the foundation of the community's ancient Eeyou history. Wemindji Eeyou call themselves "Eeyou", which simply refers to "the people." Many individuals continue to have strong, rich relationships with the Elders, stories, land, and animal resources that manifests into much community excitement before, during and after the annual hunting practices. While history is always changing, so is life changing in the James Bay region.

At present, Wemindji Eeyou continue to practice hunting, trapping and fishing activities seasonally as their ancestors did in the past. What has changed is that hunting, trapping and fishing techniques are practiced in a different form that utilizes current technology such as Geographical Positioning Satellite tracking systems, 4 X 4 trucks, helicopters, float airplanes, motorized boats, sleek snow machines, accurate high-powered rifles and gas chain saws. Within the cultural adaptation of new hunting techniques and technology, the Eeyou hunting values of the past are not displaced or forgotten. On the contrary, Eeyou hunting values and land tenure philosophy persist as some Wemindji Elders continue to live in the "bush" year round to trap and hunt. Moreover, family hunting territories are still

inherited in a family line from grandfathers, to fathers and likewise to be passed onto their own sons. Indeed, the family as an important “site” of social relationships and extended family relationships is experienced at local feasts where it is the web of related families that determine the seating arrangement of Elders, families and invited guests. Enduring family relationships, proper conduct and social responsibilities are required of all individuals in related families that still hold influence over Wemindji cultural lifestyle.

These cultural practices are not easily evident to outsiders on brief visits. One must be patient, observant and listen very carefully in order to transcend simplistic, superficial understandings of Wemindji Eeyou community life; to grasp some sense of their history and value system across time that find cultural expression in new spaces of contemporary Eeyou lifestyle.

An Ethnographic Experience

From November 2003 to April 2004, I had been in fairly regular contact by email and phone with the Eeyou (Cree) Nation of Wemindji Public Health Officer Dennis Georgekish who is also an important band council member. Dennis turned out to be very receptive and interested in the study right from the initial proposal developmental stages to the actual gathering of field data. Dennis explained that the Eeyou (Cree) Nation of Wemindji had often received research requests from all over the world. He commented that whenever research, and it is very rare, is conducted

by an Eeyou individual the band council is very interested and happy to accommodate such a study. Dennis tabled my research proposal at one of the regular band council meetings and I was pleased to find out that my proposal had been accepted and approved almost immediately within a few months. The only task now was to prepare a submission to the Carleton University Ethics Review Committee (April 2004) to acquire written permission to enter the field. Dennis advised that the best time to arrive in the community would be in August or the fall season of 2004 after the goose hunt had been completed in order to have more access to community members who would be present in the community. In preparation, in late April, I decided to leave Ottawa and relocate to Moose Factory, Ontario (my hometown) during the summer months (May-August) for family reasons and to re-adjust to living in the Subarctic environment.

Traveling north from Ottawa requires eight hours of steady driving followed by a four hour train ride through Subarctic muskeg, forests, rivers and swamp to arrive at Moosonee in northern Ontario – barring any car accidents or train derailments¹⁵. Moosonee is located at the southern tip of James Bay and is a small town (pop: 2,000) that is literally at the end of the Ontario Northland Railway. One cannot travel any further north by train or vehicle in the summer months. Once arrived at Moosonee, a 10-minute freighter boat ride is required to cross the wide

¹⁵ The Ontario Northland Railway is a company that runs passenger and freight trains between Cochrane and Moosonee on one-way trips that generally take about 4-6 hours to complete. In the last few years, due to track depletion some of the trains occasionally derail causing a delay that may take up to 6 extra hours in addition to the usual travel time.

Moose River to Moose Factory Island (pop: 2,000) where my home residence is located. Here I remained until October 2004 at which time I flew with Air Creebec on a 30-minute flight to the Northern Quebec Eeyou (Cree) Nation of Waskaganish¹⁶.

Flying northeast across the Quebec border over the boreal mainland forest, rivers, and creeks was a tremendous experience as the eight seat aircraft eventually left land and crossed out over the huge expanse of Hannah and James Bay. Nervously, I peered down from high in the sky to see rolling waves with white caps and white lines of water suds stretching for miles from the Bay's currents. From this vantage point, one becomes aware that the Bay is an immense, thriving ecosystem embodying a beautiful, powerful spiritual essence to it.

In late October, ice was already forming in the Bay and from the air the ice sheets looked like huge transparent pieces of glass with geometric designs on them. Gigantic ice pieces drifted slowly like misplaced sections in an unfinished jigsaw puzzle. Gently, the plane began to descend about 30 minutes into the flight and I knew we were making our final approach to Waskaganish. The weather had turned for the worse as we descended out of the high altitude and dropped very close to the

¹⁶ *Waskaganish* is an Eeyou word that means "Little house." In earlier centuries, Waskaganish was the first HBC post called Rupert's House in reference to King Charles of England who in 1670 laid claim to the land title of Eeyou Istchee. King Charles then transferred title of Eeyou Istchee to his cousin Prince Rupert and hence Eeyou Istchee became known as "Rupert's Land" (Grand Council of Crees 2002: 22). As Coon-Come states: "At least four times – 1670, 1870, 1898 and 1912 – Eeyou Istchee, our traditional lands, and waterways, have changed status, purportedly, transferred between kings as gifts, or deeded between colonial companies (HBC) and governments (Quebec, Canadian government), all without our knowledge, and certainly without our consent. It has always been assumed that we the James Bay Crees (Eeyou), the actual owners and occupants, simply passed

treetops as we flew low over the Rupert's River. The sky's ceiling was low with gray clouds, and light rain fell as the small, eight seat aircraft knifed through the air and shifted from side to side in a low trajectory. I found the ride rather exciting yet nerve wracking as I looked out the window to see the river moving past quickly as shorebirds took off and landed on the rocky sandbars below. The plane circled Waskaganish once and then nosed into the direction of the airport for the final landing. Once touching down on the runway I felt relieved yet excited to have traveled this far but the weather did not look promising.

Once inside the Waskaganish airport all passengers flying north to Eastmain and Wemindji were informed that due to deteriorating weather conditions the connecting flight might by-pass Wemindji and land at La Grande Airport further north of Wemindji. At Waskaganish, travelers heading further north must change planes to larger twin-engine Dash 8 aircrafts that travel on daily scheduled flights up and down the coast of James Bay. In the tiny airport, there was a mixture of Eeyou men, women, and children laughing, and talking while waiting with non-Eeyou men and women who seemed rather quiet in contrast. It was the fall season so I assumed that the many non-Eeyou heading north was due to the end of the hunt break at various Eeyou schools and that these were non-Eeyou teachers returning to their communities of work from the "south." Many of the non-Eeyou individuals were

with the land, without voice, without the right to determine or even know what was being done with us" (Grand Council of Crees [Coon Come] 1995: preface).

dressed in black clothing, shiny shoes and trendy leather jackets reminiscent of the urban styles I saw and likewise dressed in while living in Ottawa.

After a short stopover, the announcement to board the aircraft for those traveling north to Eastmain, Wemindji, La Grande and Chisasibi came over the speakers. I boarded the plane amidst wind and rain. Just as I suspected, once in the air and out over the coastline again the pilot announced we would be landing at Eastmain but by-pass Wemindji due to heavy fog. The weather was rainy and the aircraft bounced through strong head winds. After the Eastmain stop, the plane was airborne again as we flew directly to La Grande Airport 20 minutes north of Wemindji.

La Grande Airport was built to provide Hydro Quebec aircraft and freight planes with easier access to the dam projects in the area. It is also the largest terminal in the region. The airport looked and felt very modern in its exterior appearance and interior layout as the floors were tiled, clean, shiny and waxed with spacious areas for seating. Once inside, I looked for a place to sit and wondered what to do next. It was exactly 10:45 am this Monday morning, October 25 when I first started out from the airport in Moosonee. It was now 12:45 pm at La Grande. The two other passengers, an Eeyou woman, a French man and I were told by the Air Creebec ticket agent that the plane would return south at 2:30pm on its daily, scheduled flight down the James Bay coastline. At that time, it would be decided if the plane was able or unable to land at Wemindji due to rain and heavy fog drifting

in from James Bay. If the plane could not land, I was told that I would be returned to Moosonee and could try another scheduled flight in two days time. The field trip so far did not look good to say the least. From my experience growing up in the north I knew that in time a solution would always materialize. *Must have patience.* In the meantime, questions went through my mind: Would the weather clear up? Should I go back to Moosonee? Should I try to get a car ride to Wemindji? From where would the ride come? Who could I call? *No answers.*

While in the airport, I spoke to the Eeyou woman who told me that she was going to call Wemindji for a family member to pick her up. She had no desire to return to the origin of her flight this morning in Val-d'Or, Quebec. During this time I also spoke with the French man who told me that he was a mechanic from Montreal working in Wemindji for the band council and the construction company director that was to provide room and board for the field research. As it turned out, the French man had called his boss, Earl Danyluk, who immediately asked if I was also present at the airport. The French man gave the phone to me and I spoke with Earl Danyluk in which I told him the situation. Earl kind of chuckled at my predicament but assured me that he was sending a truck from Wemindji to pick all three of us up! In the north, travel is unpredictable in that nature decides whether you will fly, drive or move at all. As such one should remain calm and attempt to assess the situation with a clear mind. Speaking to people in similar circumstances helps you learn of the local options and strategies needed to get out of a bad

situation. At any rate, within two hours the truck had arrived and we were soon on the central highway traveling south to Wemindji.

The highway cut through mostly flat terrain, but hills with exposed rock were prominent in spots and were dotted with small, coniferous trees and green moss. In certain stretches of land and forest there had been large forest fires as acres of crippled trees were stripped bare of bark and burned black from heat exposure. We also passed large lakes and smaller streams as the highway weaved over these waterways. Eeyou Istchee was a beautiful place to behold. I had forgotten how immense Eeyou Istchee was and how distant one had to travel in order to arrive at destinations. I sensed that my ancestors must have been fit, strong and active people as most of the travel in earlier centuries was done on foot. There were no snow machines and very rarely airplanes during my mother and grandmother's time living on this land (early 1900's). In the winter, people had to walk pulling their supplies on toboggans and in many cases, using snowshoes to reach inland camps or coastal gathering spots. In the summer, fall and spring seasons most people used canoes that demanded physical strength to maneuver through strong rapids in addition to portaging around dangerous, impassable rivers, creeks or rapids. Yet, here I was an Eeyou from a different generation recently disembarked from a modern aircraft and now traveling down the paved highway in a warm, comfortable truck. Furthermore, the morning flight had carried me north many kilometers from Moosonee and Wemindji. I now traveled many kilometers

south along the main highway to the turn off onto the dirt access road leading into the Eeyou (Cree) Nation of Wemindji.

At 6 pm that evening, we arrived in Wemindji and I was dropped at Earl and Nancy Danyluk's house in a new housing section of Wemindji. Earl and Nancy were very receptive, had a meal ready and afterwards showed me to my room. Their big house was set in a quiet hilly, bush area of the community. Outside stood a large *müchümaahp* (see footnote 14), two snow machines, and a dog pen that held two young barking dogs. The house's interior had a main floor of 3 bedrooms and a basement with another bedroom next to a shower and washroom. The basement bedroom was to be my home for the duration of my field trip and was neatly made up with a double bed, lamp and night table. The house was very modern with new living room furniture and stainless steel kitchen appliances that gave the "feel" of a comfortable household. On top of that it was quiet; just the ideal living environment that I was seeking and hoping for during my field trip.

Meeting a cultural consultant: operating in the community

I met Dennis Georgekish in person at his band council office for the first time the next morning at 10 a.m. Dennis tied his long, black hair in a single braid, walked in cowboy boots and wore denim jeans. He was a jovial person and was very happy to see that I had arrived safely in Wemindji. To break the ice, we talked about my family and the fact that I hadn't returned to Wemindji since the 1980s. I

expressed to Dennis that I was very excited to be in Wemindji, to re-connect and begin my research. Regarding the research, Dennis advised that I visit the Maquatua Eeyou School either that day or the next to get acquainted with the principal Ida Gilpin, the teaching staff and the other Cree School Board staff. We talked for about an hour after which Dennis suggested we take a small tour of Wemindji.

We drove around Wemindji's paved streets in Dennis' van while sipping coffee as he described and introduced the names and functions of the buildings, housing sections, the new arena being erected, and the layout of the community. I felt good and very welcomed into the community. Though I had been absent from Wemindji for a long time, as an Eeyou "insider" I had a strange, emic feeling of fitting in here quite easily. Yet as an anthropology researcher I felt in an etic sense like an "outsider." Moreover, anthropology represented an academic discipline that historically has been problematic for indigenous people. For now, I put aside those thoughts and concentrated on the moment as we continued our drive.

I was continuously amazed at how well constructed the houses appeared with their neatly manicured and landscaped, green lawns. We eventually arrived and stopped at the Elder's Residence overlooking the Maquatua River and Dennis introduced me to the staff and explained the reason for my research. People smiled, shook my hand as we exchanged the Eeyou "*wachiya*"¹⁷ greeting with each other.

¹⁷ "*Wachiya*" in the Eeyou language means "hello" or "welcome!" The greeting is normally accompanied by a firm handshake. Elderly Eeyou (grandfathers, grandmothers, fathers, mothers, uncles, aunts, cousins) use "*innii wachiyaamaan*" meaning I want to say "hello" or "welcome" to my grandchild, son or daughter, cousin or

During the early 1960s my parents lived at Wemindji because my father was the first school teacher of the one room school located there. This personal connection with the community's history and many first cousins employed with the band council was quite advantageous, as I felt trusted and looked after. Moreover, almost all of the Elders I was introduced to recognized my name, my appearance (father's resemblance) and my mother's maiden name 'Gilpin' to which I belonged. People spoke of knowing my father personally and my mother who lived at "Old Factory" during her adolescence and later on in Wemindji as the "teacher's wife."

