EVERYDAY SPEECH IN AN EXTRAORDINARY TIME: CONSTRUCTING CIVIC AGENCY, IDENTITY, AND INFLUENCE IN NARRATIVES OF A SMALL TOWN'S BIG DECISION

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ABSTRACT

This research project takes place in rural Southern Alberta whereby the residents of the small-town of Fort Macleod and surrounding rural area experienced nine years of civic development opportunity regarding a Police Training College that was bid on, won and subsequently cancelled. The purpose of my thesis is to contextualize and understand speech in every day communicative practices and how these speech acts generate discourse that create and re-create social agency in discussions and definitions of contentious civic issues. Elements of a qualitative case study approach was used to analyze data gathered from semi-structured interviews and text documents such as newspaper articles and government documents. Through the application of theory and reflection on the process of academic research the results provide a descriptive explanation and interpretation of how rural and small-town people actively form and define themselves and each other as rural subjects. The researcher is included, not as an interviewee, but as a rural resident who also experienced the turmoil of this civic development venture.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The history of place has always intrigued me. I find how rural communities have waxed and waned throughout history fascinating. My research project took place within this societal ebb and flow. It is a story about one Southern Alberta rural community's civic decision-making experience when a development opportunity was proposed, endorsed, and then retracted.

Small towns and rural areas tend to be under-recognized in the leadership circles of the federal and provincial political and economic sectors which are mostly located in large urban centres. This structural divide has persisted and intensified in Alberta over many decades. Residents of rural places recognize that their communities have taken the back seat to political patronage and economic benefits located in urban centres, which has influenced the nature of change in rural areas. As rural residents experience such changes in their communities, they also experience changes in their own lives which impacts their perspective on life.

When civic changes occur in small towns and rural areas, residents may be consulted on certain matters and issues affecting their lives, though the quality of that consultation is, at times, a matter of contention. This consultation can become a strain on community relations as explored by the contributors to Epp and Whitson, eds. (2008). Rural and small-town residents have had to discuss and decide on the best benefit for their communities in which pressure is applied, and in which lines of authority and communication affecting decision-making are disputed, complicated, or unclear. Communication becomes pivotal in coming to terms with proposed civic changes.

Communication is also of crucial importance in clarifying needs and wants, revisiting individual and collective identity, and identifying risks to speaking out.

I situate this inquiry within a framework of the particular cultural configurations of rural communities and employ elements of a qualitative case study approach. The context in which this research project was situated in is the small town of Fort Macleod, Alberta and its surrounding rural community, between 2004 and 2012, during nine years of a civic development venture whereby a Police Training College bid was proposed, won, ground breaking ceremony was held, and the project was subsequently cancelled. The full story is provided later in this chapter. As my research project moved forward, I encountered some issues whereby I had to change my focus (detailed later in this chapter) to an in-depth exploration of how my interview respondents produced and re-produced their social place and identities as they experience, reflect on, and talk about the contentious civic development venture. Through this research I came to value the participants' active construction and negotiation of identities, perspectives, and world-views – of themselves and in relation to others – that incorporated a sense of being rural citizens engaged in social agency.

Purpose, Aims, and Objectives of the Project

The purpose of this project was two-fold. First: contextualize and understand communicative practices such as everyday speech which produces and re-produces social agency and relations within a rural community undergoing civic decision-making. Second: explore and discover how interpersonal communication practices generate discourse that not only shapes social agency but also affects the potential for consensus or conflict in the definition of political and economic issues.

This research project is shaped by the following questions:

- How are civic matters discussed both formally and informally, in rural communities? *Civic matter* refers to any activity/development that affects the population within a given area and that has the potential to become a public issue affecting community formation and identity.
- What does it mean to call Fort Macleod and its surrounding area *rural*?
- How does speech produce and re-produce social agency?
- How is power incorporated into everyday discourse?
- And perhaps the most important question of all: How can *I* and *you* apply and expand this understanding; me in my work within my own rural community, and you in the communities (urban or rural) that you embrace or that enfold you?

I want to better understand how communication through individual and collective discussion produces and reproduces social place, identity, and agency. I am interested in interpersonal communication through discussion and in how it both links to social agency and reaffirms social place in civic matters. How do we speak and write ourselves into being? By interpersonal communication discussions, I mean face-to-face conversations that happen between people; in this case between residents of a rural community who are immersed in the processes and turmoil of civil decision-making. How do rural people within small towns and communities define themselves? What makes them rural? This study considers not only how we produced ourselves as civic agents and/or observers, and as community members, in response to a specific civic consultative process, but also looks at how we then did it again in response to each other, in interviews that became conversations.

This project focused on in-depth interviews with three community residents who experienced and responded to the announcement and subsequent cancellation of the proposal and construction of the Fort Macleod Police Training College. It is about how these people who self-identified as rural or small-town residents constructed themselves, their communities, the bid process, its promised opportunities and their stake in them, and the ins and outs of local leadership and power relations. In other words, we undertook *shared reality-constructive and identity-constructive work* and built something in common of a shared situation. It is about the particular forms of interactive agency and co-operation by which we constructed meaningful life worlds specific to our identities as local small-town or rural residents as new developments concerning the proposal unrolled and unravelled.

I included myself as a member of a local, rural, or small-town community - not as an interviewee, but as an individual who lives within the local area tangent to Fort Macleod and its surrounding area who was also interested in the Police Training College bid, win, and cancellation. Therefore, I incorporated my own process of self-reflection into the research, considering how the interviews I undertook, as human encounters in a community context, affected my own subject position and world-view. I provide input as to how the documents and interviewees affected my interpretation and relationship to their responses to not only the Police Training College but also to me in the interviews. This does *not* mean we ended up agreeing on everything, nor that our identities became – identical. Nonetheless, we ended up after all demonstrating how mutual communicative *practices* create worlds in which the people who build them feel to some degree "at home," and in which they then *act*: socially, politically, economically, and symbolically.

I believe that, from a sociological perspective, the processes of civic decision-making are strongly affected by social place, identity-construction, and communicative processes. This becomes important in understanding how issues discussed in private or public conversation factor into rural citizens' agency-creation. How does social agency become manifest in or through participation in private or public discussions? Are such discussions *themselves* a form of social agency? How do political and social relations provide or deny support to rural residents seeking to participate in a public discussion?

This thesis is organized around two enfolded stories that impacted and shaped one another. One is the story of the Fort Macleod Police Training College bid process, approval, and eventual cancellation. The other is the process of having to rework my initial focus and approach. In the following pages I briefly summarize the Fort Macleod Police Training College story and explain the original goals of my thesis and show how they changed as my research project progressed.

The Story of Fort Macleod Police College

In the following two sections I weave stories of Fort Macleod, the Fort Macleod Police College and the morphing on my thesis project from a chronology of events in time. Each story has its own period of time and is extraordinary in its own making and ending. The timelines of each provides the framework of my perspective, more importantly, provides the reader with conventional tropes and narratives of rurality.

A snapshot of the history, social structure, lore, and politics of the residents of the town and surrounding rural area is helpful to understand the nine years (2004 – 2012) of civic relationships and social structures discussed in this thesis, and how theory is being applied. I wanted to capture the response of the local citizens to the events of the town of

Fort Macleod's bid submission, the announcement in 2006 that the town of Fort Macleod was chosen for the Police Training College, and the aftermath of the Police Training College project cancellation, announced by the Solicitor General of Alberta in 2012.

The small town of Fort Macleod is situated geographically in Southwest Alberta along the Oldman River east of the Rocky Mountains; a magnificent vast savannah of plains, foothills, and mountains, home to an equally magnificent and distinctive flora and wild life unique to this rich and expansive area, for millennia. This is the territorial land of the Blackfoot First Nations people (Piikani, Siksiika, and Kainai) who have existed and prospered in this area for centuries.

The initial settlers came to this area – a place of open lands where First Nations people co-existed with and within the natural environment, having no need for permanent structures, yet producing and living within their own societal order, ways of life, and modes of communication. With the new settlers came radical societal changes. The new settlers developed and built their society here, establishing their norms and values. As they began to put down roots, they established economic and political structures, values, norms, and customs that were novel to the land. This new multi-cultured society that resulted was influenced by and tied to the continuing presence of First Nations.

The area's history is full of wild-west stories detailing whiskey trading, scrimmages, and the North West Mounted Police (NWMP). First Nations people experienced a traumatic culture-altering change as settlers moved into the area. Clashes happened not only between the new-comers and the Blackfeet people, but also among the incoming multi-cultured people arriving from different parts of the world. To help build better relationships among the colliding cultures, and to consolidate the control of the

land, the Dominion of Canada formed and deployed the NWMP to settle the west and contain the Indigenous peoples.

The new society continued to evolve; incorporating open spaces, First Nations people, and a continuous influx of new settlers, which combined to radically change the lives and social arrangements of all who populated Fort Macleod and the surrounding rural areas. As it developed, it also generated new tensions, divisions, and contradictions, including a new set of disparities between urban and rural.

Local settler historical narratives are steeped in hardships as they carved out a new and different life for themselves and their kin in Southern Alberta. The rural areas of the prairies have a well-documented history of farming and ranching and are known for their strong political advocacy. Many current residents come from this history and have long established farms and ranches in the surrounding rural areas of Fort Macleod (Epp & Whitson, 2001; see also Epp, 2008).

The story of the Fort Macleod Police Training College began in 2004, when the Alberta Provincial Government, led by the Progressive Conservative Party with Ed Stelmach at the helm, approved a recommendation from a 2002 report of the Policing Review Committee – which indicated a need for an Alberta Public Safety and Law Enforcement Training Centre (Alberta Hansard, 2005). This training centre would be a single training facility to train an estimated 1500 police and peace officers in Alberta (McTighe, 2005c). The $100 million facility would include classrooms, a library, computers, indoor and outdoor firing ranges, a cafeteria, administrative and instructor offices, and on-site accommodations (McTighe, 2006a). It would generate 100 permanent jobs in the community that won the bidding process (McTighe, 2005d). A bidding

competition was opened to Alberta municipalities interested in submitting a proposal to build this Police and Peace Officer Training Centre in their community. Fort Macleod responded to the bid competition.

When this provincial initiative became available, the leadership in the community of Fort Macleod regarded it as an economic opportunity. However, this initiative required a civic decision of the small town and surrounding rural area which presented fundamental challenges. The community in question was both blended and potentially divided – not only in the terms of the decision but also the process by which it would be defined and reached. This had the potential for changes to the existing social milieu and its political status quo. Fort Macleod's political leadership touted already established tropes like its historical foundation as an outpost of the Northwest Mounted Police; its location at the intersection of two major highways; and a set of presuppositions about community support phrased in terms of keywords like "progress" and "opportunity."

According to its June 2011 Municipal Development Plan, Fort Macleod had a population of 3, 072. Its municipal government includes a mayor and five council members: Shawn Patience held the Mayoral position for the duration of the project. The political riding is Livingstone-Macleod which encompasses the area from the town of Nanton south to the United States border; and from the mountainous Crowsnest Pass east to the city of Lethbridge (not including the city). At the time that the bid process was initiated, the riding was held by a member of the Progressive Conservative Party, which was the governing party at the time. Fort Macleod is 30 kilometers north of the Kainai First Nation (Blood Tribe) reservation and 32 kilometers east of the Piikani First Nation reservation.

On October 24, 2005, a task force was created by town council during their council meeting (McTighe, 2005a) to prepare a "comprehensive bid package" (McTighe, 2005b). An eleven-member task force was established which included Mayor Shawn Patience, two town councillors, Mike Bourassa and Christine Trowbridge, Fort Macleod's economic development officer Gordon MacIvor, Macleod Gazette Editor Frank McTighe, residents Stasha Donahue, Ronda Reach, Mike Harris, Bernadette and Dave McNab, and Piikani Nation member Harley Bastien (McTighe, 2005b). An agricultural area of 320 acres in southeast Fort Macleod was rezoned for the Police Training College at a Town council meeting on December 12, 2005. On September 6, 2006, the town of Fort Macleod was chosen as the successful bidder for the Police Training College. While many celebrated this success, there were differences in opinion about its possible costs and benefits, both locally and provincially. It is also possible that some found it the tension of having the future of the town staked on one major project a little hard to bear. The Calgary and Edmonton police services were rumoured to have indicated some dissatisfaction with the police college bid going to a small town in Southern Alberta, as the location was not central within the province. In July, 2010, Frank McTighe, editor of the *Macleod Gazette,* wrote a report on the response of local officials to news that the Calgary Police Services were planning to build a training facility of their own, reassuring his readers that this did not undermine the validity of the Fort Macleod bid (McTighe, 2010). "At the end of August 2012, CBC news reported on the "shock" in Fort Macleod in response to the cancellation of the bid, relying heavily on comments by the mayor, which, in the context set by the headline, were set up to be read as representative:

> Fort Macleod Mayor Shawn Patience says the decision has ruined his faith in the political system. "This is a $122 million project in a town of 3,000 people," said Patience. “It's just absolutely baffling to me that you could get into the stage where you actually have equipment on site and have a town like ours that has committed already $3.5 million on signed contracts with the government's approval, that this would now not go ahead." Patience said he has called his council together for an emergency meeting. "I have asked the solicitor general to speak to the premier and cabinet and reverse the decision. I was told that would not happen. So, at this point they have literally, I guess for all intents and purposes, they've hung us out to dry." (CBC News, 2012)

However, comments by provincial Solicitor General Jonathan Denis contained in the same news report indicated that there may have been something to the rumours.

> Solicitor general Jonathan Denis made the announcement Wednesday, saying there is "substantial evidence" that a stand-alone facility wouldn’t be financially viable. . . . "This was a very difficult decision," Denis said. "But it's one I believe that is in the best interest of the taxpayers and law enforcement in this province." Calgary's and Edmonton's police chiefs and the commissioner of the RCMP do not believe the college is required and would not improve the quality of policing, Denis said (CBC News, 2012).

Although this project was not intended to analyze the local political climate, a brief description is important for context. In 2006, the Progressive Conservative Party (PC) was the elected governing party in Alberta. In that year Ralph Klein stepped down as Premier and Ed Stelmach was sworn in as Premier on December 14th. He remained

Premier until Allison Redford took office on October 7, 2011 where she led the Party until March 23. 2014. Albertans elected the PC Party in 2004, 2008, and 2012; their seats far outnumbered the runner-up party. However, in the 2012 elections, the Wildrose Alliance Party (WAP) won a protest vote in a large region in Southern Alberta, including the Livingstone-Macleod riding. The solicitor general announced the cancelation of the Fort Macleod Police Training Centre on August 29, 2012, three months after the provincial elections. It is difficult not to see some political influence at work both in the 2006 announcement of the winning bid and in the 2012 cancellation after the PC's lost their local seat to the Wildrose Party.

Finally, what happened to the land set aside for the police training centre? It was not simply returned to agricultural use. One or two businesses had relocated to sites closer to the proposed police facility, and the site itself has been since been subject to some commercial development, though at a slower pace and on a smaller scale.

The Story of the Morphing Thesis Project

Originally my interest was on communication mechanisms and networks of power structure in a small-town and rural community going through a civic decision-making process. In this project mechanisms are defined as those processes and/or structures (either natural, authorized or sanctioned) used in speech acts. I set out to better understand how decisions are made, communicated, and responded to at a community level in small town and rural communities, and how these decisions do or do not incorporate informal modes of communication between members and leaders in the affected community. I also wondered: by what means do individual or group ideas or opinions become marginalized or held in higher esteem than others? This was important

when understanding how issues discussed in private and public conversations facilitate social agency in rural citizens. How does social agency manifest in public discussion participation? How do political and social relations provide support to rural residents to participate in a public discussion? How does a public issue get defined and become resolved within formal and informal social processes?

I also set out to analyze the various manifestations of power in interpersonal communications within families and between friends, co-workers, consultants, and political leaders. My focus was on the processes of civic decision-making as they related to a particular small town and its close surroundings in their anticipation of an economic venture and their response to its eventual political retraction. I believed that contentious civic issues bring to the forefront the true, underlying beliefs and values of a given society, and can reveal how political and policy processes really work. I thought that examining such a contentious civic issue would reveal how power and authority influence information dispersal and gathering, and consolidation of personal and public opinions.

More specifically, this study aimed to understand how communicative discourse was used to facilitate societal agency in a specific consultative process. In order to look closely at this phenomenon, I had ambitions to produce a full community case study addressing my topic. That became impossible. My original thought was that the case study would consider what is rural, and what the discussion on rurality is. What makes them rural? The basis for this research project was to gain knowledge and understanding of how communication about public issues in rural communities unfolds so that I could apply this to my own work within the rural community in which I live.

The project was thus originally shaped by the following questions:

- How does communication about civic matters in rural communities happen on formal and informal levels? Are all community members equally heard? How does the process of communication on civic matters produce and re-produce social situations? How do we speak and write ourselves into being?
- What are the forms and mechanisms of communication in rural communities' civic decision-making that are unique to their culture? What types of communication are employed in their social networks?
- What did the Police Training College venture show about how community action can be decided upon in small town and rural settings?
- In what ways did civic discourse surrounding the Police Training College affect the social structure and community identity of a small Southern Alberta rural community dealing with significant societal issues that required debate, leadership, and action?
- What kind of social or power structure is characteristic of Fort Macleod?
- What kinds of formal and informal communication mechanisms were operative in Fort Macleod in relation to the Police Training College venture?
- How does social agency manifest in public discussion participation? How do political and social relations provide support to rural residents to participate in a public discussion?

I did not fully realize at the start of this research project how big and complex these questions might become. I assumed I would find in the academic literature search definitions of, for example, "rural," "community," and "communications mechanisms" that would be concise and self-evident. I also assumed these definitions would correlate to real, objective, and discoverable features of Fort Macleod and rural area as a place, a

community, and a set of social structures. It was just a matter of getting the definitions and identifying the social features that fit these definitions.

In 2019, I had initially set about to obtain publicly-available textual documents such as Town of Fort Macleod minutes of council and committee meetings in which discussions of the proposed Police Training College were held; local town hall information and publications; public postings about the bid process in Fort Macleod and surrounding area; notices of and responses to public meetings, information sessions, rallies, and related events; public statements and publications by civic and political leaders; public information postings and bulletins by local residents or groups; and public social media postings focused or specific to the Police Training College. Although, by this year the Police Training College cancellation had occurred seven years prior, I believed these documents would provide information on the process by which the Police Training College initiative moved through the local political channels. More importantly, I anticipated the documents would provide a window through which to understand how the political players (e.g., mayor, councillors, town manager, etcetera) perceived the Police Training College venture, how it was discussed, and how elected and other town officials interacted with each other in assessing it. By this time, I anticipated the venture was still recent enough that I would be able to find the information I was seeking. On the other hand, I thought that enough time had passed that my research project would not have an effect on the aftermath. I did not wish my thesis to become a cause of conflict.

To access some of these documents and resources, I needed permission or assistance from gatekeepers such as personnel in the Fort Macleod Town Office, local newspaper offices, and other public offices. I requested documentary records via email

and telephone from the Fort Macleod Town Office administration. Unfortunately, my efforts to obtain these records were fruitless: requests went either unanswered or denied. The key gatekeepers (personnel at the town office) had a pleasant and cooperative manner when I spoke to them, indicating that it would take some time to gather the documents. This, I assumed, meant that they would actually prepare a package for me as I had asked. This did not occur, and after a second request, I was not inclined to request the information for a third time. Therefore, I was unable to know the process by which the proposal moved through this small town's political processes and unable to include such documents in my analysis. This also meant that the window I had to understand political and other leaders' perceptions of the Police Training College venture would be knowable only through the interviews, newspaper articles, and public documents online.

My hope was to interview residents who had a wide range of communicative experiences relating to perspectives on the Police Training College. I wanted to understand how small town and country folk with various socio-economic statuses, political opinions, and historical ties to southern Alberta, made sense of the Police Training College proposal and its outcome. Unfortunately, I was able to obtain only three interviewees. This was extremely disheartening. This meant that I could not reach firm, representative, and documented conclusions about how all the varied participants influenced the discussion or its terms of legitimacy in the bid process, or how they were shaped by these processes. However, with the assistance of my supervisor I was encouraged and supported to change my focus.

On a positive note, in this qualitative exploratory study, the interviewees turned out to be a wealth of information and material. The individuals I interviewed are fairly

typical of many Fort Macleod and area residents, reflecting different social positions, and all knew about and had thought about the bid. All were thoughtful respondents with a range of opinions and perspectives. I can easily add myself to their mix.

The Police Training College venture, which was active from 2006 to 2012, constituted an extraordinary time for Fort Macleod and the surrounding rural area. It was a time of anticipation of change; a new development was coming to the town. This would mean an economic boost, new industry, new people, and an increase in jobs. The residents of this small town and its surrounding rural area, including myself, had something to look forward to; something *new*.

Subsequent to my rethinking of my research project, its focus continued to be on how rural people within small towns and communities define themselves communicatively; however, it became more an examination of a very specific set of social and communicative interactions. Nonetheless, in this thesis, I treat these, despite their very small scale, as informative more generally about how people identify for themselves and each other the terms of "rurality" and community that fit their experience, and construct for themselves and each other a sense of themselves as in community with each other in "rural"ways. Here, the literature and theory I consulted on rurality became *very* important; *especially* those parts of it which emphasized the importance of understanding how rural and small-town people *actively* form and define themselves and each other as rural subjects, and how they imagine their settings as *experientially* rural.

Discourse and the Narrative Construction of Ourselves

The concept of discourse is challenging to define succinctly. The analysis of discourse, according to Sara Mills (1997) considers the structure of spoken language and

written text and how it is used to create our world-views and perceptions. Foucault, however, reminds us that language and how it is structured is not a given, but it is itself produced through discursive practices, which are both regulated and regulative (Mills, 1997). The study of discourse is the analysis of contingent, local, and specific utterances and statements, as well as a way of seeing them as organized and rule-governed. Mills argues that discourse provides a means to categorize, to determine how scientific research and findings are given meaning, and to articulate the meanings given to and used in building and rebuilding societal and cultural norms and systems. She describes Foucault's concept of power as both productive and repressive in nature. Social power is not simply held at various levels of "authority" but is also activated or realized *practically* in the everyday interactions that make up or challenge the authority of the state, the municipality, the community, and the individual.

Hall (1992) takes a broader historical perspective in arguing that European discourse was molded and influenced through the very construction of dominant European languages. But this can be misinterpreted whereby specific differences with broad categories and types are overlooked and/or dismissed. Discourse is not simple and does not always "represent an encounter between equals" (Hall, 1992, p. 214). The notion that everyone wants to be involved discursively in their community paints everyone with the same brush. What if there are "others" who don't want to or are not allowed to be part of the community, and don't control the terms on which the community is being built? Even within European societies, as well as outside them, there is a diversity of cultures, classes, interest groups, and ethnic groups. These groups may not have a similar concept of community. One way to limit the challenges these contradictory concepts (and the

beliefs they articulate) may pose to a dominant order is to take away the languages in which they articulate those concepts, and to take away opportunities for people (who use those languages) to engage in discourse.

However, discourse is not merely about using the politically correct words. Naming and storytelling demonstrate how the struggle over language is more than a simple imposition of a particular view on powerless people by people in power (Mills, 1997, p. 40). Foucault (1997) states that what we think we might want to express is not simply our own, but that it comes from how we are formed by the social relations, languages, and discourses we are taught. These are beyond our individual control even as we learn them and learn to use them. Ideas, notions, program models, etcetera are not simply constructions owned by those who are credited with creating or inventing them, nor even by those who use them. How are communications socially contrived? Specifically, how is the communication by which rural people create and reproduce themselves as rural socially contrived? Politicians, planners, bureaucrats, newspaper editors, and bid committee members think they are creating pieces of work or writing out their own thoughts and experiences – both of which is and isn't the case. These are social roles that certain people (at specific) times are given the social license to speak in particular ways and with particular levels of authority. When they speak and/or write they do so in ways they have learned and been taught to do in accordance to that role. They speak about concepts and things from perspectives that not only relate to their social locations, but also that they have been taught from childhood on.