With this family background, I knew I was on display and had to operate in Wemindji on my best Eeyou social behavior, to be trustworthy, to acknowledge the local narratives, greet Elders and respect all my family's connections. Having toured the community, Dennis and I went back to the band office as he had paperwork to attend to. Leaving Dennis, I decided that there was no time like the present to introduce myself to the school staff so I walked the short distance to the Maquatua Eeyou School.

Maquatua Eeyou School

Maquatua Eeyou School is named after the river that runs alongside the school and provides a beautiful view of the rolling hills, exposed rock and deciduous

any friend they have not seen in the community for an extended period of time. "*Imvii wachiiyaamaai*" is followed with two affectionate kisses on each cheek of the recipient.

trees opposite the school. “Maquatua” is an Eeyou word that means literally “where the loons gather” or “loons are here” (Ratt 2005; Gilpin I, 2005). The school’s name also refers to a story in which it is told that Eeyou people paddling down the river suddenly observed a loon skimming across the water and exclaimed, “*maquatua!*” (ibid).

Maquatua Eeyou School was the second school built in 1973 and since then has undergone four major renovations. The renovations have expanded the school to include new facilities such as a new gymnasium, laboratory, library, music room, and workshops for Boys’ Eeyou Culture (Eeyou technology¹⁸) and Girls’ Eeyou Culture (Eeyou cuisine¹⁹). Included in the school is a computer room and audio-visual equipment to assist teachers in curriculum delivery. In appearance and structure, Maquatua Eeyou School is not unlike any “southern” school found in urban cities.

Before my arrival in Wemindji, it was decided by Ida Gilpin (principal) that the most appropriate place to find youth perspectives would be the Maquatua Eeyou School. I had been to Wemindji two times on previous occasions and one of those

¹⁸ Eeyou technology is the teaching of traditional Eeyou arts and skills that in the 17th, 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries Eeyou males would have acquired competency in *before* a father would allow his son to leave home to be a husband, hunter and provider for a family. These skills included snowshoe construction (travel across deep snow), *pvaanaaskw* construction (sharp, black spruce or cedar cooking sticks easily made from tree resources and used over open fire pits to attach and cook bannock or meat), setting rabbit snares, proper gun operation/maintenance, hunting techniques, blind construction and other animal trap setting procedures.

¹⁹ Eeyou cuisine refers to the teaching of traditional Eeyou cooking that included rabbit, geese, duck, moose, beaver and various types of fish. In addition, cooking skills were female skills that included the cleaning, cutting and proper care taken in the handling of all these food items as harvested by the male hunters. Moreover, traditional female skills included the proper handling of sharp axes for splitting firewood, gathering spruce boughs for the interior flooring of the teepee and the construction of the teepee itself.

trips had involved a Moose Factory Public School music exchange with the Maquatua Eeyou School. So, to a degree I was familiar with the school and its location. Once arrived at the school I met with the vice-principal who introduced me to an Eeyou teacher named Carmen Faries whom I had heard was teaching there.

Originally from Moose Factory, Carmen Faries is a well-spoken, confident university-educated teacher who teaches secondary school²⁰ level students such subjects as history, moral/religious studies and language arts. Since I knew Carmen previously from Moose Factory, I believed that meeting and involving Carmen and her classes would prove to be a more indigenous-friendly environment than a non-Eeyou teacher's classroom. At times, my supply teaching experience in Moose Factory (summer/fall 2004) had shown that there tended to be rather difficult relationships between Eeyou and non-Eeyou educators. For instance, some of my teaching experiences led me to believe issues of power, control and a discourse of devaluation existed by non-Eeyou educators about the community-based qualifications of some Eeyou teachers. This dichotomy and discourse was not always obvious, however, it did exist and indirectly served to perpetuate the Euro-Canadian knowledge system as the dominant system *par excellence*. For these reasons, I desired meeting and hopefully working with Carmen Faries.

²⁰ In Quebec, secondary school comprises three levels: Secondary 3 is equivalent to grade 9; Secondary 4 is equivalent to grade 10; Secondary 5 is equivalent to grade 11. There is no Secondary 6 or grade 12 as students in Quebec graduate after Secondary 5 and usually enroll in a pre-college/university program called the College of General and Vocational Education (CEGEP).

I was very fortunate that Carmen agreed to provide time in her courses and to allow her students to be the study group. Carmen proved to be a valuable, excellent leader who was extremely helpful in suggesting ideas, content for presentations and the appropriate time frame/methodology in speaking to her classes about participation in the survey questionnaire, the multiple-choice instrument and individual interviews. She also communicated that her language arts classes were based in communication skills, competency in writing, and application of research methods, and suggested that this would be the ideal group to involve in the study. In this way, Carmen became a very important cultural consultant about the information I sought.

Research Objectives

This research investigated local beliefs, attitudes, behaviors and understandings of eating habits, body weight, and physical activity that result in overweight and obesity and ultimately the onset of Type 2 diabetes mellitus among youth in the Eeyou (Cree) Nation of Wemindji, Quebec.

Being an Eeyou myself, reflecting upon and evaluating my own experience growing up in a James Bay Eeyou community and household, I was fairly certain from the start that identity-issues were an important part of these health phenomena in Eeyou Istchee. Additionally, in hindsight and upon analysis of my own past identity issues and problems with having my “feet” in both Eeyou and non-Eeyou

society, I considered that biculturalism was an important influence upon the general attitudes of today's Wemindji youth generation.

While still living in Ottawa, Ontario in the fall of 2003 I decided to make a trip to the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay (CBHSSJB) offices located in downtown Montreal in order to meet with Elizabeth Robinson who works as a Public Health Physician for Eeyou Istchee. Elizabeth has much medical experience, knowledge and expertise in the field of public health in addition to her academic publications and travels in Eeyou Istchee. I had very helpful conversations with her and some of her staff as to the nature of my intended field study in Wemindji. However, to be realistic it was communicated to me that generally the youth populations are a difficult group to obtain accurate information about. Furthermore, I was told that there has been little research carried out and published on Eeyou youth in general. Therefore, from the outset my research study was shaping up to be a challenge, which turned out to be quite accurate during the course of my time in Wemindji. Nonetheless, in my own mind I conceptualized my study as mainly a baseline or initial study that could provide some interesting insights. Further in-depth, lengthier investigations are required in the future with this subgroup of the Eeyou populations.

The main research objectives of the study were to investigate, survey, and interview a group of youth about their knowledge of diabetes and health within social and cultural life experiences. In this framework, the objective was to gain

baseline information and answers to certain questions from this subgroup about the following subject areas:

- A. Eating habits: What types of “whiteman” food (pizza, soda pop, French fries, hot dogs, vegetables, fruits) do Wemindji youth eat daily? Do Eeyou youth have a particular view of traditional food and “white” food and why? Do they think “bush food” is important and good for them to eat as Eeyou individuals?
- B. Body weight and body image: What do Wemindji youth know about body weight and fitness? Do they think body image is important? Does overweight/obesity have negative effects on childhood identity and self-esteem as some scholars suggest? (Willows 2003) How do Eeyou youth conceptualize issues like body weight/image and physical activity?
- C. Physical activity: Are there differences between the kinds of physical activities Eeyou youth are involved in as suggested from data obtained in a Chisasibi and Eastmain study of schoolchildren (9-11 years of age) and adolescents (12-18 years of age) (Bernard and Lavallee 1993)? Do youth think that physical activity and its frequency are important to good health? Do these groups conceptualize and value traditional hunting, trapping and fishing as important Eeyou physical activities within their own cultural context?

To accomplish these goals, my objectives were to gather qualitative data through ethnographic research methods such as open-ended, unstructured and semi-structured interviews, participant observation and collection of family data as discussed in recent ethnographic methodology (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995; Schensul, and Schensul 1999; Scrimshaw, and Hurtado 1987).

The main site for gathering the ethnographic data was identified as the Maquatua Eeyou School. After consulting with Eeyou school principal Ida Gilpin it was her opinion that the school was the best source to provide study participants and the easiest site in which to introduce and promote the study to teachers and students (Gilpin I, 2004).

Methodology

Qualitative Data

Initially, I planned to conduct open-ended, unstructured and semi-structured interviews with two younger male and two younger female youths (10-12 years of age) and two older male and two older female youths (13-17 years of age). Due to class absences and the return of few authorized, student consent forms I realized that this objective would not be possible. Carmen and I surmised that the reason for non-interest was mainly from lack of an incentive for students to participate voluntarily. We decided to encourage the students through a strategy that works all the time. We informed Carmen's classes that any student who participated in an

interview would get their name entered into a draw and be eligible to win a valuable prize valid at Northern Stores to be revealed after my departure from Wemindji. Needless to say, it didn't take long before we had six participants for interviews! I decided that the consent forms I received from three female and three male Secondary 4 and 5 students ranging in age from 15-19 years, were adequate for the individual interviews (six in total).

Through Carmen Faries and Elvis Georgekish (Cree School Board) I obtained permission to utilize the teacher and staff lounge to conduct one-hour interviews at night and on the weekends. The meeting room and lounge was a secure, tidy area with a phone, computer, conference table, chairs, sofas, and kitchen. It was a comfortable, familiar setting for the students as their classes with Carmen were located in the same building right next door to the lounge. Most importantly, it was a private space in which I could guarantee anonymity and confidentiality of the interviewees during the evenings.

The content of my interviews discussed themes that encompassed food, social behavior, family background, family medical history, community social issues, community life, socio-economic status, Eeyou and non-Eeyou identity, and larger political issues that may play into the psychological pressures that affect youth. I discussed and modified my interview questions as the study progressed through the guidance and participation of Carmen Faries, Dennis Georgekish and many community members who shared their opinions, thoughts and ideas about Eeyou

society at the restaurant, coffee shop, hockey arena and other informal public places. In this way, I always made sure to be attentive and listen as much as possible to the topics that people spoke to me about. Moreover, the research was participatory²¹ in nature offering the opportunity for me to learn to let the community guide the focus and effectiveness of our study. Notably, self-reflection, casual community narratives, and certain community public meetings²² provided me with a wider understanding of the social, cultural and psychological factors that affect not only the decisions youth make concerning their lives – but also what adults are dealing with.

The Wemindji youth are not typically like those of their southern, non-Aboriginal counterparts. Nor can it be argued that Wemindji youth represent homogeneity among all 10 Eeyou communities. What is compelling is that they represent generally an Eeyou life transition period that is contemporarily different in form than the previous youth of the 17th, 18th, 19th and 20th century hunting societies that lived solely off the land. In this context and over time, earlier Eeyou youth life transition stages have changed. Life transition stages have been displaced, neglected

²¹ Participatory refers to allowing and encouraging members of a study group or community to participate in the research goals in offering advice, solutions or direction as to what domains of enquiry should be examined. I cannot overemphasize to academics and students the importance of this style of research when researching and interacting with communities and Eeyou people in Eeyou Istchee.

²² While in Wemindji I had the opportunity of attending three public presentations. One was a Hydro-Quebec public information meeting to inform trappers, hunters and the general population of new water diversions. This meeting was technical in nature and concerned the effects and impacts of the Rupert River water diversion to increase electrical energy output. The second presentation I attended concerned a community information tour by the CBHSSJB. This presentation concerned funding frameworks, budget increases to improve health and social services in all the communities of Eeyou Istchee. Lastly, the third presentation was

and devalued as new developments and lifestyles have pushed them to the margins from certain processes, time periods and living spaces.

For example, during the operation and processes of the residential school system, a certain sense of neglect, devaluation and alienation occurred for many Eeyou students who would have normally been enculturated on the land learning hunting/trapping skills between the ages of nine to 20 years. Not to mention the physical, emotional and psychological stress of being displaced in southern schools far from their communities of origin for months and years in some cases. In this manner, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada education policy created a condition where Eeyou students were physically absent, alienated and emotionally severed in a very real sense from the control, guidance and nurturing of their parents, grandparents and extended family members. Consequently, because of government policy an Eeyou traditional knowledge and family system became “short-circuited” so to speak and has never fully recovered. In summary, generations of the past were socialized to hunting skills and “bush” competencies whereas today’s generations experience a different cultural milieu with new challenges, responsibilities, skills and competencies geared towards school, career choice, the market economy and community living.

In the wake of regional development such as James Bay hydroelectric dams, forestry operations and other economic activities, American satellite television and

delivered by the Cree School Board and also concerned funding arrangements and increases to education throughout Eeyou Istchee.

world-wide Internet access have become prevalent in Eeyou Istchee. Euro-Canadian social values, foreign cultural information and attitudes (whether good or bad) are disseminated widely through these lines of communication. The symbolic messages of movies, television and radio programs are behavioral “codes” that directly or indirectly instruct youth on how to act, speak, what to think and what to value. In this way, Wemindji youth are more prone to envy, incorporate and internalize “southern” influences, urban values and commercial imagery of “material urban” life than previous Eeyou generations. The issue just mentioned need to be researched, articulated and interpreted more in-depth. We need to understand the implications and effects of new technology and foreign ideals for indigenous groups like the Eeyou youth of Wemindji in anthropological literature.

In addition to the six student interviews, I conducted 10 semi-structured (typically one-hour) interviews with Wemindji adults from different professional fields such as education, health, and the band Council. These sectors provided another interpretive perspective about Wemindji including the social issues, cultural life and values, hunting, traditional foods, residential schools and the communication “gaps” experienced among the various populations.

The adult interviewees were selected because of the nature of their work in different sectors of Wemindji professional settings. The education, health and band council fields were important to give an adult perspective about youth issues from a variety of personal and professional discourses. In addition, they were chosen to

give a different experiential quality that enriched and diversified the overall qualitative narratives.

Dennis Georgekish suggested that adults could be interviewed directly in the privacy of their offices. This was an effective method as the participants could schedule interviews at times that were convenient to them. Therefore, all the interviews were conducted in this manner except for two. Of these two, due to insufficient office space, one interview was conducted during the evening in the same lounge setting where the students were interviewed. The other interview was conducted in a restaurant as the interviewee was under a tight community information tour and schedule that only allowed 20 minutes before the departure charter flight to Chisasibi and Whapmagoostui.

Survey Questionnaire and Multiple-Choice Data

In addition to the qualitative interviews, Carmen Faries and I decided to enhance the quality, quantity and nature of the student data to include those Secondary 4 and 5 students that didn't participate in a personal interview and who were ineligible for the student draw. To expand the data collection, I created a survey questionnaire and multiple-choice instrument. Carmen assessed the two formats, analyzed the kind of questions asked, the language level used and the probability of receiving completed student survey questionnaires and multiple-choice instruments. Carmen expressed that a few changes were required and certain

terms be changed, with which I complied. In addition, Carmen suggested that she manage the quantitative data collection process scheduled for her classes so that she could monitor student behavior, provide student guidance and answer any questions that might arise. In this collaborative process, I agreed completely with Carmen’s teaching strategy, trusted her judgment and left her to the task.

To include a younger population as well, Carmen suggested that we ask a Secondary 3 teacher and his language arts students to participate in the research study and have his class complete both the questionnaire and multiple-choice instrument. The Secondary 3 teacher was receptive to the study and agreed to involve his class. Therefore, the survey data were further expanded by the inclusion of the Secondary 3 group. We completed the data collection within one week and obtained a fairly large data number from the Secondary 3, 4 and 5 students. The breakdown of student participation for the survey questionnaire and multiple-choice instrument is as follows:

Survey Questionnaire:

“Survey: Knowledge of diabetes, diet, body weight, physical activity, and identity among secondary students of Maquatua Eeyou School”

Student level	Age	Male	Female	Total
Secondary 3	(14-17 yrs)	7	9	16
Secondary 4	(15-19 yrs)	6	7	13

Secondary 5	(16-19 yrs)	4	5	9
Total Number of Secondary students				38

Multiple-Choice Instrument:

“Beliefs and behavior about tradition, lifestyle, body image, and weight among secondary students at Maquatua Eeyou School”

Student level	Age	Male	Female	Total
Secondary 3	(14-17 yrs)	8	9	17
Secondary 4	(15-18 yrs)	7	7	14
Secondary 5	(16-19 yrs)	3	5	8
Total Number of Secondary Students				39

The survey data collection process went smoothly as we received useful data from all the students. It also provided the students with a fairly comfortable and stress-free means of providing data²³. In hindsight, my only dissatisfaction with this process lay in our decision to not provide a student draw and prize for Secondary 3, 4, and 5 students who participated in the survey questionnaire and multiple-choice

²³ While focus groups theoretically are a good option for researchers, my cultural experience working in two aboriginal schools showed that Eeyou students are sometimes uncomfortable with speaking out or working in groups together. In addition, because of time constraints I decided not to attempt focus and discussion groups during this field study.

instrument. I felt that all the secondary students who filled out the questionnaire and multiple-choice documents should be able to participate in a draw as a token of my appreciation for the information they provided. However, the project was under time and budget constraints.

Chapter 3: Study Group and Data

Study Group: Secondary 3, 4 and 5 students of Maquatua Eeyou School²⁴

As mentioned earlier, the main participants in this research study were the Secondary 3, 4 and 5 male/female students ranging in age from 14-19 years (2004/05) of Maquatua Eeyou School in the Eeyou (Cree) Nation of Wemindji, Quebec. The total number of interviews was six (three female and three male). Survey data questionnaires and multiple-choice instruments that were returned totaled 77. In this section, I will present a comparative discussion of the Secondary 3, 4 and 5 survey questionnaire data (n=16, 13 and 9 respectively). This will be followed by a discussion comparing the multiple-choice data across all three secondary levels (n=17, 14, and 8 respectively). Allowances for age, secondary level, gender and other relevant social and cultural issues will be interspersed throughout both sections. The student interviews will be considered at the end of this chapter while the interviews of the Wemindji adults are considered in Chapter 4.

²⁴ Maquatua Eeyou School operates classes from Pre-kindergarten to Secondary 5 (population 306).

Survey Questionnaire Data

Diabetes knowledge

Relating to the first question in the survey, “Do you know what diabetes is?” (26%) in Secondary 3, (84%) in Secondary 4, and (100%) in Secondary 5, answered ‘yes’. The percentages show more awareness of the word ‘diabetes’ towards the upper Secondary levels. In addition to this question, Secondary 3 students who answered yes were asked to describe diabetes and four answered that it is²⁶:

- “High blood sugar.”
- “Someone who has low blood pressure.”
- “A disease that you have to take needles and pills²⁷.”
- “Someone that is fat.”

The four student comments show that 25% of the 16 Secondary 3 students have a range of knowledge about diabetes, understanding that it concerns blood sugar level or an abnormal blood condition (low blood pressure) and that needles and pills (insulin) are required for treatment. The last comment suggests that the student has some knowledge that a person who is overweight is associated with having diabetes.

When all Secondary students were asked the question, “Do you know what causes diabetes?,” 56% of the Secondary 3 students responded ‘no’ compared to

²⁵ In this study, the student participants were between the ages of 14-19 years. The term “youth” is used in this study to encompass all participants (younger individuals and adolescents) within the age range of 12-25 years.

²⁶ No answers are presented from the Secondary 4 and 5 students, as this question was not included due to printing error and was not discovered until after surveys were completed and returned by students. However, this question was asked of students during the interviews. There were no Secondary 3 interviews so this question was designed to extract more description about diabetes within their survey questionnaire.

²⁷ All student comments are verbatim and are not corrected for grammar.

69% of Secondary 4 and 34% of Secondary 5 students. Three Secondary 3 students described the causes of diabetes as:

- “Too much sugars like junk [chips, pop, candies].”
- “Eating too much junk [food] and being overweight.”
- “Sugar and lipids.”

For the questions “Do you know what glucose is?,” 75% of Secondary 3 and 4 students, and 78% of Secondary 5 answered ‘no’. Asked, “Do you know what insulin is?,” again 75% of Secondary 3 and 4 students answered ‘no’ while 89% of Secondary 5 answered ‘no’. The frequency of ‘no’ answers suggests that all three student levels are deficient in knowledge of these terms. There were two exceptions: one Secondary 3 student described glucose as “some kind of sugar” and insulin as “I think it’s some kind of medicine.” However, the majority of answers suggest that all students are unable to specifically describe the exact causes of the disease or define the associated terms glucose and insulin.

On the other hand, there were more positive answers for the question “Does a person with diabetes have high blood sugar?” Interestingly, however, 67% of the Secondary 5s answered ‘yes’, while only 50% of the Secondary 3’s and 46% of the Secondary 4’s did. This gives the impression that the Secondary 5s have slightly more accurate knowledge that sugar is a main source for developing diabetes than the younger students, although there is still a lack of basic knowledge overall.

²⁸ (Ibid – Footnote 26).

The next set of questions asked whether the students had diabetes, or knew of someone diabetic in their family, and whether the students had ever been tested for diabetes. All the students answered that they did not have diabetes while a small number didn't know of their health status. Most of the students did not know of a diabetic family member, but a small number of students in each Secondary level knew of someone in the family with diabetes. The most frequent family member cited by the students was the mother. Other diabetic family members included a father, a grandfather, an aunt and a sister. Generally, students did not know of other family or extended family members that had diabetes.

The majority of students in levels 3 (69%) and 4 (85%) stated that they had not been tested for diabetes while less than half in the Secondary 5 level (44%) students stated that they had not. The reason for asking about diabetes testing was to determine if students knew the date of the last time they were tested and if they were keeping track of these tests. Only three Secondary 3 students (19%) could give the date of their diabetes test. Pertaining to the question of early mortality from diabetes, most Secondary 3s (56%) and 5's (89%) answered 'yes' that a person could die from having the disease. Interestingly again, only 15% of Secondary 4s thought that one could die from the disease. This seems to suggest that there is variation in the levels of basic knowledge about diabetes, although it is noted that the numbers in the Wemindji Maquataua School survey are small²⁹.

²⁹ The Secondary School levels in Maquataua Eeyou School are small and this is typical of most schools in Eeyou Istchee and not specific to Wemindji.

Body weight

Three general questions concerning body weight were asked of all the students: “Does a person’s body weight affect diabetes?,” “Is an overweight person at risk for developing diabetes?,” and “Can a person with low body weight develop diabetes?” The reason for asking these questions was to determine whether students had any knowledge of various body weight conditions in the risk for diabetes.

In terms of a person being overweight, most of the students in all levels, Secondary 3 (63%), 4 (100%) and 5 (89%) answered ‘yes’ that a person’s body weight and excess weight is implicated in the onset of diabetes. Some answered ‘no’ while a few answered with either a ‘no response’ or ‘don’t know’. The majority of ‘yes’ answers suggest that this population is aware that body weight and overweight conditions are important factors in diabetes.

To complicate the weight issue, the last question asked was to determine if any students knew that a person with low body weight could still become diabetic due to other factors besides weight. Over half of Secondary 3 (56%) and 5 students (67%) felt that a person with low body weight could develop diabetes, while only a minority of Secondary 4 students (31%) did. Two explanations are possible for answering either ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to this question. Answering ‘yes’ suggests that a majority of students do have knowledge that other factors are involved with diabetes. Answering ‘no’ could also suggest that the Secondary 4 students know that low body weight likely does not contribute to diabetes and that other factors are

involved such as high sugar or glucose levels. Both answers could thus suggest a certain level of knowledge concerning other factors at play in the risk for diabetes.

Physical Activity

Tied into diabetes prevention is the notion that physical activity is a major factor in the reduction of high blood sugar levels. Therefore, the following questions were asked: “Does physical activity reduce diabetes?” “Should a person with diabetes exercise regularly and what kinds of physical activities are good for a person with diabetes?”

The number of ‘yes’ and ‘no’ answers from the Secondary 3 (50%) and 4 (54%) levels was split down the middle that physical activity reducea diabetes. The Secondary 5 group all answered ‘yes’ that physical activity does reduce diabetes. Oddly, in the next question concerning regular exercise for diabetics, (100%) of all Secondary 3, 4 and 5 levels agreed ‘yes’ that a person with diabetes should exercise regularly. The different results for each question suggest that perhaps the words or the phrases ‘physical activity’ and ‘exercise regularly’ are understood differently from the student’s perspective. Yet, the student responses suggest having knowledge of the benefits of regular exercise.

When asked about the types of activities that are good for diabetes prevention most Secondary 3 students listed sports such as floor hockey, basketball,

hockey, jogging/running, baseball and football. Interestingly, the activity most listed by this group was “walking.” The Secondary 4s listed the same physical activities, but one individual included going to the Fitness Center Building³⁰. The Secondary 5s did not differ from those answers but did mention other more individualistic activities such as: weight-lifting, daily workouts, stretching, aerobics, martial arts, physical chores, push ups and sit ups. It is worthy to note that the Secondary 5s as a form of physical activity also listed “walking”.

From the student data and my observations in the community “walking” or “walking around” in Wemindji is not only a physical activity, but also culturally speaking, is somewhat of a social activity that most youth partake in. This social activity may include meeting at various locations behind community buildings or immediate “bush” areas and going from place to place, sometimes until very late at night and especially during the warmth of the summer months. These “spaces” are where youth congregate to socialize, drink, smoke, talk, and meet members of the opposite sex; these sites are usually free of adults. In Wemindji, after 9pm there is very little open in terms of restaurants, stores and other buildings for youth to meet at. As such, the local natural environments become alternative meeting places.

Similarly, growing up in my youth in Moose Factory, Ontario, I can remember my friends and I would often ask each other in the evenings or weekends,

³⁰ The Fitness Center is a separate facility from the Community Arena and School gymnasium. It is located near the Maquatua Inn and is open to the public during the week and weekends.

“Are you going to walk around tonight?” The nature of our community’s infrastructure did not afford many indoor places to congregate or socialize.

Eeyou and non-Eeyou Food

Regarding the question, “Do you think diet or eating certain kinds of food causes diabetes?” 56% of Secondary 3s; and 46% of Secondary 4s answered ‘no’, while only 11% of the Secondary 5s did. The students were then asked to list the kinds of foods and drinks that cause diabetes. The food choice boxes checked off the most by the Secondary students were: chips, sugar, alcohol, poutine (french-fries/cheese/gravy), chocolate and french-fries. The results indicate student awareness of the kinds of foods that have high sugar or fat content and are associated with diabetes, although most do not see this as a cause of the disease.

The non-Eeyou foods that the Secondary 3s ate the most were poutine, hamburger, pizza and french-fries. The Secondary 4 and 5s listed the same foods but added more diverse non-Eeyou foods such as spaghetti, soups, chicken, grilled cheese, pastas, hot dogs, eggs, ribs, fruits, salads, steak, pizza subs, corn pops, porridge, bread, Mexican and Chinese food. The favorite non-Eeyou foods from all the student results appeared to be poutine, hamburger, spaghetti, pizza, pastas, french fries and Kraft dinner. Students were also asked if they liked non-Eeyou foods over traditional foods. Eeyou foods include goose, duck, moose, beaver, rabbit, ptarmigan, caribou, and a variety of fish. Two Secondary 3s said ‘no’ because:

- “I like Cree foods because it’s good.”
- “Because they [non-Cree foods] don’t taste very good.”

Four of the Secondary 3s said they preferred non-Eeyou foods. Two of these students explained:

- “The non-Cree foods taste great easy to get.”
- “Because I hardly ate traditional food, I was raised in Montreal.”