The notion of a Police Training College and all the work that went into making this notion a reality was in actuality a product of the social environment of the time. The

social environment is ultimately produced and reproduced by peoples' everyday actions – which are also produced and reproduced themselves. As Marx (1999) said, "men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past." For example, those who promoted the Police Training College bid did so out of some awareness of their dependency on an urban center of power – Edmonton. They had to follow the terms laid down for the bid process. The discursive assumption that small-towns need economic development to survive or the community dwindles, and that such development requires following rules laid down by urban power, is part of the normative matrix of communication practices that shape discussion of development proposals in many Alberta small towns.

In turn, within small town and rural areas, local norms form a matrix of communication practices that govern ground-level endemic co-operation and social harmony. I witnessed how the interviewees constructed themselves as non-vocal observers or active participants to the events surrounding the bid process. Their self-construction was guided by their social location plus the rural norm that one should not cause discord in the community by being too political or speaking out against a development that could bring in much needed jobs. To be fair, individuals may or may not contribute to their social location, but are not necessarily in control of it.

Does this mean that the conversations of the residents of Fort Macleod and surrounding rural areas are the constructs of their culture and societies? That they are creatures of the influence of the social institutions that they attend, such as language, family, schools, churches, etcetera? Yes. In taking part we reproduce and reshape those

institutions in turn. We are made by our histories and we make history as well. But in our making of history, it could be said that the "solutions" we formulate and apply to personal, civic, and other issues may be constructed in terms that also structure the very things we are trying to solve. This notion that people speak from and act in terms of the discourse in which they have been formed (e.g., families, schools, churches, political messaging, social agencies, employment) can be somewhat disconcerting.

It seems that cultural and institutional forces shape our perceptions deeply. At times it is difficult for us to realize that we are part of the "Matrix". However, in understanding that we (our identities, agency, orientations, and perceptions) are part of discursive structures and that these structures exist through our actions. In realizing this, can we become more astute in our everyday social interactions and our civic participation? And does this knowledge provide us with more power?

"The object of planning (i.e., future action) is the routinely unique and novel," states John Forester (1982, p. 67). He further notes that planners must be attentive to the specific needs of each case. Planners may not have direct control or authority; however, they do have a socially-acknowledged expertise which can become power to influence circumstances and conditions under which residents of a locality may or may not be permitted to speak, or may or may not feel like they can speak, or act or otherwise participate in discussions and/or decisions relating to issues that affect their lives and that can strain community relations. Community consultation can give rural and small-town residents a chance to discuss and decide on what is of greatest benefit for their communities. Community consultation can also be used as a means to control and disempower local voices in order to serve powerful vested interests, which is often not

clear at the beginning of a civic discussion process. I think it is fair to say that many processes of community consultation around development proposals are a mixture of these two aims. Further, questions that arise regarding mixed aims will also generate reflection, whether communicated in interpersonal discussion or kept to oneself.

Brief Overview of Chapters

Chapter 2, Literature Review, is a summary of theories relating to ways of defining rurality and of understanding social interaction, identities, and forms of agency characteristic of people in small towns and rural areas who have experienced the fundamental changes over the years. I have included writers and theorists who have informed my focus, such as Karl Marx, Max Weber, Ferdinand Tonnies, R. Alex Pahl, R. Alexander Sim, Kieran Bonner, Phillip Hansen and Alicia Muszynski, Barbara Ching and Gerald Creed, and Roger Epp and David Whitson. In this chapter, I explain and deal with the assertion that rurality is no longer a useful sociological concept and propose some ways in which it still is. I also examine ways in which rural is both framed by dependency on forms of urban-centric economy and political power, and resists being cancelled-out by that power.

Chapter 3, Methodology, provides the research processes I undertook along with the epistemology, perspective, and approach to my research. I explain my use and application of theoretical concepts here. I initially used resources such as Denzin and Lincoln, Lynham, Stake, Yin, and Maxwell to develop my understanding of qualitative research, but I explain how this led to deeper and more far-reaching shifts in my approach.

Chapter 4, Power and Representation in Small-Town Politics, considers epistemological, ontological, and perspectival issues raised by this project in terms of Kieran Bonner's (1997), "radical interpretive theory." Bonner takes into consideration the "historical, cultural and community influence" of the researcher and the production of knowledge. He brings together scientific perspective, real-world experiences, and sense-making of those participating or being observed in sociological research (1997, p. 56), which seeks to understand how the "truth" of a situation is arrived at through analysis of the "life-world" and "everyday understandings" of members of rural communities (Bonner, 1997, p. 58). In this chapter, I also examine ways of theorizing power, agency, and legitimacy as they relate to social action, discursive practices, and their institutionalization. I use these theories to understand how an issue evolves not only through official systems but also through the practical sense-making of community members experiencing the back-and-forth processes and conversations between local and higher-level authorities who often are located in urban centres.

Chapter 5, Results and Analysis was the chapter I found most interesting to write. This is the chapter in which the heart of my research and my shift in approach came to fruition. Here I provide a detailed discussion of the contents of my interviews, along with a self-analysis of my own participation in them. I try to present the interview material in a way that each interviewee speaks for her/himself, utilizing longer quotes from their transcribed interviews to bring out details not only of what they said in response to my questions, but of how they said it. Often, they were responding to me – that is to my own interaction with them in the interviews, not only as a questioner but also as a dialogue ally. In this chapter I also discuss the interviews as social processes in which we co-

operated in reality-construction; in the construction of our identities and agency as dialogue allies, as fellow local residents, and as rural.

In the Conclusion, Chapter 6, I provide a summary of the insights gained through the process of this research and its reformulation. I also propose new questions arising from this project about the nature of social research, the idea and reality of ruralness; the concepts of community, dependency, and power; and how personal identity and social world are constructed communicatively. More importantly to me and to others who may follow, I provide some reflections of my own on the learning I have achieved through this project as a First Nations graduate student.

Conclusion

I value understanding the western world view and western ways of being. As a First Nations student living in the rural area surrounding Fort Macleod (my project location), I set out to understand the social construction of a locality within another culture's society while not only residing in the adjacent rural jurisdiction but also being a member of the First Nation whose territory the project takes place on. Kieran Bonner (1997) wrote his study in the midst of the stress and angst of moving his young family from an urban center to a small-town setting for work, knowing that his children had to attend school, day care, etcetera in this new place. In a similar context, as a First Nations student, I struggled with providing my own Blackfoot cultural perspective on this project. I feel more comfortable stating that my project was undertaken fully acknowledging my First Nation background and perspective. Although the primary perspective of this thesis is a sociological one, I include a First Nations perspective in areas where I feel a comparison would add to the knowledge of the project.

Through the various writers and theorists, I've drawn upon in this research, I gained insight to a space between individual selves and social institutions where these are not objects to be described objectively, but as effects that are produced through social and discursive practices. I recognize how these practices own us as much as we own them. Thus, as the researcher in this project I cannot simply stand apart from my own reality that is presumed to exist independently and observed from outside. From this research I began to see how I cannot avoid implicating myself in what I research. I realized that I too produce and reproduce myself into an integral part of the complex social webs.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

I was very challenged in writing the literature review chapter. There were many reasons for this, and in this chapter, I describe some of the challenges I faced. To begin, the very notion of seeking out information and knowledge relating to my initially very broad focus on rurality as it impacts social interaction, interpersonal communication, and communication practices within small-towns, was intimidating. Another issue was how to hone the material I was reading down to manageable bits that would fit into concise paragraphs and together create a chapter worthy of academic review, while still honouring the rural experience. I worried that this experience could be lost if I became too immersed in the complexity of competing theories. At the same time, I was aware that I was standing on the shoulders of giants.

The first question was: Who are the giants? Experts who have done research and writing in social theory and rural sociology for years, yes; but which ones, and which of their concepts would be relevant to my topic? Would I agree with them? My initial reaction was: Who am I (a lowly student trying to piece together a masters thesis) to critique their ideas?

In looking through a mountain of literature while seeking appropriate resources, I became overwhelmed by the enormous amount of information, knowledge, and discussion available. After reviewing many books, articles, and videos and going down many rabbit holes, I began to see my path through the massive amount of material I had gathered. This chapter chronicles what I discovered in my journey through the literature, and how I responded to what I discovered.

There is a large body of scholarly writing mapping out different paradigms, perspectives, and categories within relevant sub-fields in sociology, such as rural sociology, historical sociology, agricultural sociology, and developmental sociology. At the beginning of my review, I believed I could find a solid singular definition of *rural* out there in the vast open prairies of writing I consulted – I was wrong. As I read through articles and books looking for that definition, I came to the disheartening realization that a universally accepted definition of *rural* does not exist. That realization was like getting knocked to the ground and lying in the grass and dirt with the insects staring up at the vastness of the sky. Did this mean my research topic was moot? Did I have to start all over and choose a different topic? No, it meant that *my perception* of 'definition' and 'rural' had to change. My narrow, linear, and positivist way of looking for that one definitive phrase or description needed to change.

Looking back over what I've discovered in my research journey, I realize that I have come across some very interesting writing on the social interaction of people in small-towns and rural areas. The objective of this literature review is to summarize and discuss a chosen few well-known writers within the field of rural sociology, including some who have provided helpful descriptions of rural (as opposed to concise or authoritative definitions). In a more or less chronological manner, I will begin with the early work of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, whose book, *The German Ideology*, was written in 1845-1846, and includes some of the earliest discussion of rurality that today we would call sociological.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels

In *The German Ideology* (1968), Marx and Engels began to formulate the materialist conception of history, and historical materialism was first formulated as an integral theory. Engels said later that this theory, describing laws of social development, had revolutionised the science of society, and embodied the first of Marx's great discoveries (the second being the theory of surplus value), which played the main role in transforming socialism from utopian speculation into a science.

Marx was one of the earliest to write about the social differences between rurality and urbanity from a modern perspective, and he was not complimentary to rural people in his comparison (Bonner, 1997, p. 17). According to Marx, as capitalism developed, the countryside became subject to urban rule in the sense that the rural economy was integrated into capitalist production, and capital was concentrated in cities. This development "rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life," but Marx added that "[r]ural life is not an Other to the mode of production of capitalism but rather an early stage in its development" (Marx in Bonner, 1997, p. 15). In *The German Ideology* (1968), Marx indicates that pre-capitalist rural subservience to nature amounted to a primitive mode of production which meant a primitive form of society. He goes on to argue that modes of production, whether they involve subsistence labour that is subservient to nature, or industrial labour exchanged for money, define and shape mental capacity. Marx reasoned that in primitive societies, mental capacities had not yet become distinct from physical capacity. This contrasted to the 'advanced' society of the modern city where capitalism has necessitated higher forms of thinking carried out by specialized knowledge workers, managers, and planners, thereby putting in motion a transition to complex, technologically civilized nations.

Marx (1859) also discussed how capitalism subjects rural life to exploitation within urban-centric economies. Bonner (1997) notes that Marx's perspective on the modern rural-urban divide is framed in terms of production and productivity, meaning that Marx understands the development of society (economically, socially, legally) based on the development of productive forces and the social relations in terms of which forces are activated. For Marx, traditions and old ways of doing things were merely the expression of outmoded relations of production (and of exploitation) that capitalism would sweep away (Marx & Engels, 1848). Marx treats pre-capitalist agriculture as a social state from which modern human social relations evolved and from which modern life has now broken free. Marx (1994) states that humans became distinct from animals when they began to develop a means of subsistence involving co-operative labour, organizing themselves, and developing a relationship of control over their surroundings (nature) in order to produce not only a subsistence for themselves, but also a surplus, and to reproduce their ways of producing, their social orders, tools, and cultures.

Marx considered that the "what and how" of production in a given society shaped both individual ways of life and social and cultural forms. He wrote "[a]s individuals express their life, so they are" (Marx, 1994, p. 108). They do so in terms of social relations of production that form a system of exploitation. This a key point in his writings. Bonner (1997) follows it up by explaining that, for Marx, both traditional and modern rural life have held the rural population back, in different ways, from discovering truly fulfilling work. In traditional rural societies, this was because rural people were largely still subject to the arbitrary forces of nature (Marx, 1867). In modern rural societies, it is because they are subject to the arbitrary forces of capital, which transforms

the countryside into spaces in which raw agricultural, fishery, forestry, and mined commodities are grown or extracted for processing by urban industries, and to generate profits for urban owners of capital (Marx, 1867).

Simon (1994) describes the four forms of ownership about which Marx wrote:

1. Tribal – Division of labour is a natural phenomenon within the family. The latent labour of the children and wife is important. Their hard work as hunters, gatherers, and labourers in planting and harvesting is led by the father. This is a primitive form of production for subsistence.
2. Ancient communal and state ownership – Division of labour is more developed between owners, citizens, and slaves. The social structure is geared towards urbanity and production of property – both for communal and private ownership.
3. Feudal – Based on community; division of labour is between serfs (who are the producers on the land) and property-holders (nobles or church). The difference here is that the serfs not only produce for the property-holders, they also produce for themselves. The serfs' products are distributed upwards in the form of tribute to the property-holders (who did not own property but were granted rights to it by the senior nobility and kings, to whom they in turn owe tribute.)
4. Capitalism – Society is structured around commodities and profit where the means of production are owned by a small percentage of the bourgeois population who exploit the labour of the proletariat, who form a much larger percentage of the population.

Different forms of production and social organization are important for this review because each demonstrates a "stage in the division of labor [which] also determines the relations of individuals to one another so far as the material, instrument,

and product of labor are concerned" (Simon, 1994, p. 108). That is, individual social relationships are determined by the type and organization of economic production and exchange within each stage. These forms articulate the development of a division of labour and its relation to a particular, historical form of exploitation, and over time, to the development of different social forms of life. Earlier forms of country subsistence were based on relations within the family and to the land. Urban living requires the product of the country to feed urban industry and commerce (and the workers who make it happen). Marx indicates that the modern form of "the antagonism between town and country and later antagonism between states representing urban interests and those representing rural interests" grows out of the fact that the flow of goods from country to city is organized on a profit-driven basis that benefits urban owners more than rural producers (Simon, 1994, p. 109).

In this same line of thinking, Marx makes a point which is important to my project: within each stage, individual ideas, social relationships, and political behaviour are formed based on the type of relation they have with nature, other individuals, and their own innate characters. Even their innate characters, according to Marx, are *not* fixed, but are the products of their histories (Simon, 1994). Marx describes how social relations at every stage take form in terms of a given system of production and exchange. For example, in modern capitalism, a farmer produces food not for her/his consumption, but instead for exchange and the generation of profit. They are produced as commodities, in which commercial value comes to dominate use value. In rural communities, people who don't own farms also come to see their life chances and prospects are dependent on

markets, and on capital investments that might bring more jobs to rural and small-town communities.

Ferdinand Tonnies

The next writer I discuss is Ferdinand Tonnies, a German sociologist who published *Gemeinshaft und Gesellschaft* in 1888 (Tonnies, 2001). His analysis of the contrasts between rural and urban societies generated foundational sociological concepts, just as Marx's work had done a generation earlier. Tonnies' focus was specifically on two dichotomous concepts that he used to describe the different qualities of rural and urban social life. According to Bonner (1997), these two concepts are not necessarily based on place or land, but instead distinguish "different orientations toward the world and life" (p. 20); they are opposites on the spectrum of competition versus cooperation. Tonnies used the concept of *Gemeinschaft* to describe small, local communities. Relationships within these communities are important. The family is key, and relationships within and between families in rural communities are concrete and personal rather than abstract and limited to specific and specialized roles. Traditions and history are important, and *gemeinschaft* societies impose obligations on their members to respect these and maintain personal ties to each other. On the other hand, in *Gesellschaft* "society", relationships are created for the specific purpose of modern work. Modern work is different from traditional work; it is technical, formally-defined, specialized, organized bureaucratically, and often involves abstract legal rules. In such societies, relations between people tend to be governed by the specific roles in which they encounter each other, and need not involve an overarching sense of community, nor family ties.

In *Gemeinschaft,* a balance of social and natural factors holds society together. The idea (which may or may not be the reality) is that production and exchange is governed by common moral principles, for the greater good, creating and nurturing community bonds. All social relations are structured around traditional familial ties and family kinships and individuality is discouraged. People tend to be "placed" less by level of education or occupational specialization than by family or their concrete role in the community. By contrast, in *Gesellschaft* all relationships in public life are for the purpose of commerce or rational administration. Social relations are structured around business and competition for jobs and contracts are central. This mode of social life undermines the centrality of both family orientation and tradition.

The "original collective forms of *Gemeinschaft*" develop into the "rational will of the *Gesellschaft*" (Truzzi, 1971, p. 2), meaning that rural and small-town social forms eventually developed into or gave way to an urban civilization, economy, and state system. In this civilized state, individuals are freed from the chains of customs, mores, and religious rules and are increasingly considered to be free persons (Truzzi, 1971). In Tonnies' writings, in both Truzzi (1971) and Bonner (1997), rural is deemed to be an initial lower and slower form of life that develops over history into the cultured and busy form of modern life. Urban society is imagined as both commercial and cultured; however, both culture and commerce tend to benefit those who inhabit the upper rungs of the social and economic ladder. Like Marx, Tonnies pointed out that land and buildings become commodities for usury purposes in urban centers. On the other hand, in the country, land was still where life is grown and houses are where families are grown. Tonnies' description of the *gemeinschaft/gesellschaft* distinction is interesting. On the one

hand it is a historical and developmental distinction where the past is equated with *gemeinschaft* and the present with *gesellschaft;* but on the other, Tonnies seems to indicate that even in the present there is a spectrum, with a surviving rural *gemeinschaft* on one end and a dominant urban *gesellschaft* on the other, still in present-day opposition and contrast.

Georg Simmel

Similar to Tonnies, Georg Simmel (1950) wrote that urban social life by and large was differentiated from small towns and rural areas. The metropolis with its streets, masses of individualized people desensitized to urban noise, fast pace, and diversity in social and economic life, is contrasted to small-town and rural life in regard to "the sensory foundations of psychic life" (p.2). In the city, Simmel explains, commerce is perpetuated, and multitudes of business relations and transactions thrive, based on abstract, formal calculations, which could not have existed in the smallness and meagerness and social constriction of rural and small-town exchange. Simmel used the phrase "money economy" to describe this multiplicity of modern, formal business relations and transactions (p. 2).

In Simmel's view, precision in timing and numerical computation is crucial to the multiplicity of money transactions, the co-ordinated movement of people and goods and the delivery of services in the metropolis, so much so that the whole system could break down into chaos without them. Simmel (1950) also argued that numerical computation meant that exactness was required for the money economy. The "modern mind" has become more definitive, precise, analytic, and quick so as to keep up with the varied and

complex business and social relationships of the metropolis (p. 3). This is in stark contrast to the slowness of the small-town and rural life.

On the other hand, Simmel explained that this barrage of economic and social activity has led to an indifferent and reserved demeanor in individual city folk. This is a reaction to and a protective measure against the overwhelming and violent stimulation of the physical and emotional human senses in the modern large city. As a result, city folk don't seek to know their neighbours or interact personally with people on the street, and don't tend to show personal concern for the strangers who are their fellow city dwellers. Again, this depiction of urban life resembles the contrast Tonnies drew between urban and small-town or countryside settings where most people know each other and which family and land area they come from, and tend to be concerned about and helpful to each other both because of their familiarity and because in rural life an economy of mutual aid still operates. If you don't help your neighbour pull a tractor out of a ditch, that neighbour might not be so willing to lend you the use of a combine for a day when yours breaks down.

Being reserved, says Simmel, is a "phenomenon of the metropolis: it grants to the individual a kind and an amount of personal freedom which has no analogy whatsoever under other conditions" (p. 6). In other words, a person can be anonymous in a city, and anonymity is a cloak that hides what in the city becomes your "private" self; how your family and friends see you. In small rural communities, you are known by most people, and if not, they can still "locate" you in terms of their knowledge of your parents or grandparents. Simmel called this the "constant inner and outer pressure of a de-individualizing small town" (p. 7).

"It is not only the immediate size of the area and the number of persons which, because of the universal historical correlation between the enlargement of the circle and the personal inner and outer freedom, has made the metropolis the locale of freedom" (Simmel, 1950, p. 8) Another factor is the downside of this metropolitan freedom: one type of social interaction (concrete and personal) decreases or is moved to "private" life, while another (abstract and impersonal) moves to the centre of public and work life. Generally speaking, in the city one does not interact extensively or in depth with the many people one sees in a day, and most of one's daily interactions are short-term (buying something or providing/receiving services, for example) or formal (work and business relations) even when cordial. On the other hand, in the small-town and country, Simmel saw concrete and personal relationships as constituting a major proportion of social life (p. 10).

Although Simmel (1950) drew distinctions between metropolitan and non-metropolitan life, he did not equate these with a distinction between urban and rural. He saw them as relating to other factors: population size and density, or the rise of a money economy and modern commerce, for example. Rural society was not a different type of society, for Simmel, but the product of different levels and intensities of social relations driven by demographic and economic factors.

R. Alex Pahl

R.A. Pahl (1968) agreed with Simmel's idea that a distinction between rural and urban place, space, or locale does not give us an adequate way to think of city or country in terms of sociology. He was critical of Tonnies' *Gemeinschaft and Gesellshaft* distinction, even if conceived as a continuum forming a rural-urban spectrum. According

to Hamilton (1950), Pahl found that no sociological definition could be formulated based on geography, and he came to doubt the worth of using a concept of a rural-urban as a classification system (p. 20). Rather, as stated by Hamilton, Pahl preferred to work with the concept of social class and economic status, regardless of locale, in studying social differences. Pahl asserted that social class is a key marker of lifestyle. Social class determines opportunities and mobility as opposed to place of settlement. Expressed more simply, "only the middle class have the means and the leisure to be able to choose 'places' in which to live" (Pahl cited in Hamilton, 1968: 270, p. 21).

Pahl came to believe that rural sociology could not continue to indulge in generating sociological theory or explanations through the lens of rurality (Hamilton, 1968). This would seem to debunk the whole field of rural sociology; especially when taking into account the decline in agriculture as an economic force or as an occupation once engaged in by the majority of the population (Pahl cited in Hamilton, 1968: 270, p. 22). Bonner (1997) also attests to Pahl's reasoning that "[a]ny attempt to tie particular patterns of social relationships to specific geographical milieu is a singularly fruitless exercise" (p. 53). The focus of contemporary sociological work has indeed shifted away from or even suppressed the rural-urban dichotomy, though it is still alive in popular modern discourse. According to Pahl (Hamilton, 1968), choosing to live in a small-town or rural area today replicates an urban pattern; it is a choice based on the same priorities that urban dwellers hold (p. 54). Further to this, Hamilton theorizes that the idea of an urban-rural continuum makes it difficult to distinguish more specific, actual discontinuities, for example between small-town and city (pp. 110 & 125). Differences here include the convenience of services and employment, with convenience being an

urban interest that Pahl would say rural and small-town people may also keep in mind, if in somewhat different ways. For Pahl there was no fundamental distinction between rural and urban life; just specific differences that did not lie in some urban or rural essence (in Hamilton, 1968).

R. Alexander Sim

Alex Sim (1988) criticized Simmel's and Pahl's description and rejection of the rural-urban distinction or continuum as sociologically useless, or as being a mindset, or being based in the convenience or sentimentality of urbanity. Sim's epistemic location for understanding economic, political, and social life measures came from the space and place of the land – for him, one of two key factors in defining the rural. Nonetheless, Sim recognized that those who enter a rural area for work or play will "have no difficulty recognizing something distinctive about the new countryside" (Sim cited in Bonner, 1997, p. 56). But Sim's foundation for social analysis came from a time when rural people knew each other, faced adversities together, were self-reliant, produced their own food, and had a measure of control over their social and business lives, forming communities. Sim (1989) wrote that the foundational fabric relied on the interdependence of physically-distanced farms and small-town occupations. The coming of mechanized transportation and electronic communications technology has profoundly changed the way work and socialization is practiced in rural communities, but without fully erasing their distinctiveness.