Four of the Secondary 3 students were impartial and offered:

- “I like both Cree foods and non-Cree foods.”
- “I like them both, non-Cree food and traditional.”
- “I like them both because they taste good.”
- “I like Cree foods and non-Cree foods.”

Among the Secondary 4s, 9 said they preferred Eeyou food:

- “Because Cree food is better than non-Cree food.”
- “Because traditional foods taste better.”
- “I like traditional Cree foods because it’s better than non-Cree foods.”
- “Can’t explain it and I don’t want to explain it.”
- “Because traditional Cree food is our culture.”

One of the two Secondary 4 students that answered ‘yes’ to liking non-Eeyou food better than Eeyou food explained:

- “Because sometimes I get sick when I eat Cree food.”

Secondary 5s (89%) generally preferred Eeyou foods more than non-Eeyou foods because:

- “Cree food is more delicious.”
- “No I don’t like non-Cree food more than Cree foods because I like both foods.”
- “I like Cree foods more because it is healthy and it is part of our tradition and culture.”

- “I rarely get to eat it and when I get to eat it I think it’s so good.”
- “No. It’s maybe because my family eats together for supper all the time, eating traditional Cree food.”
- “I like traditional Cree food than non-Cree food. Because it’s just good, if you know what I mean.”

Two Secondary 5 students noted that they liked non-Cree foods more than traditional food because:

- “It taste different and easier to cook.”
- “I eat more non-Cree foods more than traditional Cree foods.”

In summary, a comparison of student comments can be interpreted to mean that many understand the negative consequences of certain non-Eeyou foods (high fat/high blood sugar) to their health. Yet, the amount and type of non-Eeyou foods consumed by students clearly shows many non-Eeyou foods that represent potential health risks for developing type 2 diabetes mellitus. However, many students voice their preference for the taste and importance of Eeyou food over non-Eeyou food and link its consumption to tradition and culture. More on these discrepancies will be discussed in the next section.

Eeyou Food and Identity

The next set of questions asked whether traditional foods were good for a person and whether they were important to students and their families. The majority of all the Secondary 3 (94%), 4 (69%) and 5 (78%) students answered ‘yes’

that eating traditional food was good for a person. Regarding the importance to them personally of eating traditional food, Secondary 3 (75%), 4 (69%) and 5 (100%) students answered 'yes'. In terms of importance of eating traditional food to their families, Secondary 3 (94%), 4 (85%) and 5 (100%) students answered 'yes'.

Some Secondary 3 students explained:

- “Cause its Cree tradition.”
- “Good to eat.”
- “Elders eat traditional food almost every day.”
- “Because traditional foods are healthy for you.”
- “Yes, because we are Natives. Yes, it is important to our parents because they are natives.”
- “It tastes good. Makes me stronger and I eat what I kill. Because we live in the bush once every 3 months.”
- “That how we get strong and healthy.”
- “Because they’re healthy and should be eaten often. I need them for strong bones and teeth and for being healthy. We [parents, siblings] eat goose, caribou, etc. every month.”
- “Because I’m Cree.”
- “Because Cree people like eating traditional food.”
- “Meat is good but it depends if it is fat like bacon, etc. I like eating Cree food cause I like it. I think so, you should ask them [parents, siblings]. My family eats Cree food about 2 times a week.”

Likewise, Secondary 4s also commented on whether traditional foods were good for a person and if it was important to students and their families:

- “Because it makes you work hard. Because it keeps you healthy.”
- “Because there’s less salt in the meat. Because it is important to keep the traditional way.”
- “It is a diet food and we always eat traditional every month. Hell yeah, it’s important to them my parents been eating it when they were little, so as my siblings.”
- “Traditional foods are good to people because people don’t have to fry their food. It is important to me to eat traditional because I don’t have to fry and

I like it more boiled from frying it. Yes, traditional food is important to my family because we have always ate this kinds of food when we were younger children.”

- “Because it is our culture and nutritional. Because I like better than non-Cree food. They [parents, siblings] like to keep our tradition alive.”
- “It’s important to me because it’s better than white food. Because they [parents, siblings] say it’s better than white food.”
- “Because meat gets them strong and have good blood. Because I am a Cree person and because they [parents, siblings] are Cree people.”

One Secondary 4 student who answered ‘no’ that traditional foods was not always good for a person offered:

- “There is a lot of grease on the animals. If you eat too much traditional foods you can get diabetes.”

Yet, this student cited the historical importance of traditional food and said:

- “I think it is important to eat traditional food because that was the only way we could get food a long time ago. I think it is important for my parents and siblings to eat traditional food because it’s our history.”

The Secondary 5’s argued that traditional foods were healthy for a person and emphasized the cultural importance to them and their families:

- “Because you will most likely not get diabetes [if you] eat only these foods. Because it tastes good and it’s healthy.”
- “Some of the traditional foods are good for a person because some of the food has vitamins and they’re good for a growing person. Yes, I think it is important because it’s part of my culture. Yes, it’s important to them [parents, siblings] because they don’t want to lose something that’s a part of our culture.”
- “Because they are healthier than non-Cree food but it also depends on how you cook it. It is important to eat traditional food because our parents fed us Cree food ever since we were young. Eating traditional food is important to them [parents, siblings] because it is a part of our Cree culture/tradition.”
- “Yes, it’s good for people. For me, it’s important to eat traditional food because it’s my tradition. Yes, it’s important to our [parents, siblings] tradition.”

- “Yes, traditional foods are good for a person because it’s healthy foods. Yes, it’s important for me to eat traditional food because it’s good and healthy.”
- “Yes, because Native people were healthy before whiteman food came. Because traditional food is healthy and for special occasions.”
- “Because in the old days people ate traditional foods only. Well, not really [importance of the food to student].”

Following these health and cultural themes, Secondary 3³¹ students were then asked if it makes a difference to an Eeyou person’s identity if that person chose not to eat traditional food. In addition, if Eeyou persons chose not to eat traditional food but still spoke the Eeyou language, would they still consider themselves Eeyou people? A majority of the Secondary 3 (88%) students felt that it made no difference to Eeyou identity if one chose to eat non-traditional food and some commented:

- “Someone can eat anything they want.”
- “There is no difference to a Cree person not to eat traditional food.”
- “The food is not the only thing to identify me.”
- “The food is not the only thing to identify.”

Four Secondary 3 students answered ‘yes’ but only one argued:

- “Cree food is part of our culture.”

Secondary 3 students then remarked on the issue that if Eeyou persons chose not to eat traditional food but still spoke the Eeyou language, would they still

³¹ Secondary 4 and 5 were not asked these questions concerning language and identity issues due to computer error and was not discovered until after all the surveys were completed and returned by students. However, students were asked this question during the interviews.

consider themselves to be Eeyou people? All except one student answered ‘yes’ they would still consider themselves Eeyou:

- “As long as I am a born Cree I will always be Cree.”
- “But not that Cree enough.”
- “But it’s not the food that makes me Cree.”
- “Yes, it’s not just the food that makes me Cree it’s the language and the culture.”
- “Cuz it all runs in the blood.”
- “Because I was made a Cree and I can never be white.”
- “Cause I’m a Cree person.”
- “I’m a Cree person.”
- “Cause I’m a full-blooded Indian.”
- “I got Cree blood.”

Lastly, all Secondary students were asked to check a number of boxes concerning the traditional foods most popular amongst them and the frequency of their consumption. The data results showed that goose, bear, caribou, fish, moose, and beaver were the most popular items. In terms of frequency, many of the Secondary 3 (56%), 4 (69%), and 5 (33%) students answered that they ate one or more types of these traditional foods at least once a month. Some students ate these foods more than one to two times a day or two times weekly. One Secondary 3 student remarked:

- “When I am in the bush I eat traditional food almost every day. When I am in town I eat traditional whenever my mom cooks traditional food.”

This comment is interesting in that it suggests that the main food provider in a household influences the amount, frequency and types of Eeyou food eaten. In addition, it suggests that students eat differently when in the “bush” or

“community” spaces of living. Culturally, the “bush” appears to be more associated with Eeyou eating behavior, while Eeyou eating patterns are less associated with the “community.”

In terms of food, the questionnaire data shows the importance of Eeyou food as a significant food resource that contributes to bodily energy for “strong bones” or “vitamins” needed by many students and their families. In addition, the students comment on how they prefer Eeyou food to non-Eeyou foods. Moreover, the data also show on a deeper level that Eeyou food and eating behavior is more than just a basic need for energy, strength, and good health or just “better than white food.” For the data suggests there is a tendency towards a personal and collective identity that is constructed around consuming Eeyou food. Personal and collective identity from the student perspective points to an understanding, belief and attitude among students that eating Eeyou food is simultaneously an act of experiencing, integrating, and sustaining one’s culture, tradition and history into one’s personal life.

However, complicating the food/identity issue is the fact that retaining the language rather than consuming Eeyou food had more bearing on being Eeyou for some students and “someone can eat anything they want.” Moreover, the data indicate that students spend more time in the community where more non-Eeyou food versus Eeyou food is consumed. Yet, it should be noted that due to socio-economic factors (full-time work, welfare/unemployment, high cost of hunting),

various limitations or constrictions might affect the amount of seasonal hunting activity a particular family might be able to engage in. Furthermore, this constraint on seasonal hunting harvest may affect and limit the availability of Eeyou foods in the household for students to consume. Further analysis and discussion of other data are presented below.

Smoking

In Eeyou Istchee, cancer and other respiratory afflictions (see Appendix E) are increasing and it is believed that many youth are smokers (see Appendix F). Therefore, I included questions about smoking as a side behavioral issue that could help develop some understanding about the ages that Wemindji secondary students began smoking.

In terms of participant observation, I observed on several occasions that some Wemindji youth were smoking publicly in front of the coffee shop, Krisianne's restaurant, the community store and Northern Store dry goods outlet that are all located in the community's central plaza³². These youth did not seem to be bothered that adults were present and showed no signs of trying to conceal their cigarettes in public.

³² Krisianne's restaurant, the coffee shop, Wemindji Community Store, Northern Store dry goods, Post Office, bank outlet and crafts shop are all located in a small, urban style shopping plaza in central Wemindji. The plaza is an area of daily activity for adults and students.

In the questionnaire I asked students: “Do you smoke cigarettes?” “If you smoke cigarettes, at what age did you begin and why did you begin?” In addition, I asked: “Is smoking healthy for a person with diabetes?” “Do your parents smoke?” “Do your friends smoke?” Of all the students, over half of Secondary 3 (56%), 4 (69%) and 5 (67%) students admitted to smoking but 94%, 100%, 89% respectively also answered ‘no’ that smoking was not healthy for a person with diabetes. Ninety-four percent of Secondary 3, 77% of Secondary 4 and 78% of Secondary 5 students noted that their friends smoked cigarettes. The age and reasons for smoking written by the Secondary 3s who did smoke were:

- “I started smoking cigarettes when I was 12 years old. My father gave me a cigarette and wanted me to smoke.”
- “I was at the 13 and got addicted at the age of 14.”
- “At 12, people forced me to smoke.”
- “I started smoking when I was 15 years old, because I felt like it.”
- “I started smoking when I was 10 and just felt like it.”
- “I was 9 years old when I first started smoking. Why I started smoking is *chii-mewoo-maa-shou*.” [the smoke smelled good; the expression also refers to enjoying the smoke]
- “15. I don’t know.”
- “I don’t know how old was I when I first smoked.”

Secondary 4 written responses reveal students are smoking early in life:

- “I began smoking when I was about 8 then I quit for awhile and I started smoking again when I was 15. I began smoking because I don’t know why.”
- “I began smoke at age 13.”
- “I began at the age of 12 and I didn’t know why I began.”
- “I started smoking at fourteen years age and I don’t know when, why I begin to smoking.”
- “At the age 12 because I saw my friend smoking.”
- “I [16 year old] started smoking this year, because my friends smoke.”

- “11 or 12 because I liked smoking.”
- “Age 13. I don’t know why I did that.”
- “I begin at age of 11.”

Secondary 5 responses also reveal that cigarette smoking began early for most students:

- “7. Because I thought it was cool.”
- “I [16 year old] began smoking last year in March or April. Peer pressure.”
- “10 years old. My friends smoked so I smoked.”
- “I started smoke at the age of 12. I started because all my friends smoked.”
- “I began smoking at the age of 12 and I don’t really know why.”

The data clearly indicate that students are smoking at early ages. They also suggest that smoking is a student behavior that is likely to become another health problem among these youth if they continue to smoke into their adult lives. As in the rest of Canada, these results are disturbing, since smoking leads to the development of lung cancer, respiratory afflictions and early death.

Multiple-Choice Data

One of the challenging aspects of constructing the multiple-choice instrument was in deciding how to make it a rather simple, clear and short process. I had to remember that if the document was too lengthy and detailed (over two pages) that student interest would deteriorate, especially among the Secondary 3 level. In light of this, I kept the instrument to two pages and integrated as many ideas as possible into each multiple-choice statement. I believe the process worked

because the students in this study were able to read the statements quite quickly and the possible choices without much difficulty.

Additional attention was given to the way in which I worded the questions. In preparing this instrument, I attempted to provide choices that complemented or reflected what I suspected to reflect the students' particular beliefs, attitudes or world-view. Conversely, one must be very familiar with the study group in order to predict the kind of choices the participants may value. In this study, being an Eeyou individual provided an advantage and connection to the kind of Eeyou roles, lifestyle issues and choices I believed the students would find important or problematic in their own lives.

Ethnographically, the multiple-choice method was an alternative method I found to be very useful with the Maquatua Eeyou School students in providing some rather shy individuals a safe medium in which to express their personal views silently and anonymously.

In this data instrument I wanted to further examine biculturalism and identity along with other issues. I wanted to know if traditional gender roles and contemporary Eeyou identity concerning gender and language were still important, and whether these were considered to be valid issues or categories with regards to Wemindji youth. I also wanted to know if body concepts (weight, image) were important and what lifestyles ("bush", community, urban "south", college, career) the students wanted to pursue in the future.

Eeyou Roles

Traditional male and female role issues were asked in this way: “I believe that mothers, daughters and women in Wemindji”... at this point the student would choose an answer that best fit his or her view, attitude or belief. To this question, Secondary 3 (76%) and 4 (57%) students believed that mothers, daughters and women in Wemindji should earn money doing traditional women’s work (sewing, selling food, making moccasins, etc.). In terms of gender, 71% of all female respondents answered in this way. Thirty-three percent of all male respondents (4 Secondary 3 and 2 Secondary 4 males) and two Secondary 4 females said that females should be able to do any work that males do. Seventy-five percent of Secondary 5 students also said that mothers, daughters and women should be able to do any work that men can do.

Another gender issue was raised in the following question: “I believe Eeyou traditional male and female roles (men hunt, women clean meat, etc.): 1) were important only in the past; 2) were important in the past and are still important to youth; or 3) were important in the past but need to change to reflect today’s Eeyou male and female youth.” Secondary 3 (59%), 4 (79%) and 5 (75%) students chose the answer that stated that traditional male and female roles were important in the past for Eeyou society, and were still important and valuable for today’s youth to use in the “bush” and “community.” However, four Secondary 3 females, two

Secondary 4 males and two Secondary 5 students, one male and one female respectively agreed that traditional male and female roles were important in the past for Eeyou society, but that traditional roles needed to change in order to reflect today's Eeyou male and female youth. Thus, only a minority of students felt that social change was necessary concerning gender relations.

In terms of “bush” skills, the instrument asked, “I believe Eeyou hunting, trapping and fishing skills are: 1) only important in the “bush”; 2) important in the “bush”, “community” and “south”; or 3) unimportant for survival in the “community” and “south.” Secondary 3 (71%) and 5 (63%) students believed that hunting, trapping and fishing skills were cultural practices important for survival in three spaces of living: the “bush”, “community” and living in the “south.” The Secondary 4 students were split (50%) between this answer and the choice that cultural practices were only important for survival in the “bush.”

Gender roles and “bush” lifestyle were examined in response to my own observation that our Eeyou society is undergoing changes. The hunting roles of the hunter and family that past generations were built upon are still important but have changed in some aspects. However, I argue that continuity exists concerning traditional hunting philosophy and gender tasks that can be quite easily delineated and still observed in the hunting camps and “bush” environments of Eeyou Istchee. Moreover, many community members (men/women) whom I had informal conversations with offered that a philosophy of sharing in all camp duties including

family nurturing responsibilities by men and women was strongly emphasized to them by their parents, grandparents and Elders. In fact, I was told that traditionally there was an extremely healthy respect between the husband, wife and family. Furthermore, those superficial understandings of Eeyou hunting societies, reportedly held by outsiders, where women were considered to be subordinate did not seem to fit with the perspectives of many Eeyou in the community³³.

Identity, Language and Biculturalism

In terms of identity, I wanted to know how language fit into the students' conceptions about 'being Eeyou.' The issue was stated this way: I believe that speaking Cree and retaining our language is: 1) somewhat important; 2) very important; or 3) not important to who I am as an Cree and my goals in life. The Secondary 3 (82%), 4 (100%), and 5 (88%) students answered that speaking and retaining the Eeyou language was very important to them as Eeyou individuals and their goals in life.

In terms of biculturalism, Secondary 3 (65%), 4 (71%), and 5 (75%) students answered that being an Eeyou youth from Wemindji was unique because they liked living two lifestyles: the Eeyou ("bush", hunting, speaking Eeyou) and the "white" lifestyle (internet, "city" life, speaking English). Moreover, when queried about what

³³ Here I'm referring to outside psychologists, mental health workers, nurses, doctors and social workers whom I was told by a number of Wemindji women held certain views that Eeyou Wemindji females were being oppressed or dominated by Eeyou males. In essence, that these women in some way were culturally "locked" into a lifestyle that was out of step with today's contemporary Eeyou female.

they would do after graduating from Secondary 5, a majority (Secondary 3-59%, 4-50%, 5-88%) of students chose that they would leave Wemindji, attend CEGEP (pre-college/university) and or attend University. Some students answered they would stay in Wemindji and either get married, have children or take a job. A small number of students (Secondary 3-18%, 4-21%, 5-13%) stated that they would leave Wemindji, learn traditional knowledge and live a traditional Eeyou life in the “bush.”

Thus far, the results from the multiple-choice data can be interpreted to indicate that students acknowledge their culture’s ancient history and traditions yet simultaneously realize they currently live a different community lifestyle. Moreover, responses to questions about biculturalism and identity suggest that the students are aware of their participation in two very different knowledge systems and ways of knowing the world. What is more, the data responses suggest that students find it very important to continue in their traditional language, gender roles and “bush” skills for a sense of personal and collective identity.

At the same time, however, there is a sense that students believe holding onto cultural traditions does not mean living in the past, but that these Eeyou institutions are valid and useful for them in contemporary Wemindji, even if they were to live in an urban “southern” society. Moreover, the student data suggest that Eeyou institutions can transcend time and space to complement living in the present lifestyle and future environments. In truth, from the data there were students who believed that traditions were very important but that some roles needed to be

rethought or reimagined to fit their contemporary lifestyles. In this perspective, the past is acknowledged but change for the future is also perceived to be positive and not negative or irrelevant.

Physical Activity and Body Concepts

With regard to physical activity, “walking”, in particular was a popular activity that arose when students were queried as to the activities they most participated in during the evenings and on the weekends. While some students chose skating, hockey, running and broomball, the majority of the choices showed “walking around with my friends” to be the most popular. In fact, from a historical perspective, among the traditional Eeyou hunting families of past times, “walking” was an important mode of transportation. Some professional youth workers in Wemindji such as Thomas Mark have tried to emphasize “walking” during winter and journeying by canoe in the summer from the inland regions as important cultural traditions (Mark T, 2004). Furthermore, these cultural traditions should be regularly re-visited and utilized within the context of involving youth, adults and Elders of Wemindji in a culturally appropriate form of physical exercise³⁴. For Eeyou youth, no doubt this cultural tradition could build self-esteem, mental health, spiritual awareness, physiology, emotional confidence, individual skill competency,

³⁴ Thomas Mark (Youth Co-ordinator) has already organized and completed one canoe expedition in which youth, adults and Elders paddled, portaged canoes and walked as their ancestors did in the past from the inland region to the coastal area near Old Factory. One journey lasted 21days before arriving at Wemindji (snow storms, rain storms and ice conditions constrict travel at times).

group interaction skills, identity reinforcement and a strenuous “bush” experience for those interested in learning the values and challenges of a traditional mode of travel. It could also develop better communication skills and bridge communication “gaps” between the youth, adults and Elders.

In terms of body concepts, the instrument asked whether weight and image were important to students. Some students (Secondary 3- 41%, 4-36%, 5-50%) answered that they were not overweight and were happy with their current body weight. On the other hand, a number of Secondary 3 (57%), 4 (36%) and 5 (13%) students answered that they were overweight and not happy with their current body weight. A number of students (Secondary 3-29%, 4-29%, 5-39%) answered that they were overweight but felt normal with their current body weight. It is important to note, during the time of my study, outside of one individual, I did not observe large numbers of extremely overweight or obese students in Wemindji.

As for body image, the Secondary 3 (53%) and 4 (57%) students noted that in Wemindji, body image (“the way I look”) is considered unimportant to them. Some Secondary 5 (38%) students also gave that answer but 50% believed body image was important to them. A small number of all students (Secondary 3-18%, 4-21%, 5-13%) said that body image was only important in the context of traveling “south” with family or friends. In other words, images from television and other “southern” media seem to play a role regarding Eeyou youth body image.

Six Student Narratives (Secondary 4 and 5 students)

From a holistic perspective, the unstructured and semi-structured interviews explored various aspects of social and cultural life pertaining to youth. Generally, the interview topics provided a basic overview of categories such as family, education, social behavior, cultural lifestyle, food, physical activity, biculturalism and language. Within these categories, thematic content explored *Ndobo*³⁵, gender roles, alcohol consumption, drug use, Eeyou and non-Eeyou lifestyles, school, Eeyou and “white” food, identity, “south”, Eeyou and English language use.

The following presents relevant content concerning the above topics and themes, organized into two sections as follows: 1) *Ndobo* (including gender roles, family, hunting, food, and the “bush”) and 2) community (including social behavior, food, physical activity, education, and the “south”).

***Ndoho*, the family and the “bush”**

The Eeyou family is a significant domain for socialization into community and “bush” lifestyles. Ideally, a healthy Eeyou family embodies both contexts of living that enable youth a balanced experience of happiness, strength, identity, emotional, physical and psychological well-being. Furthermore, most Wemindji Eeyou families move easily between both spaces of living.

³⁵ In the Eeyou language, *Ndobo* refers to hunting practice and knowledge that includes all aspects of hunting and harvesting techniques and experience concerning game and waterfowl.

Aside from community living, the counterpart of family socialization is the “bush” camp setting that is perhaps the most critical space where hunting knowledge is practiced. Within this family space, distinct hunting knowledge of the land is imparted to youth who listen to instructions and narratives, practice skills, and observe the conduct, behavior and responsible actions of parents, grandparents, Elders or extended-family members.

Eeyou youth may come of age in the community setting, but in a different dynamic, the “bush” and hunting spaces bring youth into “contact” with their history and the cultural praxis of “bush” skills and proper social interaction. Spiritually, for the youth, there is a deeper consciousness and awareness of themselves as Eeyou participants in the cycles of the seasons, land and the knowledge that animals sustain and enable life. Therefore, they must fine-tune their bodily senses and mental competencies to successfully integrate knowledge of geese cleaning, sewing, cooking, climate, ice thickness, wind direction(s) and wildlife behavior in order to locate animals and fowl. Textbooks, school assignments and pencils aside, students learn their culture’s traditions by doing and developing memory skills in order to recall valuable information and appropriate techniques disseminated through oral communication with brothers, sisters, parents, uncles, aunts, grandparents and Elders.

Student narratives depict the importance of family during hunting activity.

When asked, “Does your family hunt? When, where and who goes?,” students responded:

- “Yeah, me [male student], my father and my brother. My mom and sister come along but she stays at the camp. Just go up to LG3 [Electric dam project], to that road there, about 105 kilometers.”
- “Yes, spring...fall...sometimes winter. We stay here [near Wemindji] no not that close...probably about one hour drive. My father, me [male student] and my little brother. Spring for two weeks with my grandmother, grandfather. No electricity, different...so dark, it’s so dark staying over there. It helps you not being scared.”
- “Yeah...we go hunting sometimes when it’s hunting season. Me [male student] and my brothers. Usually it’s three families [at camp] but ahh...sometime there’s more. My mother’s family *Atsynia keyaa*” [last name of mother’s extended family].
- “*Tibib* [yes] *Pibshuutich* [near here]. My grandfather, my aunts, my father, *nehgabwe* [mother] *nuutaanii*’s cousin [father’s cousin]. *Keyaa* [yes] cabins all in one place, five...ah *muui* [no] six. *Muk* goosebreaks *in taahnaniit* [only during “goosebreak”³⁶ we’re there.]” [female student]
- “Yeah, goose break at kilometer 15 [along the highway].” [female student]
- “*Keyaa*, right [turn], four hours or three and a half [where access road meets the highway]. *Nehgabwe* [mother], *nuutaanii* [father], my mom’s uncle, *ndobo*.” [female student]

During family hunting activities at the camps, fathers, mothers, sons and daughters participate in specific gender tasks. Yet, contemporarily, there appears to be some overlap as female youth and adult individuals are also shown how to hunt, shoot geese and moose. Eeyou women of past generations also snared rabbits, set traps, fished and fired guns when the need arose (Louttit A, 2005; Louttit E, 2004). In truth, strict, inflexible, gendered categories are probably unrealistic, non-Eeyou

notions that may not apply to the Eeyou psyche of the past and present times.

However, gendered responsibilities are still prevalent as shown in the student responses to the questions about what kinds of duties, responsibilities, and jobs are accomplished at the camps:

- “[Father shows] how to set up snares...traps. We still hunt over there.” [male student]
- “I [male student] usually see women do that [clean geese]. I never see the men do that. It’s usually the men that go to the blind. Hunting like...shooting, setting traps.”
- “It’s like the men do the hunting and...but I [male student] think women can be hunters too if they want to. Well, you know if they wanted to. I heard I think this one woman I heard killed a moose I think with a 22 gun. Yeah, yeah, they can do fishing even my aunt she does fishing.”
- [Have you shot a goose?] “Yeah, last May.” [female student]
- Stay in the camp [women]. *Ipskunchaas* [we pluck geese], *minaawaaus* [we cook food], *cleanupnuuas* [tidy the area], *nisk keyaa miichoyaa* [we eat goose too]. *Wiistaans* [pile wood]. *Indaa webskiitch* [long ago] *indaa keyaa chütidits skoaiits intuuii adaaits ab naabaan aawiichiimaats* [women are not to just go anywhere when they are married with a husband; they must take care of their responsibilities as women]. *Muus kiiya wiivaan indwaaptaamaasuus niipii* [Women always get water] *chii kwaapitchiits* [carry water from river or stream]. *Wiivaanu chiikaduudiits chihpiitchenchii* [they did the work in the teepee] *Ibkuun miitnukaans* [and in the winter camp]. *Tuush chihka miichivaanits chaakoium* [eating some things]. [female student]
- “*Piimiibkuwaauch nisk* [cleaning, plucking, and gutting geese] *Ndobiits* [hunting].” [female student]
- “*Keyaa Ndobo* [yes, hunting]. *Miit en dwap tan* [we get wood], *staakuuns mak* [we get spruce boughs for teepee floor], *Nii, neh gaa wii.*” [me and my mother] [female student]
- “My sister and my mother clean the goose...[they] make some little clothing for the kids.” [male student]

³⁶ Goose breaks refer to the time period (usually 1 week) that school boards, band councils and other organizations set aside so that students may accompany their parents and extended families to hunt geese during the fall and spring season migrations.