The way in which the name "rural" is now applied and the standardization of technological, organizational, and political entities and authorities has contributed to a denigration of those living outside of urban centers (Sim, 1989). The myths of rural or

country life (e.g., like a Christmas card illustration of simple, peaceful, wholesome) persist but have been debunked; both the myths and the debunking are urban inventions and they reinforce each other. The devaluing of rurality as mere nostalgia has long term consequences. As Sim indicates; values and beliefs lie behind policies and decisions: "Ultimately, values determine behavior, while behavior reproduces and reinforces values" (p. 28).

Against reductive conceptualization, Sim (1993) argued that "[t]here is something distinctive about the regions outside of cities that requires a name. The difference goes beyond the landscape, for it includes located special arrangement, tradition, folklore, a system of governance, economic conditions, technology, and social institutions" (p. 460). It is a colonizing act Sim argued, to ignore or minimize the attachment people who live in places of low-density populations and extensive spaces have to their location. Societal structures such as large administrative capacity, citizen watch groups, or access to legal and technical expertise, do not exist (or do not exist in the same ways) in rural areas or small towns. Planners, Sim argued, needed to: consider values attached to location in place and space; evaluate the located pace and ways of doing business particular to places; and allow for local changes and continuities in demographics.

The stereotypical top-down and confrontational approach of modern urban politics is not the kind of interaction to which rural communities have been accustomed. Consideration of things like fellowship and consensus were given more weight when planning developments. This is not to claim that local politics in rural areas was entirely egalitarian and co-operative, but community views on shared spaces were taken into account. It is worth noting that as a young man, Sim was part of the last great agrarian

movement to shape Canadian politics: the United Farmers and United Farm Women, who explicitly promoted the ideals of local grassroots democracy in terms of what they called co-operative commonwealth, and formed governments in three Canadian provinces in the 1920s. However, in today's world of technology, convenience, and consumer individualism, Sim argued that practices "such as self-help and mutual aid" which once were important for social and economic self-sufficiency, are not only romanticized but are romanticized nostalgically on one hand but considered undesirable for practical purposes now (1993, p. 465). Community erosion is marked by a sense of dislocation in which individual consumer priorities take precedence and neighbours become strangers.

Privatization and centralization of public and business services and centres has furthered a disintegration of community. A separation between work and personal or social life grows as residents commute to other centres and front-line workers come in to administer regionalized services and programs. Most major planning and development decisions take place in urban centres and are initiated in terms of centralizing priorities without (or with minimal) input from local communities. Sim acknowledges that rural people seem to no longer have the political will or leadership to fight for their way of life as rural people.

The disappearance of the word "rural" as a category of social life to be taken seriously in policy and planning means that rural spaces and communities become objects of urban desire. Urbanites can leave the city on weekends to come to a countryside they treat as a place to relax and play. The place where relaxing and playing takes place can more readily be disposed of or transformed in pursuit of outside political or commercial ends (for example resource extraction or for recreational resorts) when its recreational

users don't have an existential stake to both its social and natural virtue. As local economies in rural areas become more dependent on international markets for agricultural, mining, and forestry commodities, and on recreational facilities for urbanites, members of rural communities themselves can easily be co-opted to support development driven by outside forces in the name of jobs, business opportunities, or services, and thereby see themselves primarily as individuals with private interests.

To Sim (1988), to give something a name (as in "rural") is to acknowledge and give it credence. He argues that the spread of urban-centric media communications, transportation networks, political priorities, and economic interests constitutes a form of urban imperialism. Within this mode of operation, place, locality, and community are disregarded whether in urban neighbourhoods dealing with expressways or in small towns dealing with depopulation. Urban imperialism imposes projects and/or policies in a colonizing manner. Simmel (1950) and later Pahl (1968) claim that these centralizing and de-localizing forces have nothing to do with rural-urban distinction. But Sim (1988) argued that they do, because they involve a particular way of relating to land that is invasive and ignores the social and human particularities of place, space, and distance. These only retain importance as long as they can be given quantitative value within the equivocal and global discourse of modern economics. Sim (1988) claims that this invasion and quantification is only possible through the power to name, and that naming is a central strategy of colonization.

For Sim (1988), "cultural urban imperialism" took the form of planning and politics that named things in terms of urban centralism, top-down policy processes, and usury view of the land (p. 27). Here he explains that cultural urban imperialism takes

place when the urban entities (a political or economic dominant culture) use discourse such as "periphery, fringe, and hinterland," to effectively invalidate rural livelihood (p. 27). This legitimizes administrative power to concentrate into a few hands and cultivates dependency. Sim states this type of imposition allows larger centres of power to ignore or minimize the needs of rural communities which can effectively quash them. He shows how sociological and planning discourse allows urban centres and urban priorities to creep across the countryside, not only disregarding community values, but imposing the discursive value of urban centres in the name of development. He states, "Urban life and rural life are still urban and rural despite their respective changes" (Bonner, 1997, p. 55).

In a subsequent article, *The Changing Culture of Rural Ontario,* Sim (1993) uses the word *gestalt* in his summary of a method (Sounding) used in facilitating focus group conversations which aimed at people of rural communities discussing contentious community issues. He states that gestalt is "the whole exceeds the sum of its parts" in this case advocating for consensus and closure regarding contentious issues rural people experience in their communities (Sim, 1993 p. 26). Sim stated a rural community is in a better place to advocate and plan for itself politically, economically, and socially. In other words, gestalt is embodied in physical space (which necessarily includes distance), and physical presence of land (including sounds, smells, colours etcetera); in the socially constructed ways rural people relate to each other and form their communities.

Kieran Bonner

In his book, *A Great Place to Raise Kids,* Bonner (1997) shows his debt to the work of Alex Sim, even as he develops a critical response to Sim's work. Bonner reworks Sim's emphasis on land and place as practical and having structure to a more abstract

way of describing rurality – Bonner discusses how people *perceive* themselves as rural and *perceive* themselves as members of community. Bonner (1997) notes various commonplace descriptors of rurality such as: countryside; as pastoral, agricultural, natural, fertile; as lacking in social development; and as other. In popular rural versus urban distinctions, the metropolitan comes to be associated with progressiveness and modernity while the rural is typecast as regressive and traditional (Bonner, 1997). However, there is "an intricate interdependence between rural and urban communities"; the urban cities depend on rural resources to meet the needs of their dense populations and rural communities have come to rely on urban services and industrial goods (Epp & Whitson, 2001, p.325).

Bonner (1997) uses Sim's word *rurban* to define a place that has the best of both rural and urban amenities and characteristics. "Prairie Edge", the community that was the focus of his research – big enough to include city amenities and conveniences but small enough to be 'country', giving social and cultural flavour. Prairie Edge had small-town charm, traditional family and social norms, and face-to-face contact, yet it was not associated exclusively with farming. Bonner's informants emphasized a sense of safety within this community, especially for raising children, as opposed to the perceived dangers of big city life. This is another way of perceiving rural – from the perspective of utility as conceived by parents and members of this community. Bonner further develops the idea of *rurban* in relation to this instrumental use of place. In response to Sim, Bonner states, "the value of place as an end to itself and does not get to be developed" (p. 166). Still, in this discourse of safety, rurality is resurrected and its value compared to urbanity

in terms of particular uses of space, and choices of place. These values are ultimately measured against the costs of housing and commuting.

Bonner (1997) indicates that amongst his respondents there was a belief, widely shared by small-town and rural residents and also by many urbanites, that a "perceived golden age of old-time values" and "rolling fields" gives a false sense that smaller is better in community size, especially for family life (pp. 87-88). Bonner himself characterizes rural in terms of small communities comprised of low numbers of residents who are likely to know each other (p. 56). These descriptors of rurality have been pervasive throughout my readings: a low population density comprised of people who know each other and most likely have known each other for many years. Further, Bonner proposes that this mutual familiarity benefits the relationships which ensue in rural areas and form an important dimension of any established activity, be it social, recreation, or business. These connections are established and deepened due to their familiarity with each other. This is a key point in his discussions. Yet Bonner is among the authors who subscribe to the notion that rurality is socially constructed.

Bonner (1997) acknowledges that close relationships can and do happen in small suburbs and downtown neighbourhoods within cities as well as in rural and small-town communities. But his argument is the *perception* that small towns are safer places in which to raise children conveys a pervasive belief of the people he spoke with – is false. In his research for *A Great Place to Raise Kids,* he found that statistical data did not back up the assertions of these small-town parents, though many moved to Prairie Edge precisely because of that mistaken perception of small-town safety. The facts form his research evidence (which is based in a positivistic perspective) on safety indicators (i.e.

economic, political, and social measures) and the *perception* of small-town safety was a crisis point for him. How is this phenomenon to be understood without contradicting people's decision to move to or stay in Prairie Edge?

He circled back to Alex Sim. Similar to Sim, who viewed the economic, political, and social life measures from a space and place of the land, Bonner takes an anti-positivistic view to better understand the decision to relocate to or to stay in Prairie Edge – a small rural town where advances in transportation and technology allow for greater mobility. Like Sim (993), he sees an "instrumental relation to land" at work in these movements. People did not move to Prairie Edge from the city to commit themselves to a place or community, they decided to invest in a house, situated in a safe place to raise their family, from a range of options grounded in their perception of the kind of lifestyle and parenting advantages and services available (for a fee).

Bonner stops short of using Sim's position of the existence of a rural gestalt, rather, he treats rurality as a frame of reference shared by the life-worlds in which people construct and arrange the relations between their interests (e.g. safety, peace of mind, child rearing) and their value commitments. Despite his suspicion and mistrust of the perception of safety of living in small-town and rural areas, Bonner stresses the importance of not erasing, but understanding the relations between life-worlds of interviewees.

Philip Hansen and Alicja Muszynski

Hansen and Muszynski (1990) don't refer to *rural* in geographical terms as a kind of place, but in terms of one of its predominant industries: agriculture. They write about how people living on farms and in small towns develop a concept of rurality through

actions in the social, economic, and political realms "as a complex array of relations which people both consciously and unconsciously reproduce in the course of their everyday lives" (p. 5). They also note that classical politics accentuates the importance of developing a collective life which includes addressing the needs of the citizens, institutions, and economy in which they are interested. Keeping this in mind, Hansen and Muszynski ask researchers engaging with rural community members to value their lived experience, not pass judgement, and "seek to illuminate the assumptions which seem implicit in people's conscious activity and raise them to the level of debate within a political forum grounded in the community" (p.8). They propose that any shared political action and consciousness rural people develop must be grounded in their shared perception of their life-world consciousness. Further to this, a shared life-world does not grant political possibility without being raised to explicit consciousness without communication. Like Bonner, they assert that communication and discussions on difficult or contentious issues must be had, and if need be – boisterously debated.

Hansen and Muszynski (1990) describe how settlers were provided allocations of land under public policy at the expense of Indigenous peoples. This is the story of how the family farm came into being, with the establishment of private property, labour of family and neighbours, and the ideal of freedom to work hard for independence. The notion of interdependence and community was created as farming become a viable way of life. At the same time, the ideals of the "self-made man" and individual effort, the institution of individual private property, often conflicted with ideals of mutual aid and community interdependence (Ramp, 2015). This is not to take away from settlers' lived experience, nor the lived experience of rurality of their descendants who still live in small

towns and on farms (Hansen and Muszynski, 1990, p. 11). It simply suggests that a reconsideration of how community is defined and how community is to be connected to public policy (and to politics) is a key task in raising "implicit assumptions" to the "level of debate." Like Bonner, however, Hansen and Muszynski see this as a matter of dialogue and mutual consciousness-raising on the part of researchers, community activists, and rural residents.

Interestingly, Hansen and Muszynski do not specifically speak to what rural is, but rather to how farmers (and small-town people) perceive themselves as being rural – an approach very similar to Bonner's. For the most part, they encourage and advocate for researchers to act in terms of an ontological respect for how people on farms and in small towns perceive themselves as rural people and understand and value their experience.

Gerald W. Creed and Barbara Ching

In their introduction to *Knowing Your Place: Rural Identity and Cultural Hierarchy,* Gerald Creed and Barbara Ching (1997) locate the problem of defining or describing rurality in terms of the way words like "heartland' are used to evoke images of quaint, charming, and bustling farms. Such words, according to Creed and Ching are descriptions of rurality versus urbanity, and are meant to ornament space and do not change the hierarchy placed upon rural/urban cultural, social, and political distinctions (Creed and Ching 1997, p. 17). It only seems to amplify the low status of rural culture, social, and political standings, most of which has been created by colonialism. Added to this, colonial discourse most often demonstrates the powerful superiority of the urban. Even in the face of urban crime, city decay, and business corruption, the city continues to be validated, as urban space is "the locus of political, economic and cultural power"

(Creed and Ching, 1997, p. 17). Further to this, values placed on objects such as folk art, country fashions, and rural styles are based on the interests of the urban customer who uses these items to "signal their class and cultural superiority" (p. 21).

Creed and Ching (1997) describe how not only words but also material images found in art, fashion, and style inform images of rurality and rusticity: either promoting nostalgic versions of them or on occasion, satirizing them. Further, Creed and Ching suggest that rural people themselves use these words and images to depict their own version of rurality. In other words, rural and rusticity are socially constructed notions in which urban nostalgia and rural life-worlds mingle. Creed and Ching (1997) note in particular Raymond Williams' (1973) argument that the distinction between rural and urban is more than a distinction of space. Choices of clothing, music, and food along with the cultivation of "regional accents and hometown origins" shapes identity along rural/urban lines and also generates forms of social identification that carry with them the potential of political and economic conflict (Creed and Ching, 1997, p. 3).

Creed and Ching (1997) concur with Roger Epp (2008) in acknowledging that rural people: (a) are marginalized and their culture devalued, which links to and affects rural/urban political and economic stratification, (b) at times embrace that marginalization, and (c) are inappropriately placed in postmodern theory's model of identity by many researchers. Their argument is that, even as the concept of "rural" disappears from scholarly discourse, it lives on in complex ways in popular culture: in the stubborn resistance of rural people to urban culture; conversely in their adoption of certain aspects of urban nostalgia for rurality, and in the urban denigration of the rural lifestyle. In the urban consciousness, rural is considered, whether negatively or

positively, as the Other. To the extent that these perceptions drive decisions and actions, Creed and Ching argue that neither demographics nor economic viability should outweigh the importance of understanding the complex nature of rural identity in the study of rural places and communities. "[W]hile many social scientific studies of rural societies and many artistic works take the rural as their theme, the very attempt to distinguish identity from themes, rusticity from rurality, exposes not only our limited intellectual framework but also the extent to which this element of identity has been naturalized" (Creed and Ching, 1997, p. 6). The point here is that while rural and urban identities are different, they are not developed in isolation from each other; that they can both intertwine and at the same time enhance their differences, but that they have real effects nonetheless. This echoes the Thomas Theorem (1928) which states: "things that are taken to be real are real in their consequences" (p. 572).

Roger Epp and David Whitson

In his chapter, "Overcoming Cultural and Spiritual Obstacles to Rural Revitalization", Cameron Harder (Epp & Whitson 2001) quotes an interviewee speaking of his relationship to the land: "Farm families are connected to the land-like a living body. […] We have the roots of the land in us" (p. 224). This comment sums up the feeling of most rural citizens, especially from those long-established settler families. Bob Starling (Epp & Whitson 2001), in his chapter "Work, Knowledge, and the Direction of Farm Life" agrees with Harder, stating that rural people were "supported by a community network of shared knowledge and practice" (p. 253). This statement resounds with many descriptions of past and even present rural communities and small towns; descriptions that go all the way back to Tonnies. The concept of "a community network of shared

knowledge and practice" is still central to the way people live in small-towns and rural areas. The idea of an historical environment and "common knowledge" shared by people with a sense of closeness to each other despite (or perhaps because of) distance and low population density is still held in high regard by rural people and is still articulated by many authors of rural studies, such as those featured in the Epp and Whitson collection. Practices, such as helping neighbours in times of need and bartering services are part of this common knowledge that make the rural life seem close-knit.

Like Alexander Sim, Roger Epp's own writings (2008) are based in a consciousness of rurality that could be described as a gestalt. It is a consciousness based not on chosen values but on something before choice: an experiential and ontological form of being. His essays illustrate his closeness to the land by describing what it feels like to be on the land and to know intimately the nature of the prairies. Narratives of sights, smells, textures, and sounds that grass makes on the prairie land instantly bring to mind vivid scenes. As I read his words, I immediately get a sense of familiarity, not specifically of that particular piece of land, but of the prairie space and terrain. The descriptions of the landscape, rivers, animals, hills and knolls are so familiar and embedded in my mind and in the minds and more importantly, in the psyches and even the bodily responses of people who live in the rural prairies.

Conclusion

Finally, I will add some closing thoughts on how the readings I chose shaped my own way of approaching the rural including how they relate to and tie into each other, and how they help me develop my perception on rurality and the people who live in this space. As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, I was very challenged in writing it,

honing down the mountain of literature, and deciding which authors and theorists helped lead towards my own approach to rurality. Marx, as one of the earliest modern writers on rurality and urbanity, was helpful in providing a framework in which to understand this phenomenon even though his term "rural idiocy" may not have been kind to people living a rural life. Marx sensitized me to the fact that human beings, rural and urban, are formed by their environments, both natural and social, but that these same human beings also actively produce or reproduce those environments. Further, Marx made the important point that we are relational beings, and thus to understand rural communities and social orders, it is necessary to understand how people are related unequally within them through the organization of work, economic exchange and political power.

Marx also noted that on a larger scale, rural and urban social orders *themselves* are shaped by their often-unequal relations to each other. This point became especially important as I realized that "ruling" and "subordinate" classes in rural societies are not simply the mirror image of their structural counterparts in urban societies. Small-town leadership elites do include members of the small-town business class (that is, owners of local businesses) and their activities tend to reflect business interests. But business owners as a class play a *different role* in small towns than their larger-scale urban counterparts do nationally or internationally. Along with local professionals, public service managers and board members of local organizations, local business owners and managers are *dependent on* decisions made by large, centralized economic and political organizations located in urban centres. Thus, as explained later in the thesis, the "rule" of local elites in local affairs becomes *specialized* in terms of a "patron-client" relationship with urban-centred political parties, governments, funding agencies, and national or

international businesses. Local community and business leaders "broker" relations between urban centres of power and local people, seeking to gain favour from these centres of power, and at the same time, to recruit local people into this favour-seeking game by encouraging them to maintain enthusiasm and a positive attitude toward initiatives worked out between local elites and provincial or national organizations. The police college venture was a clear example of this process at work. Arguably, one failure of the bid process was not to pay enough attention to the possibility of a local electoral upset by the Wildrose Party.

Ferdinand Tonnies and Georg Simmel described interesting social characteristics that differentiated rural and urban life from each other. For example, Tonnies pointed to the slower pace of rural life and its stronger emphasis on personal and familial relations, while Simmel pointed to the more abstract nature of urban social orders, and the ways in which urban life was more individualized, desensitized, and fast-paced. On the other hand, Ray Pahl, began his career using the notion of a rural-urban continuum, but eventually decided that there was nothing that defined its two poles as essentially different. Pahl was the least helpful to me – his argument that rural sociology is no longer suitable in generating theoretical thought clashed with my own experience and seemed to me to reflect a neglect of the experiential dimension of social life. In a similar manner Kieran Bonner diverted attention from perceived rural-urban distinctions toward other matters such as how families construct and act upon a sense of safety for their children. Bonner's study provided me with much needed guidance on understanding the importance of epistemology, ontology, perspective and world view, as well as the importance of qualitative research, but not much on rurality. I would argue that he

brought an urbanite perspective to his analysis, and neglected the manner in which rural environments and social relations may contribute to building different ways of knowing (epistemology), different ways of being (ontology) and thus also different ways of *doing* social life. The most helpful and insightful writers I found to be Alexander Sim and Roger Epp. Although they were unable to provide a definition of rural that met all of Pahl's and Bonner's reservations, their descriptions of land and people come closest (in my mind) to describing a rural perspective and the significance of rural values, as did their discussions of the importance of living in close relation to land and weather, and Sim's treatment of rural identity as based in a kind of gestalt formed by that relation.

I came to realize there is no definite definition of rural in an *objective* sense, but instead a a division in the ways rurality is understood and lived. On one side there seems to be the perception that rural society and culture have no essential core: they are simply the effects of social, economic, and cultural forces that have nothing substantial to do with rurality. Thus, Ray Pahl, for example, takes class differences to be important to the formation of both rural and urban social settings, and thereby discounts the distinctiveness of the rural. Even Bonner discounts his interviewees' perceptions of the safety of small-town society. On the other hand, through my extensive readings in other literature on rural life, I came to know rurality as a way of perceiving and acting on a particular relationship with the land; as a space for being; and as a way of relating to other people and other animate beings (e.g. animals, plants, water, wind, sky, etcetera). I gained affirmation from writers such as R. Alexander Sim, Roger Epp, Barbara Ching and Gerald Creed, that the rural is *felt* as a shared quality of experience, and that it *exists actively* in particular working relationships to land and community in the context of two

kinds of shared vulnerability. One is a shared vulnerability to the realities of geography and the natural environment – distance, weather, the capacity of the land. The other is a shared vulnerability to political and economic decisions, and to perceptions of the rural, that are held in urban centres. That is, the centralization of capital that Marx talked about has led to the treatment of rural areas as locations for particular kinds of economic development and capital accumulation. For example, the urbanization of modern life (forecast in very different ways, by Simmel, Sim and Pahl) has led to the development of a kind of nostalgia for the rural in urban culture. This nostalgia lends itself to cultural tropes that Creed and Ching call "rusticity," and to an urban-driven commercial development of certain rural settings as "decorative" or "open-air" tourist destinations. Fort Macleod itself, because it has undergone little urban growth, has preserved a late nineteenth-century streetscape which is now a movie-maker's mecca. But this nostalgia occludes the fact that the shared knowledges and practices that Epp refers to as the shared heritage of rural people do not stay in the past.

Thus, I came to understand how, according to some of the authors I read, rural landscapes, places, societies, and communities are changing, suffering from contradictory pressures, and no longer considered by much of the urban public (and government) as a force to be reckoned with, as they once were in the not-so-long-ago past. Yet at the same time, rural people are more than passive recipients of this change. They actively adapt to it, and in doing so, they selectively incorporate elements of urban culture, especially through mass and social media, despite the costs and distance barriers that make high-speed wireless a distant dream for many in rural areas. The very fact that rural people are disproportionately affected by decisions taken in urban centres of power *continues to*

reproduce rural people's sense of the *difference* between their lives and those of their urban counterparts.