- “They [mother and sister] clean the animals we kill. The women stay home and watch the children. Cut the firewood, the boughs for the teepee, stay close to home putting up snares or picking berries. The men they go out hunting, try to set traps and look for all kinds of game.” [male student].

Community

In this section, themes and narrative about social behavior, education, food, language, physical activity, identity, Eeyou and non-Eeyou lifestyle as well as the “south” are presented. According to some Eeyou Elders, community living is increasingly reflecting “white” styles of attitudes and behaviors. For example, alcohol and drug use among youth is increasing in many Eeyou communities (Louttit A, 2005). Student narratives depict a young population engaging in social behavior that involves alcohol³⁷ consumption and drug use. Asked, if they consume alcohol or used drugs, students replied:

- Not all the time, sometimes. Liquor, beer, the bootleggers sell it to us. I [male student] don’t know usually drink about two cases. People I know from other classes [school]. Me I go home before the sun comes but I don’t know about my other friends. [Is there drugs in town?] Yeah, not all the time, “coke” [cocaine], hash, yeah marijuana.
- “I’m [male student] into alcohol but not them [friends]. Budweiser, nightcaps...enough to be not very drunk just a couple of drinks”.
- “Sometimes beer, liquor. [From where?] bootleggers...ahh...one *aavvutlin jaa an* [I buy from one person]. [Do your siblings drink?] One, 13 year old [brother]. Weed *esko* [once in awhile]. Weed *muuk* [only weed]. [Who does “coke” in Wemindji?] *Imstii waanchii* [lots of people]. [Your age?] *Munii* [no] my age, *asbaaoits waanchii* [older people].” [female student]

³⁷ Alcohol consumption and purchase is legal at the age of 18 in Quebec. Alcohol can be purchased at a grocery store in the Hydro-Quebec work-site town of Radisson about a two-hour drive by vehicle from Wemindji.

- Drink...beer, alcohol. *Inkaachiimdaao shaoiits chi wuudinjebits* [we ask older people to buy it]. *Daap skuuitch skoa* [sometimes we ask older women to buy it] ahh...two cases and half...other things *iimskvaaguumiits chibgaan* [something stronger like whiskey or vodka]. [Where do you drink?] *Waachiishiits* [behind the community hall on a little hill]. [Is there other things around?] Drugs, weed, “coke” *esko* [sometimes]. [Do you guys do “coke?”] No, weed *muuk* [only weed].” [female student]

Concerning alcohol, drugs, diet and physical activity one male student responded yes to using alcohol and drugs, but on the other hand, clearly expressed that a detailed, exercise routine kept him physically and mentally in shape for hockey:

Budweiser, liquor, Smirnoff...yeah vodka. Only when I’m drinking...weed... that’s it... that’s the only thing I do. I love eating it [poutine] but I try...not eating it...gain weight. Yeah, it matters to me...I eat...ah...proper way. I don’t know how you say it...nutrition? That’s what I eat me. Like I go to the fitness center to train. Yup. I’m involved in hockey that’s why. Weight-lift, cardio, running, treadmill or bicycle. Conditioning. Three times, for one month, for one hour. Yup, one hour and half, something like that. Sometimes I take long...ahh...Monday, Wednesday, Friday. Warm up, warm up with the bike...then after do little bit of weights, reps³⁸ exercises, up to 12 reps. Then after, do some skipping rope, then do some bicycle, cool down, then finished after. [Are you disciplined?] huh..[chuckles]...yup. I do different way. Like Monday I do my upper body, then Wednesday I do leg workouts, then I do my upper body, Friday. Sometimes my upper body two times a week. Then sometimes my leg workouts two times a week. That’s how it goes, changes, Monday, Friday then Wednesday. It helps me with my mind...like you can concentrate better. Ahh...can do anything quick and helps you think too [male student].

³⁸ “Reps” refers to repetition of exercises like sit-ups or push-ups

Other individuals did not state that they used the Fitness Center but did mention some participation in sports at the Maquatua Eeyou School Gym and Community

Arena:

- “I [male student] participate in volleyball...just volleyball.”
- “Volleyball, broomball [female student].”
- “Broomball during the week. [how many times?] three [female student].”

One male individual described his weight condition as unusual. This student did not participate in any sports yet mentioned the physical aspect of the “bush” camp:

Well, I'm [male student] fatter than most people. I'm fat. I have one friend who visits, is very active. And I think most of my friends are very active but not me. I just stay inside. I usually stay inside. They don't usually come to my place sometimes they do. We play cards. At camp I do physical activities I think like some physical activities like chopping wood or something. In town, ah...I mostly lazy. Sometimes we chop wood for our teepees [in back of house]. Nah, I don't really go out or on any teams or something.

In terms of diet, the student talked about why traditional food would be healthier:

Traditional food would be good I [male student] think would be good for them because it's healthy. Some of it [I] read in books and some of it I hear from others. [“White” food is] fattening...some of it's good and some of it is bad. Stuff like vegetables or stuff like celery...or ah...but if you watch how much you eat certain food like if you eat certain food like if you eat certain amount of fries you could probably lose weight too. And subs, Subways [referring to food chain], I think they're, well, they said 6 grams of fat or something.

Pertaining to food, student narratives about Eeyou and Non-Eeyou foods suggest a bicultural aspect:

- Bush food, goose, duck. Yeah, my grandparents place, traditional food, fish, moose. I [male student] don't mind going there to eat they eat traditional food everyday. It's mainly fish, suckers, pike, trout. At big feasts it's a mixture of "white" [chicken, roast beef, peas, carrots] and traditional food.
- Pasta and some of it are Chinese. Oh ah my favorite kind of place to go would be Chinese because I [male student] normally go there [in the "south"]. Ah yeah but you know some of it, caribou. Like I've only really tasted caribou and moose. I haven't tasted the others. I eat dumplings though. Like when there's a fire made, there's ah, what they do is there's a stick here...ah...moose or caribou is cooked [on sticks] on the fire.
- "Poutine...ehh...special poutine. Green peppers, mushrooms, onions, bacon, cheese, fries, gravy. Sheppard's pie, moose, hot dogs, geese, beaver [female student]."

As well as the bicultural aspect, one individual's response included knowledge that some "white" foods contain sugar as shown in the following statement:

Porridge...sometimes I have cereal, toast. Orange juice, milk, soup, tomato soup. Rabbit...ah...*beyaoiits* [partridge] good. Sometimes we get them from our relatives. They give it to us. [What do you know of certain "white" foods?] There's lots of sugar, I don't know what they're called...in some of the foods [male student].

Relating to issues of food, language and identity, students were asked: "Is an Eeyou person who speaks the Eeyou language still Eeyou if that person doesn't like or want to eat Eeyou food?"

- "The person is still Cree [male student]."
- "Yeah I [male student] think so, I guess. We still have the Indian status. Well, the Cree youth try to act "white" they try to speak English. They always want to eat "white" food, like pizza. Poutine. I don't know why they're trying to be "white"."

- “He’s Cree in blood but you know he’s not really different. Eheh that’s what I [male student] think anyways.”

Concerning whether or not integrating both the Eeyou and non-Eeyou lifestyle was important to them and their identity all six individuals agreed and stated:

- “Yup...I [male student] wanna learn it...it’s important to me.”
- “*Keyaa* [yes] [female student].”
- “Both [female student].”
- “*Keyaa* [yes] [female student].”
- “Yeah, ahh...I [male student] see myself sometimes I do that. Yeah I think so...ah...it’s...you know...wouldn’t survive with it. I think...that’s what I think anyways. Yeah, to know some things about the past is good to know.”
- “Yeah, to keep our tradition alive. That’s what we’ve been taught all our lives [male student].”

In terms of education and the “south” student responses show that they’re familiar with southern environments. Moreover, the student narratives indicate a desire to attain a college or university education. When asked, “What will you do after Secondary 5?”, students responded:

- “Go to college yeah or Ottawa [male student].”
- “Go to school...get a good education...go to college or university he [father] told me [male student]. [I like] playing hockey over there [“south”]...tournaments. Like going over there to shop. Good restaurants. The food...good food.”
- “*Schoolunyyaahn niistum insiitunhiikunyan!*” [I’ll go to school first, maybe if they [teachers] understand me]. [female student]
- “Well I [male student] thought about going to college. I haven’t really decided what college to go yet. Cause they’re all good to me you know...they all look good to me. On the orientation trip ah...we went to Val-d’Or, Montreal, Ottawa and North Bay. They all look good enough for me to go to but you know not sure if they’ll accept me.”

However, the same student also spoke of losing weight before he went “south” suggesting that his appearance and health, including concerns about diabetes, were important:

I [male student] might leave or might stay here for a year. I might just try to lose weight. I've been putting it off. For me it would be [important]...cause you know ah...I might...ah get that diabetes or whatever. Yeah might get it if you're overweight. I think it's the amount [food]. I'm trying to lower it some of it but I'm not really all of it. I haven't really cut down on food just drink. I don't eat popcorn very much and chips, once in awhile I do eat chips.

Interestingly, only one female student stated that she had traveled to many places like Point Bleu, Lake St. John, Montreal, and Ottawa and had many experiences in the “south” but she would rather stay in school in Wemindj:

- “*Aa kaa daats Eeyouits Muui naash muuchiibeknun ne - wit inbaau in wewiichiiian*” [Because there are not that many Eeyou [Creeps] there, the “south” doesn't interest me, here is where I want to live].

Regarding the student narratives and themes on family, hunting, gender roles, Eeyou and non-Eeyou food, physical activity, alcohol and drug use, the “south”, identity, and education, the interview data show that students participate in two cultures: Eeyou and non-Eeyou lifestyles. Importantly, students appear to have no problems with this multi-faceted nature of their lives. They are aware that hunting traditions are very important yet understand that community lifestyle is equally important to them. Perhaps the most important aspect to the students is

that family remains at the center of “bush” and “community” spaces and is one of the cornerstones for healthy and well-balanced, contemporary Eeyou individuals.

Conversely, the data illustrate that certain social behaviors are prevalent at early ages among the students like alcohol consumption and smoking. In the long term, these aspects of social behavior will likely become important factors in the onset of chronic diseases for some individuals in addition to the psychological problems associated with alcohol and drug abuse. As well, there also appears to be a level of hard drug use such as cocaine use among certain older populations in Wemindji. The negative effects (economic, social, emotional, psychological) of cocaine use will likely become directly problematic for parents involved in this activity not to mention the strains on their children.

In conclusion, the student data show a variety of attitudes, beliefs and behaviors about diabetes, body weight/concepts, physical activity, Eeyou and non-Eeyou food, identity, biculturalism, Ndoho, family, community and the “south.” The data on diabetes show that there is limited knowledge among students about the ill effects of overweight, excess blood sugar and “junk” food. However, while there is a deficiency in some areas concerning glucose and insulin, the majority of students understand that diabetes is associated with high blood sugar. This fact alone is surely positive as it shows that students are receiving diabetes knowledge communicated either through school environments or other media within the community. Moreover, concerning this fact, diabetes knowledge should continue to

be emphasized to students in the home, school, hospital and other community environments such as public radio and television.

In addition, the data show that students in the study associate excess weight with diabetes suggesting student awareness of body weight as a determinant of poor health leading to diabetes. Moreover, some students show an awareness of the positive effects of physical activity on reducing diabetes. “Walking” was also shown to be an activity many students engaged in and that at least one youth worker emphasized as a cultural tradition. Again, these facts can be interpreted as positive indicators that diabetes knowledge is being disseminated to and retained by many students in the study population.

In terms of Eeyou and non-Eeyou food, identity, language and biculturalism, the data show that students define being Eeyou as incorporating all of these categories into their field of experiences. On a positive note for health researchers, the data show that some students are aware of unhealthy, “white” foods and express their views about the healthy aspect of non-Eeyou foods. Yet, what is troubling is that students continue, perhaps more so, to eat non-Eeyou foods as part of their community, daily diets. This fact is negative when one considers the potential risk for diabetes by consumption of processed, high sugar, high fat and cholesterol non-Eeyou foods. In light of this, health researchers should direct more programming and information to the healthy aspects of Eeyou food to the student populations in Wemindji.

Eeyou traditions and hunting culture are shown in the data to be important themes associated with food, family, hunting, gender, identity and language. Importantly, the data show that male and female youth find their hunting traditions and gender roles to be meaningful to their lives in the “bush”, community and “south.” For health researchers, this aspect of Eeyou culture should be recognized as an essential determinant in the social and psychological health and well-being of Wemindji youth populations.

With regard to indigenous concepts of health, I posit that the “bush” and the land are seen by Eeyou populations as a place to withdraw from the community lifestyle. This understanding of land and its powers is consistent across all populations of Eeyou Istchee. Furthermore, the land is seen to be a healing place to seek solace from the ills (alcohol, drug, violence) usually associated with community living. In this sense, we as health researchers, educators, academics, and students of medicine must understand and transcend beyond limited perspectives of the land, nature and water environments as irrelevant to community health initiatives.

Chapter 4: Adult narratives

Adult Perspectives on family, traditions and changing values

At this point, some historical background concerning Eeyou youth may be useful. In previous times (80-100 years ago), youth life skills were centered on learning hunting and trapping skills usually taught by the father to his son(s). Likewise, the mother's role was to teach essential skills to her daughter(s) to ensure competency in meat preparation, hide preparation, sewing, and cooking among other skills. At no point would a father or mother allow a son or daughter to enter marriage without these essential skills to provide for a family. If not properly monitored, poor skill status in harvesting adequate food resources could be disastrous for a young, hunting family unit. Simply put, Eeyou life skills were based in hunting and harvesting techniques on the land and were an ongoing lifetime experiential process.

During the residential school era, non-Eeyou institutionalized learning, religious indoctrination and socialization to Euro-Canadian life skills and goals changed the nature of traditional Eeyou life. As one adult interviewee stated, "All of that. In residential school, you were forced to do things, whether you like it or not"(Mark Chief Reggie, 2004). As argued earlier, the result was a displacing and obscuring of traditional Eeyou life skills. In some respects, the Eeyou family structure lost importance due to the systematic separation of parents and children.

A certain relationship of personal ‘power’ was lost as Elders, grandparents, parents and children became alienated from each other (Sutherland 2005). Family roles, values of respect and traditional knowledge that originally socialized Eeyou populations changed as a new education, religious organization, knowledge system, ideology and its values were administered in the Subarctic (Morantz 2002; Preston [In press]). Social organization now lay in the hands of an “outside”, “southern” distant government administration whose local embodiment in Eeyou Istchee often lay under the authority of the “Indian agent,” “HBC manager” or “Church minister” who symbolized and represented education, wage economy, religion, institution, control and law.

In Eeyou Istchee, written definitions, fixed criteria or strict guidelines on how to live life were not codified in any written charter, law, or book to be classified and referred to. Nonetheless, this is not to assume that an Eeyou worldview about individuals, families, or forest knowledge did not exist. On the contrary, it did exist but in an oral, implicit form. Similarly, Eeyou worldviews concerning life stages and experience were not rigid, static or methodically defined and agreed to by all Eeyou hunting families. In fact, some believe Eeyou life stages were flexible in order to accommodate the different learning styles and attributes of the individuals concerned. Additionally, the rate (fast or slow) and proficiency of skills acquired came into fruition at various times (12-20 years of age) (Louttit, E 2005; Louttit, A 2005).

To contrast with today's youth, one Wemindji individual believes there is a certain 'guilt' associated with having to succeed in the new cultural context (school, college, university, career). In fact, biculturalism seemed problematic as this young adult perceived his life to be inadequate in certain Eeyou traditional knowledge such as trapping and hunting skills. Deputy Chief Rodney Mark (2004) remembers³⁹:

We were talking about culture and tradition and one of the youth was saying, 'at age 4 I was in pre-k went to school, graduated went to college and came back all of a sudden I'm supposed to know how to go hunting, go hunt a bear, go hunt a moose, I'm supposed to know inherently on those things?' I felt he [youth] was not really confident to go to Montreal to get a job there and everything. At the same time he was not very comfortable to go in the bush and live. He was sort of right in the middle kind of things and I think that's a very sensitive stage in Cree youth whether they're 16 or in their early 20s. I think that's a very sensitive identity time for them. I think if they're being preached at [from Elders], being told that if you don't know the tradition then you don't know [Eeyou ways]. I think a lot times the youth tend to say well these Elders talk about tradition and all this stuff but they go to church. That even comes up a lot of times!

In the narrative above, there is a realization by an educated, Eeyou individual that the two systems of living in the world cannot be properly internalized and that some Elders evaluated and disrespected him because of his hunting inadequacies.

Generally, it is possible that the youth populations recognize that certain aspects of Eeyou culture like living entirely off the land are inconsistent with their current knowledge, identity and community lifestyle. In fact, some adults would agree living

³⁹ All adult narratives are verbatim and are not grammatically corrected.

entirely off the land would be unrealistic for today's populations. In spite of this, according to Eeyou consultant James Bobbish, the challenge is how to utilize Eeyou traditional values of respect, sharing and social interaction associated with the traditional life on the land in community spaces:

The way that people related to each other traditionally, of course is related to the land. You know the concept of sharing that certain times certain people would not have the same bounty as others, but didn't mean people would ignore you they would help you if they could. So there is a common bond there. But as we're populating within the community, then the land base itself is being challenged by the number of people that actually are able to live off the land. You know the land is very sensitive and if you do hunt intensively in one area you'd have to give it a few months or years to have it regenerate itself. In that case, I think at this point it would be impossible if everybody in the community decided, okay we're all going to go live out on the land and regain that aspect of our lives. It would not be possible economically and I don't think it would be possible physically to do that. So now the challenge is to capture whatever values were attached to that way of life and adapt them to Cree community, living in the community. People do say that when they are out on the land they relate to each other differently than when they're in the community and these are the same people. If a certain hunting group were in the same camp for a few weeks there is a very different dynamic of living and relating to each other if these same people are in the same community. You see them after the goose hunt the relationship changes. Something about the community that cuts off this very personal communication that was there on the land (Bobbish 2004).

Maquatua Eeyou School principal, Ida Gilpin (2004) has similarly said, "we are only recently learning how to live together in the community" referring to Wemindji's recent history. Perhaps, Ida is also communicating that Wemindji Eeyou are only learning how to incorporate "bush" traditions and values within the

context of community living and interaction. In addition, Ida points out that it's only been about 30 years since Wemindji has had a modern school (ibid). Indeed, in a macro sense concerning school courses on Eeyou culture, Ida has suggested that perhaps what is missing are Eeyou philosophies about spirituality, social interaction, respect and sharing that should underlay all Eeyou institutions and practices.

Carmen Faries' comments about the students she teaches give an important perspective about the topics and themes covered thus far. On Eeyou and non-Eeyou lifestyle and the "bush," Carmen stated:

Yeah to a certain extent I really believe that with the adaptation of our lifestyles specifically to European lifestyle, well in regards to the historical aspect of our people, the Cree people. I think that because our lives were changed in so many ways and us having to live and act like the Europeans then it does cause some confusion sometimes amongst the students because they're kind of caught in between as to where it is they really belong. I see sometimes students in the school who do go out in the bush with their parents for maybe a number of weeks and they take time off school. When they get back they're kind of lost not only because (well I wouldn't want to say failing) I guess neglecting what it is they should be doing academically. At the same time I think its good for them to live with their parents in the bush because they're learning those kinds of skills and abilities that our people once had (Faries 2004)

Carmen Faries points out that the concept of family, hunting practice and the "bush" lifestyle are very important in Eeyou youth cultural life outside school environments. Moreover, as an educator she believes that the Eeyou knowledge system is valuable to student learning and life experience. About "bush" "food" and "identity" she communicates:

There are a couple of assignments that we have in the Language Arts class where they sometimes talk about their most unforgettable experience. I guess you could say that a lot of the experience that I had already with former students have talked about 'being out on the land' and 'no I remember when my father killed a moose' or 'when they killed their first kill' and stuff like that. So it becomes an important part of who they are as individuals and I think that by them being able to share those kinds of things they begin to feel comfortable about who they are and what it is they are able to do. Especially when it comes to taking food from the land and being able to survive off those kinds of things. They know it's there and I also think that they think it's important. The reason I think that they think it's important is because they've been exposed to these kinds of things for a number of years. Most of the families that we have here in the community do take the time to go out onto the land to participate in the subsistence activities such as the goose hunt and the trapping that goes on in the wintertime. So I do believe that they know it's important for them and with the things that we study in our History class. I basically reiterate the importance of the culture and the traditions of the Cree people and how it's important to keep the language and the different things that the Elders talk about in order to keep their identity as a Cree individual (Ibid).

In other respects, Carmen acknowledges the students have educational issues to consider about their identities. One significant aspect she believes will be critical to students is for them to succeed at a certain level of non-Eeyou education. That non-Eeyou education is necessary for the "betterment" of student lives as well as to other Eeyou individuals and communities within Eeyou Istchee.

I think education is one of the most important aspects that they know they're going to have to gain for themselves. Especially living in the 21st century and the changes that have been brought to our communities. I think they do have a sense of keeping their identity but yet they have to be able to reach out to something else, such as education. It's basically for the betterment for themselves and for them to make a contribution to our native society here in the community but also surrounding communities in the James Bay territory (Ibid).

Equally, as an Eeyou individual, I propose that students must decide how much they will take from each lifestyle. Students must decide for themselves what their particular worldview will encompass about hunting traditions and modernity in the 21st century. Moreover, the student worldview must include both the "bush" and "community" spaces in providing a balanced individual who is spiritually, emotionally, psychologically and physically healthy. In particular, if the "bush" spaces are emphasized in the future as culturally appropriate healing spaces, this would go a long way in terms of incorporating an Eeyou understanding of health and well-being that is preventative in combating the risks for degenerative diseases such as diabetes and other secondary illnesses.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Survey Summary

The questionnaire and survey data results that I believe to be most relevant and of interest to health researchers, education personnel, Band Council officers and medical researchers at the CBHSSJB will be briefly discussed next. My goal here is to show the health risk themes that have emerged from the data that are likely to be problematic for youth in the future.

Social behavior questionnaire and interview data among the Eeyou Nation of Wemindji youth suggest that alcohol consumption is prevalent. Alcohol consumption is a source of “sugar” and is being consumed at an alarmingly young age that could lead to high levels of sugar not to mention alcoholism. In addition, the effects of alcohol use and addiction often lead to poor personal hygiene and poor nutrition practices. Alcohol consumption as a depressant may also be implicated in emerging problems associated with mental health, psychological crises, identity crises, and increasing suicide rates in Eeyou Istchee.

Simultaneous with the effects of alcohol, genetic predisposition or hereditary influence may also increase the risk for early diabetes for many youth. Arguably, as stated previously, genetic predisposition and hereditary influences for diabetes among indigenous groups are still not conclusive. Both sets of data indicate many students are unaware of their current health status concerning diabetes or the testing of it. While some of the data do suggest that there are various degrees of diabetes

knowledge amongst the Secondary School levels, this knowledge is limited and sometimes contradictory.

In sum, the social use of alcohol as well as cigarette smoking among youth appear to be health risks on the horizon for increasing the number of diabetes and cancer cases in Wemindji. Additionally, respiratory diseases such as asthma exist in Wemindji and given the amount of smoking, the numbers of these cases are likely to increase.

Underlying the students' belief, behavior, attitude and perspectives about the living spaces they exist in, the data continually show a bicultural theme. Data results demonstrate that history, culture, and traditions are very important to youth identities as Eeyou individuals; the students who participated in this study perceive a value in the cultural practice of their hunting traditions and gender responsibilities.

Equally, the students accept "community" lifestyle, "white" education, English language, "white" food and enjoy travel to the "south" on the new highway. Student narratives indicate a regular migration and experience of distant "southern" cities such as Val-d'Or, North Bay, Ottawa and Montreal. In an abstract sense, the highway and access road can be thought of as a metaphor for "linking", "passage" or an "opening up" of northern or "southern" inland hunting environments and urban non-Eeyou spaces. Within this metaphor the highway is a "journey" to a new consciousness, place and level of experience about the "outside" world. It is my belief that some youth may also perceive the "highway" as a symbolic route to

another lifestyle in the “south”; conceivably, an alternative to the perceived limitations, constraints, constrictions and challenges of remaining in the “community.”

In terms of gender, women “bush” responsibilities are expanding in some respects as female skill orientation appear to be transcending beyond the boundaries of the “camp” site to the hunting “blinds” of shooting geese. In some instances this is not a new trend, for in past times females hunted, trapped and fished without the assistance of males who were periodically absent on the traplines for extended periods of time (Louttit A; 2005). Moreover, inland Eeyou hunters who traveled to the HBC coastal post to trade and buy supplies often left women and children inland who hunted for themselves (Preston 2005).

Importantly connected to gender is the concept of family and extended family relationships that are significant domains of socialization that occur in the “bush” and “community.” Student questionnaire and interview data express that family structures within both spaces of Eeyou living provide the overall health and identity of all Eeyou peoples. Moreover, it appears that the “bush” knowledge system has an important role to play in the lives of youth in the “community” and elsewhere in the “south.” In this context, history, culture, traditions and language are affirmed not denied as essential “tools” for Eeyou survival in all spaces of living. Perhaps, the existing Eeyou cultural milieu is most crucial for students when leaving

the “community” either to attend college or university or to live in the “south” for extended periods of time.

In terms of food, the data shows that “white” food consumption is a staple part of daily student diet and highly important to students. Certain foods like pizza or poutine may be considered to be “cool” or “hip” foods that young people eat. Problematic in this sense is the fact that certain “white” food such as pizza and poutine are high fat, high cholesterol foods that are popular and may contribute to the risk for diabetes among youth. On the other hand, the data also show there to be a significant number of Secondary students with accurate knowledge and beliefs that certain “white” food contributes to poor nutrition, increased blood sugar and overweight status. Casual observations in Wemindji indicate extreme obesity among youth is uncommon but further investigation would be necessary to determine actual prevalence of overweight and obesity.

Most interestingly in terms of physical activity, one Secondary student, who participated in this study, described a highly effective exercise regime to combat the negative effects of food on his physical fitness and also how exercise was effective for quick reaction and clear thinking. In general, most students described participation in sports but simply taking a walk or “walking around” with friends were part of their everyday life and routine.

Concerning Eeyou food, student data related that it is tasteful and important for Cree youth in order to be healthy and strong. More significantly, the data clearly

show that Eeyou food represents all that is Eeyou history, culture, tradition, and identity. Moreover, hunting, harvesting and eating Eeyou food also operates as a means for political, social, cultural, emotional and psychological discourses about holding onto Eeyou identity.

In total, Eeyou food is not merely a physical act that nourishes life but simultaneously speaks of integrating, practicing and sustaining Eeyou hunting traditions within contemporary Eeyou and non-Eeyou society.