In reading this literature, I have also recognized and reflected on my own First Nation people who have undergone huge cultural, social, economic, and political changes. Changes continue to take place in an environment where old traditions and ways of thinking are often regarded as backward and inefficient, or romanticized and viewed nostalgically as decorative, yet at times are still fought for on principle and as an expression of a continuing life-world. It is apparent from the literature I reviewed that these attitudes and contradictions between them are part of the complex changes in rural life. Rural people, including myself as a First Nations' person, live and experience these changes (and whatever positives and negatives, real or perceived come along with such changes) whilst trying to make sense of them as best as possible. Some rural people (whether First Nations or settler, though in different ways) are for the most part complacent. Others are ambivalent or conflicted. Some rural residents and community leaders fight for scarce opportunities decided elsewhere, while others fight against the imposition of developments that threaten a particular way of life. All of them face global challenges.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the process and development of my research project. I set out to understand the socially constructed modes of communication at work in a community as they related to a particularly challenging moment in that community's history. I explain my practical use of some key theoretical concepts and provide some context for that use, highlighting how they shaped my understanding of knowledge and communication as it relates to participants' agency and social location. In my basic orientation, I draw on Denzin & Lincoln (1994) who point out that "[t]he gendered multi-culturally situated researcher approaches the world with a set of ideas, a framework (theory, ontology) that specifies a set of questions (epistemology) that are then examined (methodology, analysis) in specific ways" (p. 11). They note that no matter how well-thought-out a research plan might be in terms of traditional standards of objectivity, both participants and researchers enter the research process with their own perspectives – their social location. They further argue that paradigms with ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies "represent belief systems that attach the user to a particular worldview (p. 2). According to Wilson (2008), paradigms are the sets of "beliefs or assumptions" we have as researchers that guide our academic actions, regardless if we are aware of them or not (p. 32). My own experience is also that these ways of seeing and understanding can and often do change through the research process.

Epistemology is concerned with the study of knowledge and asks questions such as: "What is the relationship between the inquirer and the known?" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 13), and "[h]ow do we know the world?" (Smith, 1994, p. 99). According to Wilson (2008), ontology asks "How do [we] know what is real?" (p.33). In other words,

what do we take to be the ground of our existence and of the existence of the world? Methodology, by contrast, asks "*How* do we know the world, or gain knowledge of it?" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 13; Smith, 1994, p. 99). The questions we pose, if they balance careful theorization and experiential openness, can create valuable opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of how knowledge is created, communicated, valued, and devalued, and how it is impacted by our interactions with each other and the world around us. Theoretical paradigms within sociology, according to Lincoln et al. (2011), strive to account for the richness of "individuals' and social groups' ability to create and co-create their world and world views" (p. 119). They suggest that such paradigms, if carefully and reflexively developed, can favour the researcher who engages with rural participants and aspires to acknowledge how their world-views are grounded in the local social environment and within the particular time period and events in which they live. They also propose that such paradigms involve paying attention to the marginalization and injustice endured by disadvantaged groups within such locales.

Research Goals

I focus on how public communications in a rural community constructed a particular vision of that community and the bid process its leaders engaged in, and how my interviewees constructed and reconstructed their own perspectives on the bid as community members and in response to both public messaging and their own located subject-positions and worldviews. I have incorporated my own process of self-reflection into the research, considering how the interviews I undertook, as human encounters in a community context, affected my own subject position and world-view. As a First Nation woman residing on a neighbouring First Nation community, I initially wanted to keep

myself outside of the project; providing as much objectivity as possible as had been my academic experience. Therefore, it was extremely challenging to write myself into the research paper (Adams, 2012) even though I met the criteria of an interview participant, a rural resident in the area of Fort Macleod and a participant in the Fort Macleod and surrounding area economic and social life. I reiterate that this project is based in Sociology; therefore, I am limiting the Indigenous perspective to my own lived experience.

Qualitative Research

I chose to use a qualitative case study because I am interested in characteristics of interpersonal communication and located identity-formation within a rural community engaged in civic-decision making. This project involves a critical analysis of transcribed interviews and is informed by the theoretical resources discussed in Chapter Four. As a researcher, I wanted to be situated in a real-life world connecting me directly to the people with whom I would engage, their geographical and social situation, and the "institutions, and bodies of relevant interpretive material, including documents and archives" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 14) to which they responded. Consistent with a qualitative study, this research design describes "a flexible set of guidelines that connects theoretical paradigms of inquiry and methods" to collecting, analysing and also reflecting on data that researcher and participants co-produce (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 14).

Reading about and coming to better understand a qualitative research perspective helped me understand situations and happenings through a subjective lens and understand how paying attention to the subjective dimension of social and personal life yields valid sociological insight by revealing "how something works" in social life from the point of

view of participants, including myself. Subjective does not mean that my perspective has become purely individual, nor that I can make up what I want without reference to any reality, but rather, it means including in my research a critical self-reflection on my own *social placement* and my *social formation* as an inquiring subject, taking into account how it impacts my own sense-making and how my interviewees respond to me. Stories told to researchers and dialogue between researchers and other participants can help us "understand the history or the problem or [how to seek] to change the policy" (Stake, 2010, p. 25). In order to identify and understand these, we must understand the social location from which we and others we encounter do the identifying and understanding. This is the mechanism through which I, as the qualitative researcher, can honour the experiential dimension of the stories I hear from rural community members involved in or responding to an important civic-decision making process, and to take into account reflexively my own implication in that process. Researchers must be cognizant of how their own social actions and those of others occur within the socially constructed context of everyday life, and be mindful, in applying theory and analyzing within theory, that we too are its co-constructors (Stake, 2010, p.49).

Qualitative inquiry should also consider both the socio-economic and the cultural situations of participants (Lincoln et al., 2011). It should be oriented to challenging "ignorance and misapprehension" (including the researcher's own) to open up the possibility of transforming both researchers' and participants' taken-for-granted ways of making sense (Guba & Lincoln, 2004, p. 33). Guba and Lincoln (2004) remind us that values are to be taken seriously in qualitative research, and emphasize respect for them as one engages in dialogue with participants – the values of the participants will shape

outcomes of the research, and to disregard them would be harmful to those who are vulnerable, or less powerful, in the research situation. At the same time, researchers should not simply apply values acquired from their own socialization and social contexts but should be prepared to question their values in mutual but critical *and* self-critical dialogue with other participants. Researchers cannot exempt themselves from the fact that both social reality and ethics are actively and practically (if not always equally) constructed by all who participate in the research.

Dorothy Smith (1974) provides a practical way to critically understand lived and socially-located experience that does not treat it simply as raw material from which to extract and refine a picture of a "sociologically constructed world" from the outside (p. 423). She advocates for attention to "the actualities of how things come about in people's direct experience, including our own [and that] offer a knowledge of the social organization and determinations of the properties and events of our directly experienced world" (pg. 424). She treats the direct experience of everyday living, including the socially-located experience of the researcher, as a starting point for engagement and analysis. *Start from where you are*, whether you are a citizen of a small town or living in a rural area, or a member of a different kind of rural or urban community, or what you do and do not have power over or impact on, your gender, class, or race. From this starting point, which may already be quite complex, you map out the practices and relationships in which power is produced around, in, and through you and others, and in which your identity and positionality are produced, shaped, and restricted.

Defining Scope

I have come to realize that formulating a thesis and producing an academic research project involves seeking and using a vast array of academic resources. In sorting through the range of choices suggested by a plethora of literature written by academic professionals, and the practical issues I faced in developing my own path, I resolved to do a micro-study within a case rather than a survey or a full case study. According to Gillham (2000), a case study is meant to look at a phenomenon with a specific focus and time frame that will answer or explain research questions (p. 2). The case study model provides a way to contextualize the theories used to shape research and its findings, and to test and modify the research questions posed.

Although this research did not involve a full case study, it contains elements of that model. For example, I contextualize my interviews and self-reflections by discussing the organization of social power in small-towns in terms of patron-client relations to larger centres of power and the dynamics of modern capitalism as they impact rural areas and societies. But where case studies are typically meant to be generalizable to a larger population, this study is not meant to be generalized. My sample of three interviews (ranging from 18 to 24 minutes) is too small to count as "representative" in any statistical manner, therefore, I have chosen to delve deeper into the communication practices and agency of my interviewees and myself. My argument is that looking closely at the process by which particular individuals construct an issue, position themselves in relation to it, and develop or modify their senses of individual and collective identity in response to it, can show us commonalities as well as particularities, and that we can learn from both.

I believe that contentious issues or crises can bring to the foreground the shared and taken for-granted perceptions, beliefs, values, and *modes of social being* that circulate *via* particular communicative practices within a given community. Thus, they can also reveal how political and policy processes within or affecting that community really work. Forms of power and authority impact information dispersal and the gathering of opinions about challenging issues. The proposed development of the Fort Macleod Police Training College presented all the facets of communication, knowledge-formation, and identity-formation that I wanted to explore: modes of political involvement, a democratic but also bureaucratic political and informational system, a vision that has lured many rural and small-town community in many forms, and an opportunity for economic development. I did not set out to look specifically at Fort Macleod and surrounding area or at a college, however, this location and the circumstances of the Police Training College were a means for my research.

I aim to deepen my understanding of the way in which residents of Fort Macleod and its surrounding rural area conceptualized the process and politics of civic decisions, and how that process of understanding might have both drawn on and affected (created and re-created) their social identity. I wanted to focus my research lens on a few basic, everyday communicative practices at work in a local community engaged in collective discussion and decision making – types of communicative action engaged in by people responding to established, institutionalized communication processes and communicative power. This power was embedded in the definition of normative terms of discussion, and in the construction and dissemination of official news and opinion concerning civic decision-making processes.

My intention here is to test theories and practices of knowledge-production and subjective identity-formation in a specific context. The broader context is the communicative and decision-making processes that made up a complex set of events labeled as the Police Training College bid process. My study looks at the bid proposal process and subsequent decisions through the lens of interpersonal communicative and reality-construction practices that increasingly struck me as important, despite their seemingly minor place and impact within the overall process. In this case, fewer in-depth interviews meant gaining richer descriptions of these small practices and their consequences. Nonetheless, some wider lessons may be taken from the specific events and processes studied here.

Research Design

In this section, I set out the general approach and specific research methods used during this project to explain how the process of data gathering and analysis (Lynn Butler-Kisber, 2010) can work within non-positivist parameters, where "data" are no longer seen as objectively-existing or universal, but as co-constructed and local. I indicate what I initially wanted to learn from the materials I gathered, and how the research process itself came to shape my questions. Specifically, I outline (1) the research ethics that informed my work, (2) the focus of the research (3) my choices of and process of finding documentary material and interviewees, (4) what criteria I used to select interviewees, (5) the kinds of questions I used in interviews and the objectives that shaped them, (6) my successes and failures in my search for interviewees (7) how the interview process affected my orientation to the project; and (8) how I analyzed and interpreted the interview transcripts and other documents in terms of my dialogue with

interviewees and my developing awareness of my own subject-position and social location as a researcher and a local neighbour. The outcomes of these processes and my own responses to them will inform the analysis in Chapter Five.

Ethical Review

An Application for Ethical Review of Human Subject Research, along with a copy of a consent form (see Appendix A), an Interview Guide which includes a short chronicle of the events that I focus on and a list of questions for the interviewees (see Appendix B), and an introduction to the project, was submitted to and approved by the University of Lethbridge Human Subject Research Committee. All interviewees were sent a copy of the consent form prior to the interview; however, I also read the consent form to them before they signed it. They were made aware of their right to informed consent with respect to participation in the project and my use of interview material, and were provided with a list of agencies/organizations that could provide free counselling in case they were inadvertently traumatized or disturbed by any questions or conversation in the interview. The short chronicle of the events began in 2004 when the Alberta Provincial Government announced construction of an Alberta Safety and Law Enforcement Training Center and ending with the cancellation of the Fort Macleod Police College construction in 2012. This was provided to assist interviewees in refreshing their memories of the events we would be discussing.

Prior to each interview, I asked participants for permission to audio record the interview and to take notes during the interview. They were also given the choice to use their name or choose a pseudonym. Two chose to use a pseudonym and one used her real

name. The interviews were held in public spaces; two at the Fort Macleod Public Library and one at my place of employment.

These are all now standard procedures in the conduct of research with human subjects as defined by the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct of Research involving humans (TCPS2, 2014). However, the description of this research project in the ethics application reflected an earlier stage in my work, and the way in which I used interview materials raised new ethical issues. I no longer saw the interviews in a positivistic light as sources of informational data on "communication mechanisms" but as a dialogical process of *mutual* identification and meaning-creation, and as parts of an ongoing process of subject-formation. This meant focusing in the analysis more on the construction of self and identity and the discursive practices by which interviewee and interviewer addressed this. In the end, I decided that this did not entail revealing or divulging more "personal information" than would have been the case had I stuck strictly to the purposes of the original ethics application, and interviewees still had full rights to review any use I made of interview material relating to them. Nonetheless, I raised this potential issue with my supervisor.

Focus of Research

This research project focuses on three interviews, their interview transcripts, and electronic public news articles and government documents. I was specifically aiming to understand the production and reproduction of interpersonal communication practices and discursive meaning-making that surfaced in the interviews, and how these issues related to civic discussion of the bid process and perceptions of what it *meant* to be a member of a rural or local community going through such a process. I was the only

interviewer and transcriber and therefore was able to capture statements that really stood out for me. The methods I employed to capture these and other items of interest are detailed in another section of this chapter.

The following are examples of topics that, while significant to a project focusing on interpersonal communication in rural communities, already have an extensive literature and do not form part of my central focus:

- The development and use of new communications technologies
- The historical relationship between First Nations and Northwest Mounted Police in Fort Macleod
- The establishment of powerful agricultural and women's political movements
- The establishment of a strong and vibrant religious community in rural southern Alberta.

These were useful for me to explore for context, but I refer to them only where they are directly relevant to my own specific focus.

Documentary Resources

From publicly available online records, I gathered relevant secondary text documents from *Hansard*, the electronic record of Legislative Assembly of Alberta, focusing on discussions relating to the Alberta Public Safety and Law Enforcement Training Center, Alberta Police and Peace Officer Training Centre, and the Fort Macleod Police College. These three are all names used by Alberta Government at various stages in their endeavor to build a one-shop police training facility in Alberta as described in Chapter One. These electronic records were used to provide context, chronological time lines and verification of dates, places, story lines, and decisions regarding the Police Training College.

I also accessed newspapers electronically, surveying relevant news articles from the local newspaper, the *Macleod Gazette*, and other area newspapers such as the *Pincher Creek Echo, Crowsnest Pass Herald,* and the *Lethbridge Herald*. I also looked at newspaper articles from the two major Alberta city newspapers, the *Calgary Herald* and the *Edmonton Journal*. I ended up selecting most of my news coverage from the *Macleod Gazette* because there was a significant overlap in news coverage concerning the Police Training College venture in all of these newspapers. The exceptions were four news articles: two from the *Calgary Herald* (Fekete, 2010; Williamson, 2006), one from CBC News, and one from CTV News Edmonton (Hoang, 2012) as these stories were different from the others in representing the perspective of the Calgary Police Service and the Calgary and Edmonton Police Associations who were not in favour of a centralized Police College in Alberta and not in favour of a Police Training College to be built in Fort Macleod. The *Macleod Gazette* conducted an extraordinary chronological coverage of all key events and decisions made in relation to the Fort Macleod Police Training College venture. The newspaper articles provided information that I used to cross-reference for time, dates, decision makers, and pertinent events. They also provided some descriptions of the experiences of individuals who were involved in the Police College proposal bid process and subsequent cancellation. Importantly, the *Macleod Gazette* articles also reflected the anticipation, by the bid leadership, of an economic boom for the town and local area. These articles thus also provided examples of rhetorical features and narrative tropes used to construct and defend a pro-bid discourse.

I used text transcribed from interviews as a basis for discussion of a first-person, experiential dimension to this study: how these community members actively made sense

of and constructed not only a sense of the bid process up to and including the cancellation, but also of their own orientation to it, and their agency and identity in relation to it. As well, interviewees were also participating in a social process – the interviewing itself. These transcripts were used to supplement the documentary record, test questions I brought forward, and probe some of the more informal and interactive communication practices that local people might have used to discuss and clarify the topic for themselves. The interview transcripts provided me with insight into the richness of detail presenting interviewees' perspectives and sense-making processes, and the values they placed on living as individuals and community members in a small-town and rural area.

Criteria for Interviewee Selection

I originally decided that interview recruits must be residents of the town of Fort Macleod or of rural areas surrounding it during the time of the Police College proposal and its cancellation (specifically, 2004 to 2012) I did not identify the rural areas in terms of a mileage range, but instead in terms of what I might call a "view-shed" or "concern-shed" (drawing on the analogy of a watershed), an area in which attention to public issues could be said to flow toward the town as a kind of symbolic or practical centre, even if those paying attention were not Fort Macleod ratepayers. Interview recruits also must have participated in some way in relevant municipal discussions or consultations and/or the information sessions. Potential recruits included citizens of the town; members of the Town Council; those opposed to and those advocating for the Police Training College; owners and/or employees of local businesses; students of Lethbridge College who took classes at the local campus during the time the proposal for the Police Training College

was active; and individuals who lived on farms/ranches outside but near to the town at the time. My goal was also to interview at least one First Nations person who fit the above criteria. I did not rank these criteria in any particular order; in other words: I did not give preference to any of the potential recruit categories indicated above.

The categories that I developed were intended primarily to obtain a reasonable cross-section of residents with an interest in and knowledge of the Police College venture and living in the town of Fort Macleod or surrounding rural area. My hope was to interview residents who had a range of communicative experiences relating to and perspectives on the Police Training College. I wanted to understand how small-town and country folk with various socio-economic statuses, political opinions, and historical ties to southern Alberta made sense of the Police Training College proposal and its outcome.

Interview Tool

I used a semi-structured qualitative interview format, and created an interview guide consisting of eight main questions with some sub-questions having prompts or comments. The objective of the questions and prompts was to probe for a sense, in the interviewee's own words, of how the events of the bid proposal process were discussed; and to get an idea of the discussions and decision-making processes in which they participated and how they participated in them. As I undertook the interviews, I considered their experiential perspective on the proposal process or communication relating to it; the way they constructed a meaningful sense of knowledgeability or truth concerning it; how they constructed a meaningful narrative of its events and development; and how they constructed and interpreted their life worlds and identities in relation to it.

The interviews provided me with insight into individual citizens' communicative practices as *social* practices, and the definitions, assumptions, knowledge, and values concerning the values and interests they associated with rurality, locality, and community and that they brought to their experience and involvement. Their construction of events helped me understand both their participation in communication and decision-making concerning the community issue in question and also my own, and how they constructed themselves as agents or observers, engaged or detached, in relation to that issue.

In Search of Interviewees

Kvale and Brinkman (2009) state that the number of interviews in a qualitative research project depends on the *purpose* of the research project. They advise to interview to the point of saturation where no new information is likely to be gained by further interviews. I believed initially that a number between nine and 15 interviewees might be a good range to reach a saturation point and gain a reasonable understanding of communicative practices at work within a small rural community among those actively involved in civic decision-making. Originally, I envisioned interviewing at least 12 individuals. I also imagined a that variety of opinions, perspectives, and world-views would surface in that number of interviews.

Unfortunately, I was naïve about the practicalities of finding willing interviewees and having them commit to interviews. I found the task of recruiting interviewees and the experience of being refused, actively or passively, to be quite daunting, dejecting, and somewhat unnerving. Again, I wondered if this barrier, like the passive refusal by town officials to supply me with documents, was also an opportunity for reflection and analysis. My self-reflection questions became: How was I conceiving of my "task"? Did

it appear to me as “difficult” not only because of the lack of response I met, but also because I might have perceived my requests as intrusive? If so, were my perceptions, and the lack of response I received, possibly *both* indicative of a particular quality of *reserve* in rural or small-town sociality? If so, why might that be? My search for participants began with searching newspaper articles for names of people who had been involved in the Police Training College proposal. I searched and followed up names occurring in social media posts and the town and county of Fort Macleod websites, starting from the names of individuals mentioned in news outlets and eventually also including people involved in relevant public social media groups.

In the end, however, I succeeded in recruiting and interviewing only three people. This small interview sample generated a shift in my thinking regarding not only the focus of my research but also my position as a researcher. Rather than focusing on the mechanisms and characteristics of interpersonal communication within a rural community engaged in civic-decision making, I shifted my focus to the practices of interpersonal communication and of identity-formation as employed by the individual interviewees to construct a meaningful perspective, a sense of agency, and a world view, as well as particular interpretations of the civic-decision making process they experienced with the Fort Macleod Police Training College venture. My supervisor encouraged me to consider my own positioning in relation both to my interviewees and to the police college bid process as (1) an Indigenous person, (2) a resident of the surrounding rural area of Fort Macleod, and (3) someone aware of the bid process and the debates and decisions surrounding it. In short, he suggested that I treat this project not simply as a process of

gaining information about others' attitudes, communicative practices, and sense-making, but also as a process of socially-located self and mutual understanding.

Furthermore, the whole interviewing procedure triggered unanticipated thought processes/deliberation/reflection for me. As I read, listened, and discussed the events of the Fort Macleod venture, I became aware of how I compared and contrasted the information coming to me; of what I was learning, including *my own* participation in discourse; my own process of reality-construction, and my own subject-formation as an individual citizen, rural resident, and community member. In other words, I began to see myself as if I were an interviewee and as a participant in dialogue. It was during this process that I became more aware of how my own thoughts, values, beliefs, my own prior formation as an individual of a rural community, and my own social location, had 'filtered' my perception of the interviewees, their responses to my questions and to the Fort Macleod police college venture.

I came to reconsider this project as one in which I would gain further insight into my own life-world and location in relation to local civic issues. This also impacted my approach to the public documentation of the issue. Instead of mining that documentation for information or simply using it to cross-reference dates and events, I began to explore how it contributed to the discursive formation of a topic, a set of issues, and a process of legitimation. I also began to consider my own response to the Police College venture: how I as a First Nations member, an academic, a researcher, and a local rural resident, engaged in processes of communication, self-making, and community-making.

The Interview Process

On the positive side, for this new purpose, the interviewees turned out to be an excellent source of insight. They provided indispensable and diverse perspectives and communicative styles. Their transcripts were by far the most interesting text documents I used. I found myself deeply reflecting on their perspectives and world-views which in some instances I though were quite profound (I elaborate on these in Chapters Five and Six). The interviews changed the manner in which I approached the analysis of their "speech" as they responded to me in the social process of an interview. I began to see how communicative practices entrenched perceptions as the interviewees recreated their lives and their relationships within and to the small-town and rural area of Fort Macleod. This entrenchment and these practices were specific, located, and interactive. Nonetheless, they were part of a repertoire of practices, used selectively but part of a shared, common set of communicative resources, commitments, and grounds of speech.

I listened for narratives about how events unfolded from the perspective of the interview participants, to hear and understand the participants' ways of constructing reality; making events part of a meaningful sequence. I listened in particular for the communicative dimension of this work; how participants communicated (or refrained from communicating) about issues related to civic decision-making; how in the process they constructed a sense of location, agency, and identity as rural or small-town residents, and how they made sense of the issue and of their own communicative participation in it. The kind of communication I was interested in included not just their consumption of news or other public documentation, or their participation in public meetings, but also their participation in informal and inter-personal talk among residents, in back-and-forth discussions regarding the initiative and its eventual cancellation, how they perceived

what was happening in the discussions, how they framed themselves in relation to the civic-decision making process, and how they constructed and reconstructed its realities. This entailed finding out what documentation was available to them, how they saw information and opinion being conveyed to them, how and with whom they interpreted and critiqued that information and opinion, and from what perspective they did so.

Engaging in dialogue directly with resident interviewees helped me to gain a sense of how they, and I, and potentially others living in small-towns and rural areas communicate in relation to official decision-making, and how they make sense not only of the statements presented to them but also of their own position and agency in relation to a particular civic issue. Interviewees described their own perceptions of the decision-making and informational processes surrounding the Police Training College initiative.

Approach to Analysis

In this section I describe the process of analysis I developed with respect to the documentation gathered and the interview material. The outcomes and results of that analysis are presented in the Chapter Five, which also includes my self-reflections concerning my own participation in the interviews and my engagement with the issues raised by the Police Training College bid. To begin, I employed relevant categories from the communications and social theory discussed in the following chapter (e.g., power, control, legitimation, who gets to speak and how speakers were defined, what forms of communication were used by the bid leadership: the town mayor and councillors, the economic development coordinator, the newspaper editor, etcetera). As my project evolved, I began to discover my own perspectives arising from engaging with interview and documentary material, and from my own status and lived experience as an

Indigenous person and as a member of a neighbouring rural community who was aware of the Police Training College venture. This means that the theories discussed in this thesis were not simply applied to the research process but were also questioned in relation to that application. With respect to the interviews, my intention came to be a better understanding both of the interviewees' life worlds and of my own; to better understand through my questions and their responses how interpersonal communication in a small-town and surrounding rural area works for them – and for me – in constructing our perspectives in relation to issues that concern us.

My strategy was to re-visit the three interviews, which ranged from 18 to 24 minutes, by re-listening to the recordings and re-reading the transcript texts, interview notes, and other documents I had gathered through the lens of these revised research imperatives, applying the approach developed in the first section of this chapter with a particular emphasis on reflexivity. My observations and analyses reflect *my own use, synthesis, and modification* of the theories laid out in this chapter, drawing on readings discussed in Chapters Two and Four, my interaction with interviewees, and my own situation as a rural resident living in close proximity to the small-town of Fort Macleod.

The general questions I asked of the texts, documents, and transcribed interviews specifically in relation to the Fort Macleod Police Training College initiative included the following:

> What are some ways in which the organization of communication about public issues in rural communities, as indicated in this case, might be related to features of the social structure and the terms of life in common in a small Southern Alberta

rural community as it dealt with civic decision-making that required debate, leadership, and action?

How might communication about and reflection on such issues not only reflect features of social structure and terms of community but also help reproduce or modify them?

How and in what ways did such communication *construct particular models* of community or of civic agency?

Was there evidence of equal or unequal dissemination of information, or of people feeling that they were equally or unequally heard? Was there any evidence of ways in which the ideas of some individuals or groups might have been delegitimized – marginalized or held in lower esteem than those of others? How was the potential of de-legitimation responded to?

What appeared (and to whom) from the public documents, and/or to the interview participants, to be the driving forces at work in the creation of a public discussion and decision-making process?

During the interview process, I formed first impressions about which I made notes following the interview. This initial work already involved interpretation (why something "stood out" for me; how I judged speech to be "negative" or "positive"), and thus generated immediately a need to be reflexive in my analysis. In preparing to analyze the interview transcripts, I did a first run-through of the audio recordings and of the reviewing notes written at the end of each interview. The audio recordings captured tone of voice and emphasis which added to the meaning of the words said, especially given that they were said in an interactional setting. The notes recorded my initial impressions

and observations of interviewee actions and perceived attitudes. Statements made during interviews that referred to particular events were cross-referenced with publicly-available dates (when available) for the purposes of clarity and of historical context – and also to note if and where an interviewee's *experience* of time might have differed from the "official time" of public communications.

Re-reading textual documents, interview notes, theoretical writing, and other resource materials, along with listening and re-listening to interview recordings in the process of categorizing and re-categorizing allowed me to clarify my thoughts, re-examine my application of theory, generate new ideas, or disagree with my initial categorizations. I monitored how the text and interview recordings resonated with me, and questioned myself as to why or how they resonated with me.

I sought to contextualize the communicative practices, looking at how interviewees picked up on and used narrative and rhetorical forms available in the wider political discourse, as represented in news and other public documents and speech. In analyzing the interview transcripts as examples of discourse, I looked for emphases and word choices in utterances; links between and organization of statements (affirmations, denials, expressions of hesitancy or uncertainty), and other evidence that showed how the interviewees produced and reproduced meaningful narratives of the bid process and its aftermath, and of themselves as agents. I also focused more on how the interviewees constructed statements that furnished them with a meaningful life-world: a life-world composed of meaningful objects and a meaningful sense of civic selfhood and agency; a life-world that also carried emotional weight. Subsequently, I listened to the interviewee audio recordings and reread the transcripts at least half a dozen times searching to

identify words, statements, or ways of speaking that were prominent or occluded, unique or common, expected or anomalous.

Campbell et al. (2013) argue that the main focus in interviews is to look for overarching or general patterns and themes deriving directly from the interviewee's reality, and thus I was also mindful of how interviewee responses might indicate or draw on discourses that helped in interpreting and understanding the particular construction of a meaningful community of concern in Fort Macleod and its surrounding rural view-shed during the Police Training College venture – and to what extent that community of concern drew on wider discourses of community or rurality.

Self-Critical Appraisal

Stake (2010) states that qualitative researchers seek to understand and explain *how* things work and *how* people experience phenomena (p. 20). In other words, they seek to understand situations and happenings through a personal, subjective lens; understanding the participants' worldviews and perspectives. However, the personal and subjective is not easily separable from the social and interactional – or structural. In this research, I aimed to understand the personal and interpersonal dimensions of human life to be *real* not only phenomenological but socially, to see them not as a discoverable essence "inside" human individuals or groups, but as effects of the discursive *practices* by which we make sense together and as having consequences for our *actions* in relation to each other. Research findings or stories told to a researcher help us (researcher and participants both) to "understand the history or the problem or seeking to change the policy" (Stake, 2010, p. 25).

Stake (2010) reminds us that simply analyzing the information or data worked up from the research guarantees neither a solution to the problems nor a resolution to the issues, nor can it give an objective picture of them. The documentation I analyzed, and the interview transcripts contain "the issue" *only as it was constructed* in particular communicative practices, by particular agents, and in particular settings. Stake (2010) goes on to assert that it is also the *researcher's* interpretation of the data and information that persuades and *prioritizes* one meaning over another. Thus, I do not stand outside the meaning-making process I describe; I am part of it. In this case study of the Fort Macleod Police Training College venture, it is my task as a researcher to understand *both* how interview participants and document creators produced knowledge and opinions, and *also* how I myself did so; how the participants as witnesses to the events of the Police Training College venture produced a sense of themselves as agents who might have or could have affected the process, and how I produced a sense of myself as at once a dialogue partner and co-resident, an *Indigenous* local resident (thereby both on the inside and the outside of the debate), and as a researcher, through an active process of reorganization and interpretation of the materials I studied.

Arlene Stein (2010) provides a narrative that serves to remind us of how the best-intentioned research can be undermined and go astray. She warns that small-town (and rural) communities can react negatively to research done in their territory. Therefore, researchers must tread carefully, respect those they write about, and reflect carefully on what their research does and does not allow them to say. As a researcher, I am limited by my own world-view; however, listening intently to understand the perspective of the

participant in the process of making meaning can help me both understand and respect the others I encounter in my research.

As a somewhat-failed recruiter of interviewees and disappointed non-receiver of documents, I must also ask if these "failures" reflected something about how information is managed by small-town agencies, and if it reflected also something about how small-town residents maintain control of their words and exercise caution when speaking about the fabric of the local community and their standing within it. Further, I must also consider if this reflected something uniquely rural about the definition and handling of controversy. These are questions that I examine more closely in later chapters.

Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, I originally thought this research project would be a relatively positivistic straightforward journey. The *study* and application of academic methods turned out to be contextualizing my experience as an academic researcher: what stood out for me, where my decisions came from, and how I understood the process of applying a social science research method.

The perspective from which I view research is founded on my social location as a First Nation woman living in Fort Macleod's neighbouring rural area, which is not my own community but where I frequently shop and do business. My worldview is how I see and act as a social agent in the research process, which includes how I formulate my reality of the project, what I consider to be valuable information, and what I consider to be knowledge. Further to this is the realization that interviewees and I come from multiple ways of thinking about the Police Training College and how we created and recreated our agency in the interviewing process.

The critical questions raised through the journey of defining my research direction, the application of academic methods, and attention to the interviewees' lived experience have all helped me to better understand how knowledge is constructed and reported. It has opened a new window from which to view and act within society. It has provided a new opportunity from which to perceive and participate in society. Next n Chapter Four I explore ways of viewing power, agency, and legitimacy as they relate to civic action, discursive practices, and their institutionalization in relation to small-town and rural communities.

CHAPTER 4: POWER AND REPRESENTATION IN SMALL-TOWN POLITICS

In this chapter, I situate the specific focus of this thesis in a broader context: how to understand the social structure of power, politics, and discourse practices in the small-town setting of Fort Macleod and surrounding rural area governed by relations of dependency between local, provincial, and national organizations. One focal point for this thesis is the intersection of knowledge construction subject-formation and power in the ordinary communication practices of town and rural residents as they were re-deployed in an extraordinary time. Here is where the townspeople exhibit but also produce their nature as individuals and as members of a particular community. The time period I focus on is between 2004 and 2012 during a civic development venture whereby a Police Training College was promised, counted on, and then revoked.

This thesis draws upon a variety of theoretical resources, including Marxist and Weberian theory, the institutional ethnography of Dorothy Smith, and Foucault's understanding of power and control. My approach was also shaped by the communication theory of Stuart Hall. Throughout the chapter I indicate by what means these theoretical approaches assisted me in understanding how an issue evolves through the practical sense-making of community members, back and forth from public announcements to private conversations, to public discussions and eventually to civic decisions and dissensions.

This opportunity came at a time when Fort Macleod and the surrounding rural area was experiencing an economic low. Chamber of commerce president, Emily McTighe, was quoted as saying, "This is exactly the economic boost Fort Macleod needs right now. The development of this college is going to "bring economic spinoff to the

town," attract an "influx of businesses in the service industry" and "build huge investor confidence in Fort Macleod and southern Alberta" (*Gazette* Contributor**,** 2006a). Fort Macleod could expect 1,500 trainees per year creating 75 – 100 jobs in the community (McTighe, 2006c). These comments link the Police Training College to economic aspirations: the fact that a *law enforcement training facility* was being proposed was secondary; both promotion of the project and much of the public sentiment toward it was focused on possible economic benefits. On the other hand, the Fort Macleod Police Training College proposal also created rumblings of dissension in this small-town and its surrounding rural area that related to the proposal itself, to established modes of communication and civic decision-making, to the structures supporting them, and to taken-for-granted notions of community as collectives and as part of personal identity.

Here I explain "community". What makes a community a community is framed by Tönnies (Bonner, 1997) and Sim (1988): a community must share some mixture of shared interests and/or values, shared experiences, shared social and/or geographical location, shared feeling, and a shared identity. However, these don't need to all be shared all the time. But I would argue that with today's technology allowing increased mobility, a community need not be total, all-enveloping, unchanging, continuous or permanent: each of us today can belong to, join or leave several communities of varying personal importance, in person or virtually. The interviewees who were all residents of Fort Macleod or its surrounding rural catchment area, had varying degrees of commitment to the local community. Their definitions and perceptions of what a community is and of their own places in it, also varied. To be "rural" is not to be identical.

The bid was promoted as something undertaken for the good not only of the town of Fort Macleod itself but also the surrounding rural area, and people outside the town (including me) took an interest in it. People outside the town proper shared both values and interests with town residents and understood their relation to provincial centres of power which also positioned them in a manner similar to town residents. These people did not all agree with how the bid process was conducted and whether its intended outcome would be good for the community. However, I would argue that another definition of community applies here; one developed by C. James Mackenzie in response to complex and clashing identities in the communities he studied (2016): community involves a shared sense of *what to fight about* (with each other). That is, people can also be bound together by their *differences* over issues they face in common.

Power Relations in Political Structures

In the tradition of historical-materialist analysis developed by Karl Marx (1932/1845), it is proposed that societies are organized institutionally, politically, and culturally in terms of a particular mode of production, accumulation, and exchange. In the Preface of his 1859 writings, Marx stated:

> In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness.

However, Marx also argued that economic production itself is shaped by particular social relations of ownership and work which in turn affect other social relations such as family, community networks, class sectors, etcetera. The particular practical organization of economic activities in and around Fort Macleod at the time of the Police College announcement framed the political and social life of the town and the consciousness of its residents. Further to this, Dorothy E. Smith (2004) and Michel Foucault (Ramp, 1999, pp. 74-76) have emphasized an often-forgotten but key point made by Marx: that economic power, like other forms of power, is *practically produced* in everyday speech and action.

If, according to Marx (1845), social structure is the practical relationships that make up the course of production and exchange in a given era, then the social structure of the small-town of Fort Macleod and its neighbouring rural area is produced through the everyday practices and relationships of town and country people. These define, affect, and continually re-establish the communication networks and power mechanisms currently in place. In turn, they are shaped by relations and practices extending beyond the local to and from larger centres of economic and political power in what could be called a form of urban imperialism.

As noted in the previous chapter, Marx characterized capitalism as predominantly urban-centric; its history is one of growing economic concentration which leads to centralization of political power and administration. This means that the autonomy of rural and small-town municipal governments has been limited in relation to provincial and national jurisdictions. Similarly, economic activity in rural areas is often dependent on national and international markets. Further, rural residents no longer depend solely on

a small-town newspaper or local connections for information. While electronic access in rural areas still leaves much to be desired, residents are generally familiar with broader news, public affairs, and cultural discourses, mostly relayed through mass and social media outlets controlled by large public or private corporations.

These developments mean that rural and small-town people, such as the individuals I've interviewed for this research project, are aware of their marginalization in relation to urban centres; their responses even to local issues are coloured by this awareness. Max Weber (1905) argued that to be maintained over time, social and cultural power must involve *domination* by individuals, organizations, or institutions. This is aided by *authority*: an expectation of acquiescence, acceptance, and obedience. Weber argued that lasting authority entails *legitimation*: legitimate authority is seen to exist by *right*. If, as Marx said, power is increasingly concentrated in large-scale organizations, one might expect that local, small-scale organizations would be de-legitimated. But this is not the case. On one hand, local agencies act as contact points for larger institutions: the local clinic to the health care system; the local school to the provincial educational system, the First Nation reserve to the Federal government, and so on. Local people develop client relations with these agencies; thereby re-establishing that the power of large-scale urban-centric organizations and institutions is both *exercised by* and *mediated by* these local agencies.

Mediation, power, and politics flow two ways, even if the flow is unequal. Municipal governments and local organizations serve as vehicles through which rural residents can exert limited influence over larger organizations. Weber (1947) argues that social life in complex societies always involves struggles for power, influence, and the

terms of legitimation. Power struggles, he says, may be motivated by economic, cultural, or political *interest* such as motivation to gain some advantage, or to resist some disadvantage. However, they may also be motivated by a clash of *values*; by a shared ethical orientation; a sense of non-negotiable principles (Weber, 1905).

Typically, relations between rural communities and urban centres of power are managed by specific organizations which mediate between local and provincial, national, or international levels of political or economic organization. Those who manage or govern such organizations locally can use the knowledge they gain from such mediating activities to an advantage. For example, a local store, business manager, or bank manager may not only have a certain limited amount of local economic influence, but also valuable knowledge. They may come to know a large number of local people while at the same time connected to people in higher levels in nearby urban centres. This may also give them local social prestige that they can leverage in local clubs, churches, or municipal politics. Individuals with social prestige and economic or political advantage can use both to influence local affairs. In this case the 11 people, including Mayor Shawn Patience, who were part of the "task force struck by town council" commissioned to "finalize the comprehensive bid package that will accompany its response to the provincial government's request for proposals" might be considered to be in these controlling positions (McTighe, 2005b).

Local "mediating" organizations can become sites of power struggles or tensions between those in local centres and in surrounding areas. The local residents who claim the positions of authority in local organizations often play a double role in seeking opportunities for their communities or communicating local grievances while

legitimating forms of authority governing rural communities. They often become "boosters" publicly involved in a sense of collective identity and local pride, by hosting, funding, or participating in local events. Through their links to larger organizations, they also legitimize institutions. The local Member of Parliament will tour schools to promote the importance of voting. A local mayor will stress that the municipality's economic requests fit a provincial government's funding policies. Local business owners will shape an area's economic future to align with large corporations. They legitimate a discourse in which the well-being of the local community is tied to its ability to attract attention and funding from large-scale economic and political organizations and initiatives. To do this, they must find a way to make the local community's dependency on such organizations appear natural and non-controversial.

This is not always easy. First, rural Alberta supports a widespread suspicion of government, urban institutions, and bureaucracy, and an equally widespread embrace of self-reliance and local resilience. Second, many rural communities have bitter experiences of large corporations, especially in the resource sector, and provincial and national governments. Thus, "legitimate authority" cannot simply be imposed by the locally-powerful or prominent. It must constantly be managed, protected, and re-phrased to fit the circumstances and critics of the moment.

Networks of Power in Relationships and Subject Formation

As noted above, Weber (1947) viewed modern society as composed of different groups and interests competing for power and resources, arguing that various aspects of our social world can be explained by looking at how particular individuals or groups benefit from a particular social arrangement of power, or use bureaucratic or party power

to advance particular sets of interests. Residents of Fort Macleod and its surrounding rural areas were, at varying times, invited to participate in discussion surrounding the Police Training College proposal, although, some felt themselves to be excluded from the discussions. Their ability to influence that discussion or its terms of legitimacy also differed.

According to Mills (2004), Foucault argues that power clearly "circulates through a society" as opposed to being held by one group; it "is not easily contained" but "is more a form of action or relation between people which is negotiated in each interaction and is never fixed and stable" (pg. 34). Marx (Simon, 1949), on the other hand, would locate power in the class that owns and controls the means of production. This form of power is a means to "curtail the rights and liberties" of those in less powerful positions. Power is commonly seen as exercised by state agents.

Thus, power has a double operation and is integrated into and dispersed through all levels of social life (Mills, 2004, pg. 34). According to both Foucault and Marx, despite their differences, power is both practical and relational, and beyond control of material things, persons, or groups. Power is also the ability to define terms of reference, problems, and solutions, as well as implementation. This often has the effect of reproducing or encouraging particular social practices, while restricting others (Mills, 2004, p. 67), and also reproducing particular kinds of subjectivity. The discourse analysis that Foucault pioneered focused on how such practices produce discursive formations that appear to be solid and structural and to "have power" in their own right, as legitimating and enabling manifestations of large-scale power relations, while shaping consciousness and agency at the most intimate levels of social life. He wanted to show

how images of power were produced in quite specific ways. Similarly, Foucault (2013) argued that power is created and operates within networks of practices that actively form and reproduce institutions and discursive formations, but that those practices are shaped by the past history and present organization of those institutions and discourses. But as Dorothy Smith (2004) points out, Marx (1859) also conceived of power as implemented through everyday social relations and the practices that activate and reproduce those relations, and in turn are shaped and defined by them. Hence, those practices reproduce the relations.

As Marx (1858) himself pointed out, there is economic disparity between hinterland and metropolis. The small-town is not a miniature version of global capitalism; it is an effect of capitalist relations which tend to centralize economic power. Further, the people or groups dominating small-town politics are not necessarily "owners of capital" in the Marxist sense. Marx's "ruling class / ruling ideas" formulation can help make sense of how people and groups with influence in small-town affairs shaped the bid process. While Marx is often quoted as saying "the ruling ideas are the ideas of the ruling class," he also stated that "[t]he ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance" (Simon, 1992, p. 129). Instead of seeing the ruling class as the source of dominant ideas, Marx argues that those ideas in some sense make the ruling class what it is, and also make or reinforce the status of the subordinate class. In the *German Ideology* (1968), he placed an emphasis on practice which is similar to Foucault's notion that ideology requires certain socially usable discursive formulas and practices to be

omnipresent, through which forms of domination are defined, made manifest, and operationalized. This is the way in which Dorothy Smith (2004) reads Marx. We could think of "ideology" as a crystallization of particular discourse into a set of linked formulas. In turn, these formulas shape and justify, in other words "legitimate" a mode of domination by giving meaning to the social relations and practices which produce, activate, and reproduce it.

To come back to the small town, the idea of employment was pervasive in the proposal, as were assumptions that jobs would enhance and boost Fort Macleod's economy, that the jobs would go to Fort Macleod residents, and that jobs, business spinoffs, and growth of the municipal tax base were priorities for all citizens. Hence, we can argue that the people of influence in the bid process were not simply a "ruling class" imposing "ruling ideas" that reflected their economic ownership interests on a subordinate class. Instead, they were using their *relative* power as local members of a "patron-client" system of awarding contracts and benefits (from centres of power to the periphery) to *leverage* that system. Their "rule" involved steering the bid process in what they saw as the *right direction*, populating it with the *right people*, and promoting their sense of the town and its prospects as *representative* of the common sense of the town as a whole.

The specific way in which the employment relation forces its way into the consciousness of small-town and rural residents is that diverse job opportunities are limited, and employing organizations are often controlled by corporations or governments in larger centres. For example, small-town automobile or agricultural-implements dealerships may be owned by local residents. But the company that makes

the cars or implements that the dealership sells is often an international corporation, and its decisions about which dealerships to keep or declare redundant are made in company headquarters far away from the dealer's locality. Similarly, ultimate control of the outcome of the police college bid process resided in Edmonton with the Provincial Cabinet. This means that in rural or small town communities, economic leverage is limited and dependent. Those who exercise power in small towns manage the local levers of dependency; and a key lever for the past century has been jobs. In addition to *jobs*, the town will *grow* in population and economic activity, and growth is a good thing by capitalist standards. Fort Macleod also has a larger urban neighbour, the city of Lethbridge, which provides a wider if more centralized range of goods and services. Consequently, the argument that the Police Training College would generate a positive economic spinoff for local business struck a chord, especially for those involved in promoting those businesses.

Thus, we can think of the Fort Macleod "ruling class" as composed of people positioned socially, and by virtue of their knowledge and economic interests, to represent the town as a whole, in a particular way. Local elites play a brokerage role between large and remote organizations that act politically as "patrons." Thus, local elites are the "clients" of these large-scale organizations, expected to organize support for initiatives or opportunities those organizations may choose to offer (Lemieux and Noël, 2006). The political space in which they act is squeezed between the wants, needs and perceptions of ordinary local residents and the wider forces that affect the viability of local municipalities. We can see how they may take it as self-evident that representing town interests means attracting attention from centres of political and economic power, using

forms of solicitation that are defined in those centres (application, criteria, bid process). We can also see them as people who consider a primary need of the town and surrounding area to be job creation. They would likely see the town through the eyes of urban centres of power, and position themselves to represent the town to those centres. However, this narrative produced by the local "ruling class" was not shared by all residents of Fort Macleod. There were some who held the perspective that the Police Training College would not provide a positive culture in the community. Community culture was more important for some residents who were outside the local leadership class – and also for some within it.

In representing their town to provincial officials in charge of the bid process, and in representing the terms of that process to their fellow citizens, those interested and influential on the local side of the bid process (e.g. in choosing members of the bid committee and guiding their deliberations) would come to *see themselves* as representative of the town. This "ruling class," if we can call it that, would also tend to represent the town's interests in terms of *jobs and growth*, and be interested in increasing employment regardless of the specific effect of the police college on social relationships defining their small town. On a micro-level this representation can be observed in the interviewee responses. The local newspaper contributed greatly to this idea of prioritizing jobs and the prospect of increased spinoff economic activity made the idea of bringing in the Police Training College seem an even more natural fit.

Hegemonic Discourse and Social Agency

Discourse (Mills, 2004) is a conglomeration of speech and writing practices that serves to form and produce the subjectivity of its users. Mills (2004) contends that as we

practice, produce, and interpret particular forms of speech and written texts, we constantly become who we are as we speak and write ourselves into being. She explains that the process of producing meaningful statements is so rooted and fixed in our day-to-day lives that it is difficult to notice or realize that this process of subject-formation is happening – it becomes almost unnoticeable.