Commentary

One of the goals of ethnographic research is to situate a local population within the context of larger socioeconomic and political structures (Schensul, Schensul and Lecompte 1999). Moreover, it is argued that by positioning a local group's experience of a certain issue(s), event(s) or process(es) within a macro-context enables an in-depth local understanding of that group's historical trajectory (ibid). Furthermore, the reader's understanding of the group should extend beyond statistical data into more humanistic, interpretive narratives that convey a sense of the historical, cultural, traditional, political and social position of the group under study (ibid). In short, most ethnographic research about a particular group is revealing and insightful if it is researched, experienced and written about within the backdrop of the larger, dominant society and its institutions.

In this thesis, I have situated the Eeyou (Cree) Nations of Northern Quebec within the larger society of Quebec and Canada. In this context, the Eeyou (Cree) Nations of Quebec have experienced historical, cultural, political, social and economic challenges to “outside” processes such as the colonial fur trade of the 17th-19th centuries. Within a colonial and post-colonial perspective I’ve pointed to challenges that the Eeyou populations have encountered over 300 years of “contact.” These challenges, constraints, adaptations, and accommodations were mainly Euro-Canadian encounters that have included economic dominance from colonial companies such as the HBC. Debatably, many Eeyou populations in the early years of “contact” and “post-contact” participated in the economic fur trade system of their own accord. To some extent, these accommodations have changed their food systems, cultural practices and social organization.

Nonetheless, the spiritual and religious complexion of the Eeyou peoples have also been tampered with and altered to a large degree by Christian power, authority, doctrine, socialization and political influences that included powerful institutions such as the Anglican Church of Canada, the Roman Catholic Church and more recently, Baptist, Gospel and Pentecostal Ministries. In some communities like Chisasibi (see Appendix A), hunting rituals involving singing with the Eeyou hunting drum barely exist today due to community bans placed on the people by certain Anglican ministers who sought to eradicate such Eeyou practices (Preston 2002; Cheechoo 2005). To many Church officials of colonial and post-

colonial times Eeyou practices such as the performance of hunting drum songs, the shaking tent, and sweat lodge ceremonies were thought of and continue to be regarded as inappropriate forms of cultural practice usually stigmatized as un-Christian.

In a psychological sense, the extent to which these cultural practices contributed to the overall health and well-being of the Eeyou populations was never really understood by early missionaries, health practitioners and Department of Indian Affairs personnel, all of whom had their own particular religious, medical, political, and educational agendas to fulfill according to the dominant governmental policies and administration of the 19th and 20th centuries.

From a health and illness perspective, I have outlined the need for important qualitative research about Eeyou socio-cultural knowledge implicated in body weight, body image, eating behavior and physical activity of Eeyou Wemindji youth. Moreover, this type of qualitative research is minimal and the research findings in this thesis will positively add a unique dimension to current medical and anthropological literature.

As discussed, the Eeyou (Cree) of Eeyou Istchee as an indigenous culture have accommodated, adapted and adjusted to a variety of powerful persons, processes and pressures that is often understood to be “whiteman” influence. The Eeyou people have been resilient and will continue to negotiate and integrate new urban ideas, values and images into their daily lives that are contemporary “outside”

influences such as the world-wide Internet, satellite television programs, and telecommunications. However, other important communication routes exist.

On the ground level, a major highway now connects all 10 communities to southern French towns and cities providing further access to “southern” culture, goods and food products. In the air, passenger and freight aircraft bring a steady stream of transient workers, doctors, researchers and other professionals into regular contact with Eeyou peoples and communities. Additionally, Eeyou inter-community travel and migration once traditionally accomplished by foot, toboggan, and dog team over distant, arduous journeys have now been replaced by rapid air transportation such as that offered by Air Creebec⁴⁰.

In an epidemiological context, a central theme of this thesis has been to situate the Eeyou (Cree) Nation of Wemindji within worldwide type 2 diabetes mellitus epidemics now afflicting many diverse indigenous groups with similar contemporary, societal “fabrics” rooted in colonial history and cultural adaptation. In particular, I have discussed the Eeyou historical experience, in terms of the emergence of infectious disease (tuberculosis, whooping cough) and chronic disease (diabetes) during the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries.

In terms of literature, I’ve provided a minute sample of the vast amount of medical and social science literature on type 2 diabetes mellitus to critique some

⁴⁰ Air Creebec is the air company owned and operated by the Eeyou Corporation in Eeyou Istchee. It services all 10 communities and offers passenger, freight and charter service that link up with other southern cities as far as Montreal, QC and Timmins, ON.

specific issues I believe relevant to indigenous communities and youth. In doing so, some important questions have arisen that should be addressed in future studies such as: What other kinds of Eeyou youth studies could be implemented in the future? How do we design multi-focused, interdisciplinary studies that articulate Eeyou perspectives on language, ethnomedicine, healing, world-view, social and cultural values?

In my opinion, understanding Eeyou language and the multi-faceted meanings of certain words can help us understand something of the social and cultural values of the past that can inform contemporary Eeyou communities and the research projects they design. The challenge is to uncover aspects of our traditional past that I believe are imbedded in our language and words that may help us to understand and revitalize our current cultural identity. Moreover, such a linguistic enterprise in the greater scheme of things may assist, particularly, the youth in negotiating identity crisis, suicide potentiality and other psychological stress. In addition, it may assist in understanding, re-creating, and building positive ‘self-image’ for what it means to be a contemporary ‘Eeyou.’ The young people need to have the ‘tools’ to be able to move forward confidently in the face of so many new pressures in a challenging world.

One way in which to reach the youth, I believe, could be to look into our *adiucan*⁴¹ stories and other Eeyou narratives to find social, cultural and psychological

⁴¹ *Adiucan* refers to ancient Eeyou stories and creation myths from the distant past usually understood as “Elder stories” and recounted by the Elders.

information that we can use as the basic themes for plays, theater productions, music productions and literature production (books, articles):

They [Elders] really believed in what they were doing but there was a sense that there was a higher power that was there that was going to guide them. Or Spirit or something like they had a connection - I found their stories they always felt that they had a connection with the spirit world. Now this is something that would be interesting to go into. How dreams were interpreted a long time ago. This is something that not that many Elders now can really tell those kinds of stories (Mark R Deputy Chief, 2004).

Documenting Elder stories and building new Eeyou knowledge may assist Eeyou populations in developing vibrant oral futures in new contexts that build cultural competence in dealing with the stresses of living in a globally, interconnected world.

Future research considerations should also include the root causes of youth alcohol consumption that is a preventable problem that may lead to a risk for diabetes and other secondary illness such as kidney and liver failure. The effects of alcohol and hard drug addiction (cocaine) are likely to lead to psychological and emotional problems such as depression, low self-esteem, family stress, violence, and suicide among youth.

In addition, alcohol consumption among pregnant adults in Eeyou Istchee is implicated in Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) among some children (Maamuitaau⁴² March 27, 2005). The risks for low birthweight and brain damaged children may increase and put further constraints on a health care service in Eeyou Istchee already

lacking specialized health care for these type of illnesses. Moreover, children with FAS are more likely to have depression perhaps leading to emotional disturbances, in some cases, suicide (ibid). My data⁴³ show there to be a number of teen pregnancies in Wemindji, one as young as 15 years of age. The extent of alcohol use among pregnant youth is unknown. In addition, it is unknown to what degree they have knowledge of the effects of alcohol on the unborn fetus during pregnancy and the risk for FAS.

In a macro-sense, we need to consider the implications of the dominant system's institutions while building new institutions based on Eeyou values, traditions and cultural processes of interaction:

There are two challenges here. One is to bring a value system that is very strong and consistent within the community setting and then transpose that way of relating to each other into an organization or institutional form. So just because the Cree Health Board is an organization [that] has its set of regulations and policies doesn't mean that we cannot adopt traditional values. But at this point, it is a challenge because you cannot transform the existing law as it applies to us, and that's not created by us. To adopt that system really means that we have to draft our own laws and regulations (Bobbish 2004).

Religiously speaking, hunting spirituality (drum, ceremonies, rituals), Christianity, and the new pan-Indian traditions (Powwow drumming, singing and dancing) need to be affirmed together as healthy spiritual practices that can

⁴² Maamuitaau is a weekly Eeyou television program produced in Montreal that reports entirely in the Eeyou language on many health, education and community issues within Eeyou Istchee.

transform individuals onto new planes of self-consciousness. Affirmation of the hunting drum songs, shaking tent, sweat lodge and tobacco ceremonies, as important forms of Eeyou spirituality should be revisited not rejected as archaic or taboo.

In general, we must make connections between biomedical healing approaches and healing from an Eeyou perspective that must include the land, “bush”, continuity of traditional family structure in the hunting “camps” and the “community” in order to transcend a “separation” of all three domains. A new imagining must emerge where each is integrated into a “whole” based on Eeyou values of living and communicating together. Importantly, the family and extended family as the site for a sense of identity, mental health, spirituality, safety, physical and emotional well-being – all culturally appropriate preventative aspects of living well – cannot be overstressed.

In conclusion, our Elders of earlier decades faced challenging social, cultural, economic and political conditions of a different sort, but the majority of our Elders have survived to show and teach us how to strengthen our current generations in facing new challenges. The late Eeyou hunter, Job Bearskin, drew from years of complex hunting experience and forest knowledge in answering youth and Eeyou leaders confronted with different, contemporary social problems (alcoholism, suicide) than the difficulties his generation faced by advising:

⁴³ Here I refer to other interview data not included in this study in which one 15 year old student told me she knew of a number of females her age and older who were pregnant.

I can only share with you how we dealt with problems long ago. I cannot tell you this is how to deal with problems – this is the way you have to deal with it. For today, you as leaders, workers, you are faced with more new complications that touch every aspect of our Eeyou culture. This is the time to use your skills, new skills, knowledge which you have acquired or gained. It is time to start to put your new skills to work (Bearskin 1994: 14).

Appendix A

LOCATION OF (10) EYYOU COMMUNITIES IN EYYOU ISTCHEE



(Source: Grand Council Crees of Quebec website)

Appendix B

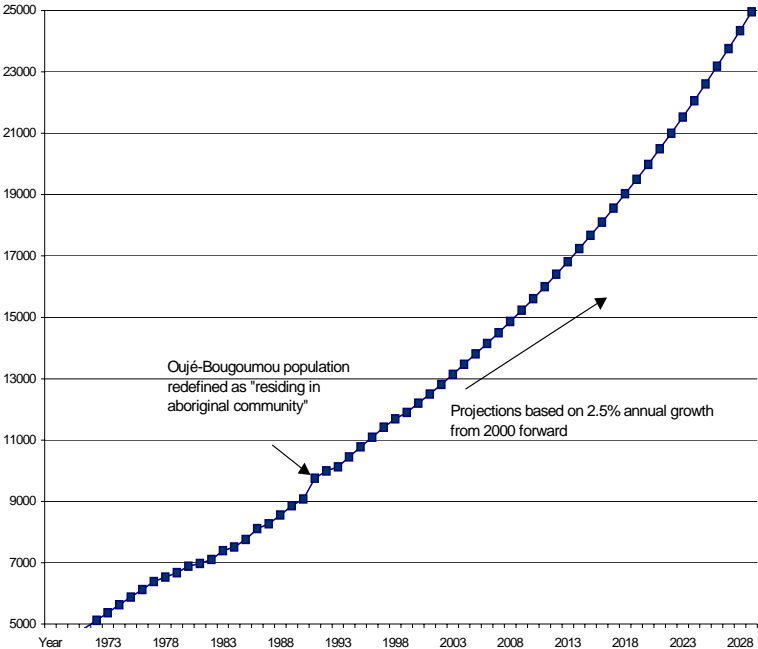
TABLE 1.1.1: ESTIMATED RESIDENT CREE POPULATION (INSTITUT NATIONAL DE LA STATISTIQUE DU QUEBEC, 1999)

Age	Population
0-4	1,451
5-9	1,634
10-14	1,266
15-19	1,223
20-24	1,435
25-29	1,539
30-34	1,171
35-39	927
40-44	740
45-49	469
50-54	504
55-59	357
60-64	318
65-69	257
70-74	118
75+	185
Total	13,594

(Source: Torrie 2003: CHBSSJB)

Appendix C

PROJECTED EEYOU POPULATION GROWTH BY 2028



(Torrie, Bobet, Kishchuk and Webster 2005: CBHSSJB)

Appendix D

DISTRIBUTION OF THE FIRST NATIONS AND CANADIAN POPULATION

Age	1999 First Nations ¹ (n=437,035) %	Canada 1996 (n=28,846,760) %
80+	0.8	2.7
75-79	0.7	2.4
70-74	1.0	3.3
65-69	1.4	3.8
60-64	2.0	4.1
55-59	2.6	4.5
50-54	3.5	5.6
45-49	4.6	7.3
40-44	6.1	8.0
35-39	7.5	8.8
30-34	8.0	8.6
25-29	8.2	7.0
20-24	8.4	6.6
15-19	9.4	6.8
10-14	11.0	6.9
5-9	12.4	6.9
0-4	12.4	6.6

1- Includes on and off reserve for Alberta and British Columbia
N=size of population

(adapted from Health Canada website 2005)

Appendix E

AGE-ADJUSTED MORTALITY RATES BY CAUSE COMPARED, 1993-1997 (QUEBEC MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES, 1999)

Cancer Deaths per 100,000 per year	Eeyou Istchee	Quebec
Stomach Cancer	0	8.7
Colon or Rectal Cancer	14.7	26.4
Trachea, bronchial or lung cancer	49.6	64.5
Leukemia	4.2	6.7

(Torrie 2003: CHBSSJB)

Appendix F

PROPORTION OF DAILY SMOKERS IN EYYOU ISTCHEE COMPARED
TO QUEBEC AND CANADA

Proportion of Daily Smokers Cree of Eeyou Istchee Compared to Quebec and Canadian Averages		
Cree 2001 Age 15+	Quebec 2000-2001 Age 12+	Canada 2000-2001 Age 12+
37%	24.9%	21.5%

(Torie, Bobet, Kishchuk and Webster 2005: CBHSSJB)

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