Further, Stuart Hall (1992, p. 275) defined discourse as a system of representation with embedded rules for speech practices, producing meaningful statements and regulating what can be said in a given historical period. For Hall, discourse takes shape as "related statements that work together to provide a 'language' as a way of representing a particular kind of knowledge about a topic" (2007, p. 201). In other words, discourse is the activity of producing and grouping statements that provide a way of talking about – a way of representing knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular time: discourse involves the production of knowledge through the practical employment of language. All social practices entail meaning, and meanings shape and influence our conduct. All practices have a discursive aspect; language and practice are intertwined. In his description of rules that serve to regulate discourse, Hall (1992) indicates that because discursive rules are inherent and emergent, they are also constantly subject to reinforcement or change. If it seems that only certain people within a particular structure are allowed to speak on a specific subject or topic, it is because their position and status as speakers is produced by complex discursive and institutional practices within which they are defined and from which they speak (p. 224; see also Foucault, 1980).

Hall (1992) relates this approach to discourse to the historical construction of the "West;" how western discourse categorizes non-western societies and cultures in a

particular way as Othered and different. Typically, the category of Others is not internally differentiated: all are classified with the same brush; for example, in the way settler discourse erases distinctions between Indigenous nations. This is similar to a point made by Elizabeth Povinelli (Povinelli, 2005; DiFruscia and Povinelli, 2012) about "liberal subjectivity" as a way of framing settler identity in terms of the "universal human" in a way that renders Others (for example, rural communities and Indigenous people) as particular, traditional, and pre-modern. The official declarations of support for the Police Training College bid employed similar constructions to generalize about "the town" as a whole and its "people," treating dissent as outside the norms of rational reasoning and a progressive outlook.

In the process, that dissent could itself be generalized as a kind of chronic negativity which – like "tradition" – never changes. The interviewees who considered themselves "dissenters" recognized their social place and the potential for being defined as chronic nay-sayers, and made decisions to engage or not engage in public discussions accordingly. The political, legal and personal culture that Povinelli (2005) calls settler liberalism treats law as something generally or ideally objective and reliable, and policing as a trustworthy institution; a "service." In the face of this liberal discourse, those suspicious of policing or of the attitudes of police, can easily be Othered. Further to this Goffman (1967) states that as an "aspect of the social code of any social circle" individuals must be cognizant and be in line with a particular "expressive order" to maintain a level of self-respect in events large or small (p. 9). In our conversations, the interviewees and I expressed mutual care not to offend each other and took care to avoid

conflict. Although this is a feature of interaction particularly evident between rural people, Goffman treats it as also a general feature of everyday social interaction.

The Proposal Process

Typically, in civic planning and development, the local political officials and municipal administration begin with an idea and produce a formal written document – usually a proposal which is submitted to a government or corporation. Power relations are built into local political (municipal) politics and economies, reflecting both local divisions and dependent relations with larger centres of power. Such realities typically entail efforts by municipal and local government staff and politicians to research, discus, gather input, and seek buy-in from various stakeholders including local businesses, citizens, and interest groups such as local chambers of commerce, business improvement associations, and surrounding communities. The term "buy-in" has clear economic associations, but also clearly ties to what Weber (1905) would call the process of establishing legitimation: generating support for the bid and ensuring that what underlies a bid process (structures and processes of local power and influence, and the composition of the bid committee), were not seen as objectionable. Each step of developing such a proposal involves the careful fostering and adjustment of a discourse of needs, wants, opportunities, and constraints which require discourse for motivational statements about opportunity while reinforcing structures of authority governing consultation, and public participation.

When the Mayor and council of Fort Macleod decided to bid for the Alberta Public Security and Law Enforcement Training Centre, they entered a client relationship with the provincial government, which would decide the winning bid and largely fund the

project. Despite being regulated by provincial and federal authorities, the Police Training College held the prospect of employment, local economic (business) spinoffs, and an increased population with the accompanying expanded municipal tax base. The resulting carefully-crafted proposal took into account existing discourses at work in local and regional/provincial government, news outlets, civic organizations, and among interested citizens and groups. Those who developed and promoted the bid were involved in a complex power game governing who got to lead the process; what could and should be said or emphasized; what individuals or groups were to be designated (or not) as stakeholders, who should be recruited to participate, who should be consulted, and how consultation should (be seen to) take place.

But in promoting the bid, both local boosters and provincial officials referred to the social fabric comprised of its social relations, political will, and especially its values and lore, as providing a strong foundation for the ensuing social changes. Solicitor General Harvey Cenaiko is quoted in the *Fort Macleod Gazette* online news article as saying: "[t]he people of Fort Macleod should be extremely proud of their efforts to put together a tremendous proposal. The community's proud policing history provides a strong foundation for a training centre that will serve the needs of Alberta's law enforcement community for years to come" (*Gazette* Contributor, 2006a, para. 2). Here we see one way to legitimate a major development proposed to a local community at work: linking it flatteringly to the legitimacy of small-town work ethic and values.

In the context of the community civic discussions, this organized discourse of power and the social practices which convey and reinforce it may be applied within group or individual discussions, but may also be resisted there or transformed in unexpected

ways. The discursive organization of power and resistance, in the context of civic-decision making, may apply formally or informally between or within groups, between individuals, or in individual reflection.

As word of the bid spread and formal consultations were organized, it eventually became apparent that two opposing views were forming. One was that those jobs, regardless of social impact, were essential for the benefit of the town; a position conveyed by the mayor and council and the local newspaper. The assumption was made that employment is positive and a benefit for those in need of an income, and that this project would provide good jobs without any major economic, social, or environmental drawbacks. However, a second current of opinion questioned if bringing in a police training college might also draw in a police mentality that might not sit well with some townspeople. There was concern that such a police mentality might change the social environment for the worse.

With plans in place, the bid leadership sought local community representation to sit on a task force to oversee the proposal development. Frank McTighe, *Macleod Gazette* Editor commented confidently in the Macleod Gazette, "Fort Macleod's bid for the new police college, which drew on resources and people from every corner of the community, and which has the support of southwestern Alberta, is in the hands of the provincial government," (McTighe, 2005d). This task force consisted of influential community-minded residents, the mayor, town council members, and the economic development officer. "Power, according to Weber, is the ability of an individual to carry out their will in a given situation, despite resistance" (Morrison, 2006, p. 363). He "was referring to the extent to which officials, groups and individuals actively acknowledge the

validity of the ruler in an established order, and the right of the ruler to issue commands" (Morrison, 2006, p. 363). In this case, the mayor, economic development officer, town council, and the Police Training College task force constituted the *collective* leadership of the planning process for the proposed Fort Macleod Police Training College. However, they did not exercise leadership through "commands" but by *setting the terms* of discussion, and also by setting the terms of participation.

The Police Training College proposal seemed to be inclusive of community members, holding the values and beliefs common to most or all citizens. By 'seemed to be inclusive' I mean that the communications announcing the proposal and the consultation process around it were *produced in a particular way*, as a particular set of statements, *to have a particular effect*. In other words, these announcements, news reports, and other official documents were produced through intentional discursive practices which *represented* the bid in particular ways, and indicated that support for it as *representative of the whole community.* These discursive practices drew on wider discourses of democracy, individual equality, and civic participation. These discourses in turn called on those who heard or read them to respond in terms of liberal subjectivity (Povinelli, 2005) that injects settler culture and politics into social situations as normative; a subjectivity that is rational, progressive, individualistic, and not negativistic.

All three of these terms (rationality, progress, positivity) were defined *in particular ways*, in response to particular interests *and* constraints. These interests and constraints, however, had to be represented as *not* particular. The bid discourse implied that *all* community members were included in and supportive of the bid process; that all community members were equal *as individuals*, equally included in the

proposal/consultation process, and the actions and recommendations stemming from it. But that discourse also attempted to de-legitimize and to *other* dissent; to acknowledge but then to negate it as if it didn't really exist. In the aftermath of the cancellation, those attempts began to come apart.

As I mentioned in Chapter 3, I accessed the local newspaper, the *Macleod Gazette,* to cross-reference time and dates, and to provide contextual information on pertinent events. The local newspaper provided an extraordinary amount of news coverage over the course of the Police Training College venture. This source of information that I and community members read and surveyed is also a form of discourse. The Editor of the newspaper, Frank McTighe, was selected to sit on the eleven-member bid task force in 2005 which was established by town council to prepare a winning proposal. Obviously, he was on board with the narratives presented such as job opportunities, community support, and citizen support in the surrounding rural area. In turn, the newspaper articles shaped the way the Police Training College was presented to the public and also provided a template for evaluating its importance with titles such as "Police college is Fort Macleod's destiny" (McTighe, 2006d) and narrative statements like the one McTighe developed to argue that the Calgary Police Service's commitment to building their own training centre did not contradict the Fort Macleod initiative (McTighe, 2010). This effort to shape the narrative continued after the project was cancelled, with McTighe eventually developing an interpretation that clashed with his earlier claim but arguably gestured toward local solidarity in the face of big-city rejection: "Justice Minister and Solicitor General Jonathan Denis in a news release

cancelled the project after learning Calgary and Edmonton police forces and the RCMP would not use the training centre in Fort Macleod" (McTighe, 2012).

Small Town, Big Loss

In 2006, it looked as if the small-town of Fort Macleod was going to have a police college. A flurry of speculation reflecting social and economic interests engulfed the community. On September 6, 2006, the *MacLeod Gazette* announced: "Fort Macleod had been chosen as the preferred site of the Alberta Police and Peace Officer Training Centre." (*Gazette* Contributor, 2006a). The mayor also chimed in: "I think at the end of the day it was the people's desire to have the facility located here that won the day for us," Patience said. "All 3,000 people in this town need to be congratulated for the effort they put forward" The words and phrases used by the Mayor and Solicitor General form and produce them as political leaders, their speech serves to reproduces their subjectivity. Here, too, McTighe's reference to a generalized "excitement" is reinforced by Patience's invocation of "the people." In a sense, with these words, two of the bid leaders constructed themselves as *not* leaders, by representing and generalizing the specific work and interests that produced and shaped the proposal as "the people's desire." In other words, they constructed themselves as *merely representatives* of the people's unified will, thereby negating the significance of an Othered dissent.

On September 13, 2006, Fort Macleod Mayor Shawn Patience was quoted in the *Macleod Gazette* as saying, "It didn't matter who won this, there is going to be some of that [grumbling]. Development in the province doesn't need to be in a corridor eight miles wide between Calgary and Edmonton. Building the college in southern Alberta will give this part of the province an economic boost. This is for everybody" (McTighe,

2006b) In this instance, Patience is distinguishing himself and his colleagues from opposition to the proposal by characterizing such opposition as typical; in other words, as a particular type of speech that is motive-less except to oppose for the sake of opposing. Patience uses language that speaks to what Hall (1992) indicated earlier regarding the way that *grumbling* and *building* invokes a way of thinking about opposition as a kind of *negative subjectivity* and positions it as "other."

The local newspaper gave no evidence of an outward show of dissidence or protest; however, one can discern that there were rumblings from the residents. There were those who touted economic growth and much needed employment for the local people. Other residents, though, were skeptical of the newcomers who might blow into town with the new development, and the attitudes they might bring. As this came to the awareness of the bid boosters and planners, their discourse shifted to "Other" such dissent as mere grumbling, always present, always narrow – as narrow as the corridor between Calgary and Edmonton.

Following this announcement, a lengthy silence from provincial authorities created doubt that this police college would ever become reality. Finally, after five years, a sod-turning ceremony took place. "Alberta Infrastructure Minister Ray Danyluk operated a trackhoe Monday to turn the sod to mark the start of construction of the $122-million Alberta Public Security and Law Enforcement Training Centre in Fort Macleod" (McTighe, 2011, photo insert). This meant the building of the police college could actually begin. Fort Macleod Mayor Shawn Patience is quoted as saying, "I think it means a great deal to Albertans that their government keeps their promises and displays that kind of integrity" (McTighe, 2011). In making this statement, Patience made a veiled

reference to the patron-client relationship between the provincial government and the town in the bid process; a relationship in which the province held most of the cards. Patience was almost (though not quite) saying, "don't back out on us now," holding the government to the terms of a *moral* contract.

The cancellation of the Police Training College on August 29, 2012 was reported as "unexpected news [that] sent shock waves through Fort Macleod." The Town of Fort Macleod economic development officer Gordon MacIvor, who was intensely involved in the town's successful bid, was quoted, "It's like a death in the family," (McTighe, 2012b). There was a swift reply from Rob Anderson, Wildrose Finance Critic, on that same day, stating that "Fort Macleod is now paying the price for the Progressive Conservative government's ongoing fiscal incompetence and mismanagement" (McTighe, 2012a). In the same article, he "slammed the government for scrapping the project despite having spent millions in planning and preparation, breaking ground on it more that a year ago and hiring a construction company to build it last month."

Thus was a small town and its rural hinterland left to deal with the social fallout of a lengthy and costly gamble on a lost economic expansion. "Alberta Municipal Affairs Minister Doug Griffiths said that there would be a consolation prize: the town would get $10.26-million in compensation from the province. 'We're dealing with a situation where a commitment was made eight years ago now and a lot of people were very excited about it. [] The community and council members and the mayor have put a lot of heart and soul toward this project. I know it was a disappointment'" (McTighe, 2013). As I drive along the southeastern limits of Fort Macleod where the plot of land reserved for the police training facility was to be located, I see it is now home to a Tim Hortons coffee shop and

a Dairy Queen. Fort Macleod is obviously capitalizing on the infrastructure meant for the Police Training College and is moving on to support more modest portfolio of economic developments. In the 2013 municipal elections a new mayor was elected and only one councillor from the bid era, Wolstenholme, remained in office (McTighe, 2013).

Conclusion

My focus here is to utilize the theoretical approaches I familiarized myself with to help me understand how social structures of power, politics, and discourse in a small town governed, like so many small towns, by relations of dependency, have shaped identity and social agency. This discussion is not about nor meant to be about any individuals as *persons* or members of groups who participated in or made observations about the venture in question. It is about how political and economic structures and the discourses around them provided the foundation from which the winning proposal was built; but which also provided the basis for social discord.

A bidding process was created by provincial government authority whereby towns/cities were invited to develop and submit proposals for the Alberta Public Security and Law Enforcement Training Centre. Interested towns/cities, in turn, created a process to develop proposals that would meet (and hopefully surpass) the provincial bid requirements and government funding requirements. As contenders for the bid, the Fort Macleod Mayor, Council, and Town put together a task force comprised of local town folks who were deemed to be articulate, open minded and "forward thinking." During the nine years of this project's focus (2004 to 2012), from the bid announcement for the Police Training College to its cancellation, the discourse of the task force (which can also be seen as representative of the town's leadership classes, economically and politically)

was that concrete long-term economic benefits could be anticipated for the town and its economic catchment area as well as for its neighboring communities. The cancellation came as a shock to this discursive commitment. The loss of the anticipated economic opportunity revealed other perspectives that had gone untold. Not all residents had been on board with the bid proposal for reasons that had not been exhaustively addressed in the process of the bid development.

The task force in this sense can be looked at as a dominant group influencing the affairs that shaped the bid processes. They legitimated a discourse in which local jobs, police history, and economic needs of the local community were tied together in representing not only the town's needs but also its ability to attract attention and funding from a provincial government centred in Edmonton and focused on large-scale economic and political initiatives, and attentive to large-scale, urban-centric organizations. In doing so, they illustrated how the local community's dependency on such organizations can appear and be represented as natural and non-controversial; as simply a "reality" that structured and limited municipal options.

Communicative practices that we use in everyday speech to produce and reproduce ourselves and our social agency, are virtually unnoticeable; normally, we take them to represent transparently the way things are. The intertwined subjects of jobs and economic benefit were primary talking-points in the proposal and prevalent in discourse on economic opportunity and on the historical construction of law enforcement as trustworthy, providing a service to keep 'Others' in line. These discourses were naturalized, and the anticipated benefits they articulated were touted as central to the town's future. On the other hand, voices of dissention or objection to the venture were

sidelined as just grumbling. Concerns about matters such as the impact of urban police culture on a small (though conservative) Southern Alberta town were minimized and discounted.

Every day speech practices can be influenced and shaped by private and public conversations as well as print materials – in this case, the contents of the *Macleod Gazette*. Narratives and discourse set out in the newspaper seem naturalized; we need to create permanent jobs and economic boost (McTighe, 2005c & 2006b); our local history fits the initiative (McTighe, 2005a & 2006b), and rural community support is important (McTighe, 2005d & 2011). The issues framed here fuelled the narratives concerning a decline in the population in small-town and rural areas with a corresponding hollowing-out of their economic base and government services. The interviewees articulate this issue and how they *know* what is best for their community. They also provide shared local and experiential knowledge about a decline in the economic and social viability of rural areas in general, telling stories of how events of the past have unfolded to bring Fort Macleod and the surrounding region to its present economic situation.

In the next chapter I provide examples of everyday speech and action and how they produce and reproduce social agency and structure. If the social structure of a community during a period of time is a function of the practical relationships that make up the course of production and exchange (in that time period), then the social structure of Fort Macleod and surrounding local rural area is produced by the everyday practices and relationships of its residents. This phenomenon is described in more detail in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER 5: INTERVIEW FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter describes and analyzes findings from interviewees and my response and interest in them. I describe how I approached the interviews and how I used the transcripts and other textual material I gathered. I provide a selective transcript of each interviewee's responses to demonstrate how they discursively constructed themselves and their life-worlds as rural or small-town residents and as citizens going through and making sense of a civic decision-making process; and how they *continued* to create themselves in relation to their experiences and to me during the interview. I incorporate my own responses to the interview material, providing a sense of how I, too, construct myself as a fellow rural resident, a sociology student researcher, and a First Nation woman. This exercise in self-inclusion is based on Bonner's (1997) discussion of the importance of understanding, and not erasing, the relations between the life-worlds of interviewer and interviewees.

The goal of this chapter is not only to analyse the stories told and stances adopted by the interviewees, but also to provide space for their individual narratives to unfold and be heard while acknowledging their *contexts* as discussed in Chapters Two and Three. Their reflections and discussions were produced in response to my initiative to undertake a project that I defined as I researched my particular concerns and interests. Each interview constituted a social and communicative *interaction.* Now I will engage in interpretation and comparison of those interactions: the narratives as recorded and recalled. I reflect on them not in a vacuum but in my respective identities indicated above. My task as an analyst is an ongoing process of *becoming clear* about both *their*

situated understanding and *my own* concerning the topic of this thesis; and what it means to be critically aware of the grounds of these understandings.

I intend to explore how we actively form and re-form communicative practices, selves, ruling relations, and life-worlds in that process. It is the verbal gestures and in-the-moment-speech-acts that creates the insight-*making*, self-*making*, life-world-*making* as it *actually gets done;* the work that *gives a voice* or *construct* a voice in *particular ways* in the process. I hope to illustrate how ordinary folks with good intentions acted discursively to positively affect their world as the potential for a colossal change to their town was proposed, promised, and canceled. In the conclusion I include myself by providing my responses to how I interpreted their answers to my questions and how I gained insight to their world view.

Use of Interview Transcripts

I have chosen to use partially-verbatim transcriptions to focus on the substance of what they said, as opposed to verbatim transcripts which capture all speech utterances, tics, and speech habits such as ums, ahs, repeated words or phrases, and random or minor starting and stopping of speech. My decision to treat the interview transcripts in this way keeps focus on the discourse and avoids placing the interviewees' (or the interviewer's) natural conversation under a microscope. During the process of reading, re-reading, and choosing passages that were relevant to my thesis, I became familiar with each interviewees' characteristic words or phrases; for example, the following speech words and phrases were: *and; I don't know; so; um;* and *you know*. As individuals, we all have our own distinctive words and phrases; sometimes we are unaware of our use (or over use) of them. I point this out to further explain how I decided on what I thought were

relevant portions of their conversation. Their distinctive speech habits may be endearing, but, in this research project, I deemed them not always necessary to include. My focus was to capture their discourse on the civic matter.

Nonetheless, I realize that I take a risk in being selective. I am conscious of the process by which I decide that certain words or phrases are 'relevant' or 'not.' Discursive self-construction happens not only through what we say, but also *how* we say things. Therefore, I have included several instances in which interviewees backtrack, second-guess themselves, use self-depreciating phrases like "I don't know…" or "never mind", or got halfway through a thought and then re-started. If I thought that such practices were something more than habit, indicating something about an interviewee's response in the moment toward an idea, a memory, or to me, I included them. In short, I have made judgments about when an utterance appears to be habit rather than *significant* to self-construction or when it is specifically responsive to the interpersonal moment or what's being said in that moment.

I have selected three questions from my Interview Guide (Appendix B) to focus on in this chapter: (a) What was their involvement in the police college venture? (b) What private and public conversations did they have or did they hear of? and (c) What was their opinion on the cancellation? These questions provide a simple framework of the interviewees' articulation and expression of how they and other residents of Fort Macleod and rural area make themselves part of the social fabric (Bonner, 1997). I hope to demonstrate how each interviewee makes sense of their social location and establishes themselves communicatively, not only in discussions within their social networks but also in the interviews. Quotes in the following sections capture the words and phrases

that emulate discourse – everyday speech, power in speech, defining their identity as a rural person, discourse around community, and comparing each interviewee's response. In the following four sub-sections I give only the relevant results of the interviewees' answers. The results I have chosen to describe here are those responses that are directly related to the question in each section, streamlining where interviewees may have squirrelled-off into an interesting but not relevant topic. Further down, I provide my analysis of the process, my interpretation to their answers, and some discussion back to Chapters 2 and 4.

Who Are the Interviewees?

Each of the three interviewees were friendly and open, which helped ease my interviewer anxiety and prepare me for an interesting and enjoyable conversation. They were given the opportunity to articulate their connection to the community and their residency of Fort Macleod or surrounding area during the events of the Police Training College proposal which confirmed the eligibility criteria. They provided information on their employment and education qualifications, hinted at their particular stance in the community, and established their longevity in the town and surrounding area identifying themselves as residents. Of the three, one is male, and two are females, including one is a First Nations individual. I have decided not to indicate which interviewee is First Nation for the sake of anonymity. Although I did not ask for their ages, two offered this information; hence, I can state that interviewees' ages ranged from mid-forties to mid-sixties. All had lived in the area throughout their lives; in the small-town of Fort Macleod, in close proximity to the town, and/or in the surrounding rural area.

All three individuals have been employed in the town of Fort Macleod and surrounding communities in areas such as public health, Fort Macleod hospital when it was fully operational, labour jobs, modern arts facility operations, and in jobs working with families. One had previously been a business owner, one had once managed an historical establishment in Fort Macleod, one currently owns an acreage outside of town; two are currently employed by human service agencies. Two interviewees indicated their spouses had employment here as well and one spouse is a business owner in town. One indicated her children attended school in Fort Macleod. All interviewees indicated they attended *school* (which I assumed meant primary and secondary education) in Fort Macleod and surrounding community schools, and two had formal education in the Health Sciences or Nursing programs. One person was pro-police-college, one was anti-police-college, and the other took a middle road. One was clearly still engaged with the aftermath of the issue and saw herself in that light as a participative citizen; another distanced himself and took the role (and identity) of thoughtful observer.

I take the time here to bring attention to how they and I mutually worked to establish them as rural people, and understand their social agency in the community. For instance, in Stacha's (real name as per her choice) interview, we helped each other come to an understanding that she's lived there a long time when she spoke about where she and her husband live and work. She says, "He owns a business, so yeah." Her use of the phrase "so yeah" can be a way of saying something *without directly saying it* and not being too 'forward'. I respond with "Very established in the town", which makes it easy for her to respond, "yeah." By providing that clarification, I am in a sense contributing to *her* meaning – so the agreement that results (Stacha's *yeah*) is the *mutual* work of *both of*

us. The work we engaged in can also help to construct her family as part of a cohort of long-time resident families who have gained economic success locally. In retrospect, it seemed important to both of us that as *rural* people, we establish how long she had lived in the area or been part of the community. This ties with the notions of rurality as having deep roots, both literally in the land, but also in years (and sometimes generations) spent in a community which adds legitimacy to an inhabitant's right to be there, and have opinions.

I was very interested in Dave's (pseudonym) answer to my question, "what has been your experience of living and working in a rural small-town?" His response was:

> Well for me it's been a bit of a challenge, 'cause I have, different tastes; inquisitive culturally. I don't like the idea of urban places. I have a connection to earth, somehow, in a way I don't understand completely. I articulate it as my mother's. The hills ring for me too, when I look at them. You know, if you're not driving a car all the time you notice the world in a different way, and that kind of puts me at odds with a lot of people, cause they're moving fast. They're, I want to say idolize, but they are very connected to their machines and I never really went there in a big way.

This is his testament for being rural. His response was like a tenet for being rural. As he provided this explanation, I found myself seeing in my mind how the "hills" formed a fortress to the west and how, as you come to the crest of a hill, you can see the vastness of the prairie lands. I also sensed the familiarity of the natural terrain, sounds, and smells known to those of us who work and engage with the land. It was surprisingly refreshing to hear someone articulate the experience.

The third interviewee, Nancy (pseudonym), although not a life-time resident of any location, earned her livelihood in the small-towns between Lethbridge and Pincher Creek, establishing her residency of the larger region for quite some time, and then became closely connected to Fort Macleod. She spoke of her education endeavors and

how she became employed in her current position. As a person who also lives in the rural area, I understood intimately her descriptions of the local land and surrounding small-towns.

As a resident in the surrounding area, I am familiar with many of the people and previously knew two of the interviewees. Together, through our talks, we (interviewees and I) helped each other determine our rural-residency. When we met for the interview, Stacha and I recognized each other. However, we could not pinpoint where we had met before, but we came to the conclusion that we had attended the same work-related meetings for discussions around assisting our respective target populations in the area of human services, mental health, and income support. Nancy is another interviewee with whom I am acquainted both on a personal and professional basis. My intention, when I approached her regarding my research project, was to ask her for referrals – did she know anyone who fit the criteria I had outlined to her. She indicated that she fit the criteria and would agree to schedule a day for an interview. I was surprised that she lived in Fort Macleod during the time period of my research and I gladly scheduled her for an interview. Dave, on the other hand, is someone whom I have never met before the interview.

Involvement in the Police Training College Venture

Here I asked the question, "What was your involvement with the process with the Police Training College in Fort Macleod?" I wanted to learn how these residents had been involved in the Police Training College bid, the winning of the bid, waiting for the construction of the building, and the cancellation. I want to know how the interviewees saw themselves in relation to the events of the Police Training College. Also, I want to

know how they created themselves as residents involved, engaged, or not engaged in civic decision-making.

Stacha's response was "Well, I was a volunteer of the committee … that put forth the proposal." She further elaborated by stating "Um, and a member of the – I guess we were the steering committee with the town. You know, for the most part I think the town was really sort of the driving force but we had a committee established to move the work forward." I was surprised to hear her say she was on a committee for the Police Training College with the Town. As the interviewer, once I recovered from my surprise, I felt that this interviewee would provide me with a view from the front row seating of the bid proceeding. She was at the table of the driving force of the bid along with eleven other members, including the mayor.

In this section Stacha humbly downplays the role of the committee by using words "um" and "I guess", and by indicating the town had the power or authority while the committee of which she was part was taking directions and carrying out tasks. Stacha's viewpoint potentially allowed her to experience the inner workings of developing the proposal: knowing, administratively, how the Government of Alberta processes public bids; involvement in the foundational creation of this project; being privy to the information gathered for each step of the proposal such as opinions of the local public and town leadership; and providing input into all aspects of the Police Training College.

On the opposite side, Dave "followed the story with interest." As a private resident, he purposefully chose not to attend the public meetings but, rather "just followed it in the Gazette, the Macleod Gazette." Adding further, "and you know, you'd

hear people talking in passing for the most part, but I didn't participate directly in those conversations." Dave's vantage point was more reserved, "We [he and his wife], ah, kept our thoughts to ourselves for the most part, we listened." His viewpoint allowed him to listen and hear conversations regarding the Police Training College bid. He actively and thoughtfully followed local newspaper articles written primarily by an editor who was also involved in the task force committee and a prominent supporter of the bid (McTighe, 2005a). In this section Dave establishes himself, for me, as an observant person and, interestingly, hints at not wanting disagreement.

Nancy's position was "as a community member, being a part of, like, interagency meetings around community members – I more just heard the conversations about the police college." She adds, "they [her circle of co-workers] were very involved with decision making or the meetings. So, I never attended any of the meetings. Just by hearing the conversations. I always just listened." She indicates her position right away as a *community member* which I interpret as removing herself from any potential conflict because of her job position in the community, downplaying her role in the decision-making process. Nancy's perspective came from her role as a public service provider to families. Although she was not a business owner herself, she was exposed to and heard business owners talk at the interagency and community board meetings she attended as part of her job. From my experience working in the human services field, the interagency meetings are face-to-face meetings with various local and regional agencies and organizations who come together to discuss, plan, and/or collaborate on social programs, services, and issues for both the public and individuals.

Like Dave, Nancy did not actively participate in meetings or discussions, but listened with interest. However, unlike Dave, she was part of a work group where folks who attended meetings openly discussed the matter. She heard from folks sitting at tables of organizations mandated to provide public family/health services and programs to residents of Fort Macleod and area. Her focus was on what she heard and saw, but she did not form or express her own opinion – which is an interesting point that I speak to later in the chapter.

Conversations About the Police Training College Bid

Next, I asked them to "tell me about the individual or the private conversations you had regarding the police training college." In this section, interviewees talked about the discourse they heard privately and, in the community, surrounding the Police Training College bid and resulting winning of the bid process. The response of interviewees to my questions provides a better understanding of which features of social structure and world views (as individual interviewees and as shared collectively) are produced, reproduced, and/or modified — which relates to discourse and everyday speech. These included accounts of conversations that interviewees had participated in, listened to, and/or heard second-hand.

Sacha spoke first about her private conversations, indicating "well, I probably would have talked to my husband about it when approached by the town." She further adds "you know, sort of talking about what would the pros and cons would be if this [Police Training College] were here, you know, just to kind of bounce" ideas off each other. She continues to say "and, um, my friend [A] who was also on the committee, we would have talked about it."

The public conversations Stacha speaks to are from her involvement with the committee. She recalls that "You know there were some people who were opposed in that they thought, um, having a lot of police around and police trainees, ah, around might be a negative thing." Adding, "this was the perspective of a few people. I didn't necessarily agree with that." She explains that "they felt that that sort of thing, I'm trying to think of the word [paused to think] Well to use their words - *cocky young fellows* – kinda around the community wouldn't be a good thing." Again, she indicates her disagreement by saying "now, I'm not certain about that." Her hesitancy in repeating the phrase '*cocky young fellows'* that someone said is perhaps being polite and searching for words without the profanity.

By disclosing her aversion to the characterization of police recruits as *cocky young fellows* she illustrates a positive attitude and by discounting the phrase, she is aligning herself with the rational, objective, and unbiased steering committee group. Later in her interview, Stacha indicated that the individual who made the characterization is a "'friend of ours'" who had "'grudgingly went along'" with the proposal. This could be to further indicate openness by demonstrating how she can have an opposing opinion and still be friends.

I had asked, "during the town meetings did you find that there were a lot of times for individuals to voice their opinions? She thought back and didn't "recall a lot of dissent about it. Really." She went on to explain that "for the most part, I think people thought of it as an opportunity and saw it as an economic, saw it as potential economic benefits outweighing the other." Stacha provides this general recollection, which is notably similar to her own opinion. She conveys here that she engaged in civic

discussions regarding the Police Training College in private with her spouse, friends, and steering committee members.

A major focus of Stacha's interview surrounded what she "saw was an opportunity for access to employment" locally. She indicated three times in her interview that her opinion was based on the "opportunity for employment" which she relates back to her work in health care and knowledge about the rural and small-town population in this area of Southern Alberta. Through Stacha's speech, the words and phrases she uses, she constructs herself as a particular kind of person by using a form of language that produces a picture and positions her in relation to a certain demographic.

On a private level, Dave indicated that "our perspective, myself and my wife, we were not [pause]." Dave discontinued this line of speech, not being upfront with what his true thoughts were possibly to avoid confrontation. He switched his focus and instead said, "when they announced this was something they were going after, something that could happen. When it was announced I was a little bit shocked." He went back to his initial thought process, "the whole time we were not convinced that it was a good idea" and that "they were interested in and it didn't matter what the ramifications were" (*they* being the municipal leadership). Dave's use of the word "they" provides insight to how he places himself (and his wife) in opposition to the leadership who are "going after" the Police Training College development.

Dave's conversations with folks with whom he was "on a friendship level" indicated that they "were people who were excited about it, that were supportive, and I think the reason they were supportive was – there was something that was going to happen here that was going to benefit the communities all. Meaning this venture would

benefit the small-town and surrounding rural areas economically. That was, at least, the people I was talking to." In this segment, Dave establishes in very general terms a network of people with whom he is engaged, and the way they form opinions. He speaks in a way that conveys both disagreement with, but also an understanding of, their perception. He clearly points to the *social position* his (and his wife's) opinion puts them in. He acknowledges that his thinking is different from others', who saw the economic possibilities for Fort Macleod and surrounding area.

This almost seems guarded to me. Dave chose not to engage in public discussion because he "didn't' want to be that person" who gets up "to say, well I think it's a bad idea." In his own words, he shares his thought on that kind of action: "I think that's crazy and then you start down that track, you know – being negative, generally speaking about police cause you need 'em, too. So, I'm not sure about 100 of them at once [laughs] you know? I honestly don't know." His frequent use of phrases like 'I don't know' and 'you know?' signals that he and his wife were uncomfortable with the Police Training College bid and he is uncomfortable with making their discomfort into a public disagreement. He indicated that as a young person, his experiences with police were at times negative. While he acknowledged the benefits of policing, he also made a clear reference to a fear that the local culture would be negatively affected by having so many police officers and cadets in the small-town. Today, as a private resident from the local arts community, he felt that he had a different perspective from other local people who he perceived as too attached to their machines and electronics.

Dave clearly understands how economies work and what is required for a small-town to become more vibrant, stating "you could see, I don't know, property values

increase perhaps. I don't know, just more vibrancy because there would be more people. You know, I don't know, there would be more shops because there would be a need for them, you know, that kind of thing. So, there'd be some development." Nevertheless, his discomfort with the Police Training College bid has more to do with "how much damage that kind of culture's done." He stated that "we were more interested in fostering community that was culturally inclusive, and not dominated by this energy that a police culture represents." He indicates that he is not against enhancing or improving local economic conditions, but his focus is on *what* is being proposed for that economic gain. Despite his sensitivity to the police culture, voicing his discomfort might lead to social consequences for him and his wife. His perception implies that his opinion is a minority one, and in some sense a vulnerable one.

Like Dave, Nancy acted in the capacity of an observer and chose not to engage in public conversations or attend public meetings, with her own reasons: "So, I never attended any of the meetings, so just by hearing the conversation, I always just listened, I never really put in my two cents because I was trying to understand what was going on – even at that, I was kind of too busy to get involved because I was sitting on other boards as well." She did not provide any comments around private conversations she may have had regarding the Police Training College. However, her conversation was focused mainly on the interagency meetings to which she was privy. "There were times that I really wanted to make it [to the community meetings] - because of the tension I heard was happening. I was like, I should've went to that meeting! [laughs]." She comments, "You know, just to listen, be a fly on the wall kind of."

She indicated that she heard there was "conflict between the business owners and council – I do remember there was some conflict." She went on to add, "I heard there was some meetings did not go quite well with Shawn. And so, there was some tension between the business owners and the mayor and council because they've been there for a long time – these business owners. So, if the highway did go through, then they would lose their business." I found it interesting that Nancy, while attending these service provider meetings, could *hear* fear in the conversations. She went on to say that "There was even rumor they were going to relocate the main highway to go past the town. There was fear that or fear conversations that all the businesses were going to lose and they were going to eventually close down."

In her interview, she refers to two "projects" that were being talked about simultaneously at these meetings: (a) the Police Training College bid and (b) the possibility that Highway 2, which now runs through the town of Fort Macleod, could be relocated through the construction of a bypass closer to the Police Training College proposed site, endangering the future viability of downtown businesses. While I could find not documents to substantiate the fears around the highway relocation, a similar situation occurred in Monarch (discussions further below) which may have fuelled the rumours. Regardless, the fear conversation seems to have taken on a life of its own.

Nancy also commented that "one of the reasons that a lot of the people, that I heard in conversation, why Fort Macleod did not want to change is because of the movie productions that were coming in. It's got quite a history because of the building structure. So, that's why they didn't want to change Fort Macleod. They wanted to keep it as original as they possibly could." I provide comments on this aspect later in the chapter.

The three interviewees demonstrate their world view of community and how they discursively constructed themselves as citizens experiencing civic discussions. Stacha as a member of the steering committee that developed and advocated (in the local community and surrounding area, and to the provincial government) the proposal for the Police Training College for the jobs that would come from this venture. Dave, who understood that jobs are important but that the local culture would be negatively affected by having so many police officers and cadets in the small-town. Nancy's responses bring to light her focus on her colleagues' fear of the potential changes to the economic fabric of the town that might affect their livelihoods – real or perceived. In their speech acts, they each not only framed their perceptions of fostering community but also formed, to me as the interviewer, their social agency.

Reaction to the Cancellation of the Proposed Police Training College

This next topic of discussion is around the reaction of each interviewee to the cancellation of the Police Training College venture that was promised to Fort Macleod and where a sod-turning ceremony was held (McTighe, 2011). Interviewees' reactions to the cancellation can provide insight in regard to their perception of: (a) the social structure of their community and (b) their community's relationship with local, regional, provincial, and national governments. Their responses also provide insight on how discourse creates and recreates the social structure and their social agency as individual citizens.

Stacha poured out a number of interesting discursive points in her initial response:

> A very strategic **political** move now, wasn't it? You know, of course it was disappointment. Having the rationale being, 'Well, we already have that' in – what was it, Calgary or Edmonton, one of the big two – 'why would we need

> that?' It was very political, about that. And I felt like, *once again rural loses out*, you know? Like, this would have been a great opportunity. It's really too bad.

I responded to her vent with an understanding and sad, "Yeah."

She reiterated a point that was central to her world view of a person rooted and committed to rural community, "Aside from the economic benefit, but, it's really too bad." Adding another interesting spin to that, "You know, and especially since politics of place is a big thing. Right? And the politicians want to please the powerful levers. I guess we don't have any in Fort Macleod. So, they thought [laughs]."

Stacha was quite bitterly disappointed in the cancellation. As a life time resident, who works to help and support the health of the community, and the wife of a local business owner, she experienced the cancellation from a number of perspectives: the clients to whom she provides services; the organization with which she works; the business that could have grown. Stacha spoke directly to the urban-centric nature of the decision to cancel by drawing attention to whose interests were more likely to be satisfied. In her responses of "again, once again, we are disappointed right?", and her interrogative use of "wasn't' it?" and "you know?" and "right?" are also very important markers of an expressed fatalism about politics. She understood the precarious and uncertain power and autonomy of rural and small-town economic and political relationships in the context of provincial (and national) markets and politics, and she noted specifically the corresponding marginalization of this small-town's interests. She also specifically identified the failure of the venture as "very political," in the sense of being skewed by the weakness of small-town influence and power in provincial political affairs.

Dave's response was very different. I was thrown off guard when he replied, "What a surprise when they pulled it a month after they announced it was going ahead, or after they say there is a shovel in the ground. An absolute shock. Even for me. It's like 'What happened there?'" My response signified my own surprise, "Oh really? You were very shocked?" To which he replied "Yeah. Yeah" in quick succession. He added, "They were stopped in their tracks." Despite his opposition to the Police Training College, Dave remained empathetic by stating, "I can't imagine how council felt. Especially the mayor, Shawn, because he worked so hard on it. … And he stuck his neck out at times and he got some bits of flack over it."

Further to this, Dave indicated he had read an article that, "because it wasn't central to the province and because the existing police culture didn't agree with its placement. Right? Whoever, Calgary Police Force and whoever else, Edmonton, I guess, so, I think that did factor in there." Like Stacha, Dave verbalized a wariness of urban-centric economic and political relationships in which local people perceive themselves to have limited power and little insider knowledge. On the opposite end, he did not share her bitterness at the cancellation:

> [A local service professional] was very pro. But I think she was pro for reasons that were very civic and didn't involve money and it had to do with improving programming, you know. I couldn't quite see it myself, but you know, that was one of the reasons I wasn't 'that guy', because she had an idea that it was a good thing.

Dave spoke of her ideals for the people and community and how that relates to her positive evaluation of the establishment of a Police Training College respecting her effort and intentions, even as she came from a very different experience than his own.

I was challenged to understand Nancy's perspective. Her initial response was that she could "see pros and cons to it. You know the things about the pros, I see, that it would've attracted, brought more business. You don't have to travel so far for shopping" and "the population would've definitely went up." But, "You see because they already won it. And honestly, I think it might have been with the Town, itself. Is the way I feel about it." She further adds "Honestly, I think, what I think is it's really political." The explanation she provides is that the Town of Fort Macleod's leadership have "experience with politics" and "you really see, like, who the people are, who really do have [experience] - when it comes to decisions and stuff like that." In other words, from the discourse she heard at the interagency meetings, Nancy's perspective is that the Town of Fort Macleod leadership had the political knowledge and authority to move the project forward. But because of the local political disconnect, they lost the Police Training College. Whether or not this is true, this is the perspective that is true for her. Similar to Stacha and Dave, she understood that the college could potentially create an increase in the population which in turn would increase the current businesses and establish others while decreasing the need to travel to larger centres for shopping. I further discuss the links to the literature on political and institutional centralization, and the privileging of urban centres later in this chapter.

Creating Rural

I want to bring attention to discussions that are at the opposite end of the political-economy scenario in the above discussion. Stacha and Nancy both refer to a common occurrence; a common fear of many small-towns, villages, and hamlets – the economic death of a small-downtown or main street, especially with respect to businesses that are

not easily relocatable. Stacha reminded me, “And, you know, we had the hospital closure.” Nancy stated, when talking about “reconstructing the highway – then I think that’s when they were like, ‘Hey wait a second.’ We are going to lose business and they are going to forget that we are [h]ere.” She goes on to say “for an example like Monarch. Remember when the highway went through there?” I remembered, and added that rerouting the highway “killed the town.” She recalled that the Monarch “hotel, town, and gas station” benefitted economically from the traffic that flowed through the town and motorists would make impromptu stops at the local businesses.

As a resident in the region of this project, I witnessed the changes to Fort Macleod and surrounding rural area about which the interviewees speak. The re-routing of Highway 3, which originally passed through the small-town of Monarch, was detrimental to the businesses that relied on the traffic flowing through the town. Also, I experienced the down-sizing of the Fort Macleod Hospital, and the removal of a service that was once vital for Fort Macleod and surrounding communities. I have experienced their fear discourse first-hand, and understand it is very real for them.

The *social* viability of this small-town as a *local* entity depends on the viability of its local forms of production, exchange, and accumulation. But these, as Marx argued, are increasingly subsumed within larger, more centralized, and urban-centric webs of exchange, ownership, and regulation (1968). However, the survival of small businesses continues to be an important topic in small-towns, especially with respect to the retail goods and services sector: downtown stores and agencies, local car and agricultural-equipment dealerships, restaurants and eateries, arts and crafts galleries, museums, motels, entertainment venues, fuel stations, repair shops, and so on. Some of these same

businesses are particularly important to the tourist trade, on which Fort Macleod also relies. Thus, fear conversations could easily fasten on to any possibility of their being sidelined, especially as the bypassing of nearby Monarch by a newly-twinned Highway 3, was still recent at the time. The fear that drove conversation and disagreement about the potential relocation of the highway which fed these small businesses was very real.

It seemed to me there was a sort of a balancing act between two necessities: one being the decreased resources due to the low population of the small-town and the other being a small enough population to enjoy community engagement along with open spaces. In his testament for being rural, Dave touched on the latter situation. I interpret this as being his epistemic location for understanding and dealing with civic (political and economic) and social life – it comes from the space and place of the land. His description is something Alex Sim (1989) affirmed, that the foundational fabric of rural life relied on the interdependence of physically-distanced farms and small-town occupations, and that electronic communications technology has profoundly changed the way work and socialization is practiced in rural communities. This, however, does not erase the distinctiveness of rural communities.

An important aspect of the interviews was that we were practicing such rural socialization as we interviewed; the interviewees and I repeatedly recreated our relationships as rural people throughout the conversation. In retrospect, it seemed it was important to all of us that we make a point of establishing this in our discussions. For example, we actively established a sense of how long they lived in the area or had been part of the community, whereas that might be less of a concern in an urban environment.

The interviewees brought with them a sense of their rurality. Stacha indicated that she was blessed to have the opportunity to live in a rural area and spoke of how nature provides a great deal of mental health wellness. Dave stated in his interview that "I don't like the idea of urban places. I have a connection to earth, somehow, in a way I don't understand completely … and the hills ring for me too, when I look at them." Although Nancy did not articulate specifically her rural attachment, she and I *knew* that she grew up in a rural community and for most of her adult life (except when she attended a postsecondary program) lived in one of the small towns in southwestern Alberta. It seemed at the time that no explanation or articulation was needed between two rural residents familiar with living in rural South West Alberta. This is a good example of the kind of tacit knowledge that reinforces what Hansen and Muszynski (1990) call "the assumptions which seem implicit in people's conscious activity," but at the time I did not "raise them to the level of debate." Together, we recreated memories of the local lands, towns, and surrounding area from a knowledge based in a shared familiarity of being local residents for a long period of time. In doing so, we discursively reproduced a sense of a shared social identity.

Some of the interactional and communicative characteristics that we demonstrated in these conversations seem to be common among rural people (including myself), such as avoiding confrontation. As rural people, we continue interacting with and most likely will need to rely on co-operation with a limited population within our geographical area, many of whom we've known for years and have had inter-generational relations. For example, Dave didn't want to be "that" negative person and bring attention on himself neither at the time of Police Training College bid, nor at an interview speaking about the

event. Stacha didn't want to put herself on a pedestal in her description of being on the steering committee. Nancy wanted to be "a fly on the wall", careful not to state her opinion on the matter. My hesitancy to interject prompts to get more out of the interviewees would be an example of this. Essentially, we all discussed this civic matter, providing information and opinion while being careful not to offend in case we may need to rescue or be rescued by one another in the future. Or, more likely, so when we meet again, we can be cordial.

Inferring From Three Interviews

Though these three individuals' responses and perspectives collectively span many categories, they cannot be inferred, either individually or collectively, to represent the range of opinions to be found in the town or surrounding areas – though their statements likely fit quite well within that range. My interview guide was developed long before I actually sat down with microphone and a participant. At the time I was developing my semi-structured interview guide, my thoughts were to move the interview discussions from the interviewee's private conversations regarding the Police Training College to public conversations in which they participated. The interviewees' first- and second-hand information comes from their own particular social locations: each spoke from the vantage point they occupied in the Fort Macleod community during the time that the Police Training College bid was being developed and promoted. Whether or not the results answered the research questions is not a primary focus at this point. What is significant is the process of discovery – how each interviewee created their social selves.

Discussions With Theory

Ching & Creed (1997) and Epp (2008) speak to how rural people continue to be marginalized by the centralization and urbanization of political and economic power. Further, their culture is devalued and cultural agency weakened by the urban-centric perspective of mass media. This is in relation to Alberta's two largest and most influential cities, Calgary and Edmonton, and the booming economies between the two cities along Queen Elizabeth Highway 2. Historically, Alberta's rural roots have been relied on to project an image that contrasts the supposedly urbanized eastern half of Canada. But this image today tends to be that of a generic and decorative western rurality that feed an urban nostalgia. In the realms of economic and political influence, from the standpoint of rural residents, urban wins. According to Stacha, "*once again rural loses out"*; and Dave echoes this with "*because it wasn't central to the province and because the existing police culture didn't agree with its placement*."

Further, Ching & Creed (1977) and Epp (2008) indicate that rural people themselves at times embrace the marginalization as part of an identity that is both aggrieved (in relation to centres of power) and self-critical. All three interviewees spoke to this, but it was Nancy who emphasized the latter in a rueful observation of what could have been: "There were other franchises that were trying to come in, that they were rumored because of where Fort Macleod is located, two major highways going in, … it's the ideal spot where business could grow."

Nancy's statements regarding the building architecture of Fort Macleod providing an old-town look popular in film productions resonates with Ching & Creed's (1997) references to an urban gaze, at once both modern and nostalgic, which represents rural spaces as decorative and/or ornamental. Through her own observations, however, Nancy

aligned Fort Macleod's 'historical' look with economic benefit. She also indicated that the conversations at the service-provider meetings she attended included an awareness by at least some folks sitting around the table of how the ornamental aspect of Fort Macleod as a 'small-town' space conveyed an economic benefit.

Nancy's responses, as I mentioned earlier, were different from the other two interviewees. She is younger than they are, she still had school-aged children in her home and she and her spouse were both employed. Nancy portrays a busy person in a professional role who does not want to stand out, providing reasons she could not be involved with the bid process which included public meetings. Bonner (1997) wrote how younger couples relocating to the small-town of Prairie Edge found it difficult to find social opportunities as the established groups of long-time residents were difficult to become a part of. A more in-depth discussion lays in a different research project, but nonetheless is important to note here.

Dave recognized what Foucault (Mills, 2004) would state: that the speaker who opposes (especially publicly) the predominant terms of local discourse risks having not only their words but also their discursive and social agency minimized and negated. Being at a table or on a board can provide influence, leverage, and access to resources – this is particularly significant in small-town and rural areas where government funding and community and family programs and services are scarce. This aligns with Weber's (1947) view of modern societies in which various organizations and groups compete for power and resources. To oppose or question a civic venture that could give the small-town and surrounding area a shot-in-the-arm against economic stagnation is potentially to be painted as a negative agent and a discursive threat.

Dave was also sensitive to what Hall (1992) defined as *othering*. Hall (1992) and Foucault (Mills, 2004) both emphasized that everyday speech is inherently embedded in social practices. Discursive practices produce forms of meaning, agency, and identity, which affect conduct and are subject to reinforcement or change. Each interviewee's reactions (speaking to work colleagues, friends, neighbours; reading and listening to news; observing how others act and speak) has constructed and reconstructed who they are as small-town and rural citizens. Each of them performed small acts of power and influence. Even in Dave's case, refraining from overt public speech and action was his way of preserving his communicative credibility. Stacha's statements such as "employment of our people" (which she states twice), and "child poverty", and "working poor" discursively construct her as someone who holds a specific kind of knowledge about the rural and small-town population in this area of Southern Alberta. Through our speech we construct ourselves as a particular kind of person by using a form of language that produces a picture of and positions us in relation to a certain demographic. This includes Stacha in the words and phrases she uses. All three interviewees, to the best of their ability, sought ways to influence (or to avoid negatively influencing) what they perceive as the best for their community.

When Dorothy Smith and Michel Foucault refer to the organization of social, political, and economic activities and how the consciousness of their participants are practically produced in everyday speech and action. We need to bear in mind that such practical, discursive work is not simply cognitive and driven by interests, but also has an emotional dimension – as Nancy noted in her interview. Despite my having only three interviewees, the interviews turned out to be a rich source of data, and it became apparent

that I could not possibly utilize all the information they contained. I made a decision to focus on three questions in my interview guide. I decided not to use some questions because the responses could not be cross-referenced as I was unable to obtain detailed documentary information from public town meetings. Eliminating one particular question in my discussion was a challenging decision: "How do you think the handling of the consultation around the Police Training College affected the relationships or friendships among the townspeople or the rural people?" The responses to this question were just as rich as those to the questions used for this thesis. An analysis of this additional question would have provided more insight to the interviewees' construction and reconstruction of their identity and social agency. However, I chose to keep my focus narrow due to space and time considerations.

Conclusion

This project's goal, as stated previously, is to generate a better understanding of the manner in which discourse, power, and speech used by three rural or small-town residents can create a particular sense of individual and collective self, agency, and understanding as rural people making sense of the policy and political process of a developmental proposal and its subsequent outcome. In conclusion, each of the three interviewees provided evidence of how they are vested in their community.

Their speech acts and mannerisms provided the evidence in ways that the interview transcripts alone cannot capture. At times they were uncomfortable making statements, other times they were confident, at times they said things forthrightly, and at times vaguely, coming across as unsure and seeking my validation. Each came with some knowledge, a particular perspective, and a sense of how they were at once citizens and

individuals. They had a sense of how to recreate these selves to me in my dual role as research interviewer and local resident known to them. Each recognized how they as individuals must live with their works and actions in a small-town and its surrounding rural area where people are known by name – not simply by role – and where personal reputation may have real social consequences. I found myself becoming fascinated with how individuals create and recreate themselves in these contexts. How many residents have lives like Nancy – too busy with the demands of work and family to be actively involved in civic matters, but still sensing important issues that they are cautious about articulating? How can you be included in the conversation when, like Dave said, you "know how things work around here" but you know it *differently* than others do? When you know that your opinion, openly and directly stated, would be deemed as negative and ultimately diminished by people you know and with whom you must interact or co-operate in the future? How can you work as a service provider knowing that long-term sustainable employment is part of the solution for a demographic that faces poverty, and fearing that once again, an opportunity will pass the small-town and surrounding rural area?

Dorothy Smith (1974), following Marx, emphasizes that economic structures are practically produced in everyday speech and action, and further indicates that power is implemented through everyday social relations and the practices that those relations shape and define. Throughout the interviews, employment and increased population emerged as primary topics. An increase in population would increase the tax base, as Dave stated. An increase in jobs for the local and surrounding Southern Alberta population was recognized as a highly anticipated benefit. Both, it was hoped, would

bring about stabilization for town's ability to finance its infrastructure, and would enhance the diversity of local businesses.

As I sat and listened carefully to each interviewee's story, I found it difficult at times to remain silent, remember questions, jot down quick words or phrases, and hear what they were saying. I found that, as a researcher, listening was central to allowing speakers to reminisce and recount what was important to them regarding the Police Training College venture. At the same time, I have come to recognize not only how much I emphasized listening as an interviewer, but also how often I did not ask specific follow-up questions. I wonder now if I refrained from doing so in part because I was a fellow rural resident along with my interviewees, and aware of how rural and small-town community members - like Dave - often refrain from communicative actions that might cause offense. Could it be that I was uncomfortable with probing questions or follow-ups, not wanting to place these fellow-rural-residents in an awkward position? Are some of these communicative practices such as: being sensitive to their thoughts and concerns, seeking to avoid or soften conflict, and being particularly sensitive to implicit knowledge, not only rural characteristics, but, to some degree, gendered and racialized practices?

I was very nervous about interviewing non-native people, especially non-native males. I went to great lengths to find a public place with enough seclusion for a private conversation. This stems from a cultural position. As a First Nation's woman, it is a cultural taboo to be alone with a non-native man; additionally, as a local Indigenous woman who is committed to a long-term, well-known relationship this was quite tricky. I am particularly nervous for my safety in this time with awareness of murdered and missing Indigenous women. My anxiousness was greatly reduced as I was fortunate to

find three friendly, interesting, warm, and respectful rural interviewees. Perhaps my relief was expressed in part in my taking care with them in the interviews; giving unobtrusive encouragement or small affirmations rather than taking opportunities to interrogate them, even if it meant that I did not gain the specific details that a more persistently probing approach might have revealed.

The selection of results and analyses I provided from the interviews gave me insight into how we mutually (including me as the interviewer and neighbouring rural resident) discursively construct and reconstruct ourselves in their interviews – how we construct ourselves as rural people. The next chapter provides concluding comments on my interpretation of the project and how the findings can be applied in my work, but more importantly, how it affects my worldview.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research project was two-fold. First, to contextualize and understand everyday speech and action which produces and re-produces social agency and relations within a rural community undergoing civic decision-making. Second, to explore and discover how interpersonal communication practices generate discourse that not only shapes social agency and identity but also affects the potential for consensus or conflict in the definition of political and economic issues in a small-town and its surrounding rural community. I carried out a qualitative research project *focusing on three interviews with residents who experienced the civic consultative process of the Police Training College which was to be constructed in Fort Macleod, Alberta*. These three interviews did not simply provide me with information about the Fort Macleod Police College, they helped me to look in depth at how participants constructed themselves, their communities, the bid process, its promised opportunities and their stake in them, and the ins and outs of local leadership and power relations a*s they responded to the announcement and subsequent cancellation of the proposal and construction of the Police Training College.*

My research came to focus on investigating and interpreting how my interview respondents actively sought to understand and represent themselves and their social circles in response to (a) both proposed and unforeseen changes and (b) civic discussions – those held in the public domain and in private conversations. It is about how these people who self-identified as rural or small-town residents collaborated in building a shared sense of identity on a common stock of social codes and cultural perceptions, and a shared subjective sense of who we were as members of a local, rural, or small-town

community. In this thesis I took multiple perspectives: (a) I wrote from an academic sociological position in which my aim was to write through my knowledge of theoretical literature, (b) I am a rural resident of a neighbouring community to Fort Macleod, and (c) my perspective as a First Nation woman plays a part in how I interpret and respond to the texts I've read and the interviews I've heard. The knowledge and insight I've gained results not only from what I read, but from the documentary records of the Police Training College venture, from my interpretations of the interviewees' responses, answers, and discussion of my interview questions, and from my reflections on my own implication in the social circumstances discussed by my interviewees.

I focused on how I interpreted these rural citizens' production and re-production of their social place and identities as they experienced, reflected on, and spoke about their community. In this study, I reflected on how we produced ourselves as civic agents and/or observers, and as community members, in response to a specific but in some ways typical civic consultative process. I also considered how we then did it again in response to each other, in interviews that became conversations. In other words, we undertook shared reality-constructive and identity-constructive work and built something in common out of our different positions in a shared situation.

I included myself as a co-participant engaged in conversations with the interviewees. As someone who lives tangential to Fort Macleod and its surrounding area, I too, was interested in the Police Training College bid, win, and cancellation. Therefore, I engaged in reflection to how the documentary record and my interviewees' discussions affected how I related to their responses – not only regarding the Police Training College but also to me in the interviews. It became important to me to try to understand my own

responses to how they framed their answers, and how my relationship to them and their answers was produced and reproduced in terms of my own worldview.

This thesis drew upon writers such as Marx, Foucault, Smith, Hall, and Mills who discuss how discourse is imbedded in everyday speech and behaviours, and how institutional structures are reproduced through relations of ruling that extend into everyday life. These theoretical resources assisted me in understanding the social organization of power, politics, and discursive practices in a small-town setting governed by relations of dependency between local and provincial organizations set in a wider national and international context. My interviewees and I not only engaged in an exchange of information, but we also engaged in mutual sense-making – producing and reproducing a discourse about social agency and power. I came into the research project with my own set of perspectives and worldviews. Through the research process, I progressively discovered how my own perceptions of the local rural community, the interview material, the documentary record, and even the decisions I made in the course of this research came from my First Nation background, my position in the rural history of this area, and my particular path through an academic education.

At the beginning I was adamant that I would work from an objective sociological perspective and not from a First Nations perspective. My goal was to take this opportunity to observe and learn through an academic lens about a small part of the Western settler world through an academic lens. In this chapter, I provide my reflections on how my initial and subsequent approach and the methodologies I employed worked or didn't work as this project developed. I have discussed how I came to relate my findings to a new set of evolving research questions. I will provide a sense of the potential

implications of my research and its possible application to my community work. And finally, I speak to the contributions this project could provide to academia, the matrix from which I began.

The Effectiveness of My Methodology

Qualitative interviewing is a mutual social interaction that may involve mutual social construction of identity and reality. Incorporating this kind of awareness into research doesn't simplistically or necessarily lead to the replacement of "facts" by "opinion." However, as my initial intent was to be sociological about this research project, I tried to maintain an unbiased stance to the document materials and interviewees as much as possible. As friendly and interesting as my interviewees were, in the back of my mind I had an agenda to keep – move through the interview questions as efficiently as possible; keeping as close to the questions as possible to maintain a consistent setting for each interview so as not to compromise the objectivity of the results. My intention was to remain as passive as possible, providing only the necessary prompts to guide the interviewee back to the questions and topics at hand. I was very conscious of their time and did not want to go over the forty minutes I had indicated that the interview would take. I wanted to respect their time, allowing them to return to whatever they had planned to do for the remainder of the day. However, the consequence was that there were moments when I got hooked on their stories and did not ask for clarification or probe with other questions.

Adherence to scientific writing rules that reflect the epistemological and ontological claims of positivism isn't the only way to do good, rigorous research. The notion that social reality really exists "out there" and can be discovered and accurately

described using accepted concepts that simply mirror such realities is not the only method of valuable research. Not all research must involve the identification and study of a representative sample. However, at the beginning of my research I felt I must write my own voice and presence *out* of my work to "be objective." My main task, as I initially thought, was to obediently accept and accurately repeat what academic authorities claimed in theory and methods, and then to simply apply what they said, rather than comparing them critically and using them to synthesize and develop my own approach. Science is one of many ways of telling the story of interviewees and data. Despite an evolution in my approach to an evaluation of so-called objective research methods throughout the project, I found it difficult to shake the authority and perceived correctness of science, especially as a person who was educated with a Eurocentric world view.

Perakyla & Ruusuvuori (2011) indicate that qualitative researchers can reach areas of reality that would otherwise remain inaccessible, such as people's subjective experiences and attitudes (2011, p. 529). The researcher can analyse interview transcripts, noting ways in which an interviewee uses language and social resources to construct their relations to rural discourses. Bear in mind that the researcher comes with her own bundle of life experiences, perceptions, perspectives, social location, and academic aspirations. As the researcher, my research and interpretive practices and my worldview touched all aspects of the processes in the research project. By "all aspects" I mean the manner by which I handled the recruitment of my interviewees, the setting up of the interview including how I greeted and placed my recording devices; how I perceived and responded to the physical and speech actions and mannerisms of my interviewees; what elements of

these that I thought were important enough to jot down as observations; how I transcribed the audio recordings; what I thought was important in their speech; and how I analyzed and interpreted their information and experiences.

As Bonner (1997) says, I had to include self-reflections on my own perspective, epistemology, ontology, and worldview, and an awareness of my own judgments and their sources. Further, I needed to keep in mind that these were and are shaped by my background, social location, and training, but are not fixed in stone by these factors. They can become flexible; changing and expanding my self-awareness as I respond to other people (such as my interviewees) in the course of my research. As I write, I realize that I am totally framing the reality of my interpretation of my interviewees' responses to my research questions. Did I construct rurality from the triggers that their stories kindled in my memory and knowledge of the land in this southwest rural region? Their descriptions of the land (the rolling hills, the places the interviewers lived) related to locations I could see in my mind's eye.

Rurality

Tönnies (2001, see also Bonner, 1997) is not alone in emphasizing that interpersonal relations in rural communities tend to be concrete and personal, rather than formal and abstract. It is important to recognize that communities such as established city neighbourhoods where there is a collective identity of neighbourhood-membership, and in which facilities and resources are available within the neighbourhood, encourage regular engagement between its members. People in such communities often make it their business to know about their neighbours in a multidimensional and often intergenerational way. But this is not the whole story. *Rural* people exercise a different

kind of manners when face-to-face. They avoid open disagreements – as Dave stated about himself. They avoid leading with direct questions or requests. They dodge controversial topics. They tend to respect an injunction not to pry. Faced with argument or conflict, they may seek to change the topic, or quietly remove themselves from a contentious situation. They are conscious of not being able to lose themselves in a mass; of the fact that someone with whom they dispute one day may be their rescuer from a snowdrift or their assistant with stuck farm machinery the next, or may be the business owner on whose goods and services they rely. In her interview, Nancy demonstrated this characteristic by downplaying her role, as if she didn't want to appear as "standing out". Again, is this a rural trait? Could it also be a gendered one? Dave also demonstrated this characteristic when he stated how he kept quiet and didn't want to be pointed at and regarded as, "that guy that doesn't like the police college." This could reflect a common reluctance to be confrontational among members of rural communities, although it might also reflect his personality, or his place in the community.

Similarly, could it be that I myself displayed this feature of rurality in that I was uncomfortable with probing questions or follow-ups, not wanting to make these fellow-residents uncomfortable? Further, there may be another dimension to my sparing use of follow-ups. To understand what my interviewees were saying, I relied heavily (as rural people often do) on a sense of shared, implicit knowledge. However, such sensitivity to shared, implicit knowledge, along with behaviours such as smoothing out interactional situations, caring for another's sensitivities, seeking ways to avoid or soften conflict, and trying not to offend, are not only rural traits. Are these not also, to some degree, common to gendered communicative practices?

One of the reasons I embarked on this research journey was to have a better understanding of rurality form a sociological perspective. My reading led me to the realization that there are various descriptions and perceptions of rural, and divisions over the ways in which rurality is to be understood; there is no definitive definition. I didn't find a definitive definition of rural or rurality within the academic research, in the positive sense that "research reveals" the thing that the concept names. Even so, my interviewees did indicate in their own way how they perceived rurality in ways important to them, through their descriptions of where they lived, their senses of the land and how they "get along" and associate with other folks in the small-town and surrounding rural areas. Dave's connection to earth and the hills is an example of how rurality can be described and its importance to someone who self-identifies as local or rural without feeling the need to provide a comprehensive theoretical or empirical explanation. Yet, as Sim (1989) argues, rurality is not only a matter of an interviewee's *perception* – it is experientially real – for the rural resident (like Dave) it is tangible, despite lacking a definitive positivistic definition. This tangible *gestalt* (as Sim calls it) is not fixed or immutable.

Nonetheless, through this research I came to observe and value my participants' active construction and negotiation of identities, perspectives, and world-views – their own and in relation to others. They incorporated a sense of being rural citizens engaged in social agency that they developed and continued to develop in response to their social contexts. In their speech, the interviewees demonstrated an ability not only to express a rural sensibility but also to assess their circumstances critically: how the town of Fort Macleod and its surrounding rural area might or might not benefit as a community from

the civic venture. Even Dave, who was not sold on the idea of a Police Training College, acknowledged how it addressed the economic disadvantages of a rural community with few job opportunities to offer.

My interviewees also constructed in their discourse a shared sense that residents of Fort Macleod and rural area had little power or control, individually or collectively, over major economic and political decisions affecting them. For example, Stacha specifically pointed out that they lost out on the Police Training College, not only for the town but also for the surrounding rural area, and Dave reported shock at the cancellation after the ground breaking ceremony. His response of, "It was a done deal" indicates his recognition that small-towns can easily be subject to arbitrary treatment by a higher political authority, one swayed by the political and economic interest of two major provincial cities (Calgary and Edmonton).

Stacha, Dave, and I discursively recognized and reproduced the mutual perception that the Police Training College cancellation was another example of how the small-town of Fort Macleod, its local surrounding rural areas and rural Southern Alberta in general, no longer contain a political and social force to be reckoned with as they did a century ago, in the historical glory days of the United Farmers and United Farm Women of Alberta. The rural communities in which we reside are, in our experience, undervalued and passed over for economic opportunities and development, which in turn diminishes the possibility of their gathering or accumulating any political or social capital. In other words, Stacha, Dave, and I mutually constructed ourselves as rural residents in passive roles, as supporters not influencers. We were to accept and show support to a bid proposal process, to wait in anticipation for the authorities to make their decision, and

after an undetermined length of time happily receive the news that they won the bid (or not). Within the larger patron-client framework that tends to govern relations between rural municipalities and provincial governments, these roles are classical examples of "boosterism," the response that is expected of local citizen by local elites and the local client power-brokers.

Within the local political scene, the power to act and to make decisions on behalf of the town and its economic catchment area unfolded in a different manner. The Mayor and Council of Fort Macleod had the authority to decide whether or not to participate in the bidding process for the Alberta Public Safety and Law Enforcement Training Centre. The MLA representative for the Livingstone-Macleod region was a primary broker between the town and the Alberta Government, and the editor and publisher of the town's newspaper (*Macleod Gazette*) served as a leading narrative instrument in boosting and encouraging support for the bid. The declaration that was proposed and disseminated to ground local actions was that Fort Macleod had what it took to put forth the best proposal of all the bids in Alberta. One of the primary narrative tropes included Fort Macleod's pride in the history of the North West Mounted Police hegemony in the region. In anticipation of securing the bid for the Police Training College, infrastructure resources and land were designated for a construction-ready site. The Mayor, Council, and key Town officials had the authority to determine who was actively involved by recruiting people to sit on the Steering Committee which was used as the mechanism of power to determine how the bid proposal was prepared and presented, how community engagement was to take place, and how to garner support from the town residents and from the surrounding Southern Alberta communities.

This picture of a small-town and its surrounding rural catchment or watershed area captures what Weber (1947) indicated: that power and politics flow two ways but not always *equally*. As well, this picture shows how the Southern Alberta municipal governments and local organizations served as bureaus through which rural residents were able exert very limited influence or control over the larger organizations such as those in Edmonton and Calgary. This contrasts with the well-documented history of farmers and ranchers who were known for their strong political advocacy. Sim (1989) wrote about how rural folk historically formed communities to contend with – a significant political and economic force at the provincial and even national levels. Many of the current residents, like Dave and Stacha, very well may have come from this history of established farmers and ranchers in the surrounding rural areas of Fort Macleod. As long-time residents I would say that they might be experiencing a nostalgia for their settler history, which is in contrast to their present experience and political circumstances. Similarly, I, as a First Nations person, have witnessed and experienced the unequal political, social, and economic flow of power in the local, provincial, and national levels. My personal history as a member of the Blackfoot Confederacy tells of how we were one of the most powerful forces to be reckoned with right up to a few decades before the settler golden age.

However, it must be noted that the citizens of Fort Macleod did display some forms of agency in this civic venture. For example, one of my interviewees sat on the steering committee, and a local business, Scougalls, made the decision to move to a location closer to and in view of the site where the Police College was to be constructed. The dissentient discourse about the potential impact of police trainees and police culture

on their community was voiced by residents, such as Dave, Stacha's friend John, and commenters on *Macleod Gazette* newspaper articles, letters, and editorials (McTighe, 2006b, 2006d). In the interviews, Stacha stated that her friend John was not excited about having recruits running around town, and Dave voiced his personal opinion on the negative effects of a police mentality on the local social environment. Although these and similar opinions were often voiced in private, or were largely minimized and/or dismissed, it is important to note their existence. Through these discursive acts, the residents displayed and reproduced their power of speech. They voiced and acted within their power to influence the outcome (however limited) which could also be construed as rural or small-town actions. These discursive acts circulated among the residents and are not "contained" by a particular group as Foucault (Mills 2004, p. 24) described. Here residents create forms of relations which formulate how they act towards one another in each interaction, which in a social setting is fluid and unpredictable. However, it is important to remember that residents must continue to be a neighbour in this small-town and rural area where some families have lived for decades.

As an individual who comes from a rural community, I recognize how making comments or responding to comments about community and area issues can be risky. I had ethical concerns about critically analyzing the interviewee responses to the interview questions, which I now understand as, at least in part, expressing fears of offending members of a nearby local community; a local community in which I "know people." Just like Dave, I don't want to be "that" person; one who causes friction or who criticizes others in some public or outward way that might be viewed negatively or taken out of

context. I don't want people in the community to be less likely to want to engage with me in relation to future issues regarding our common "watershed" area.

Social Construction in Local Identity, Agency, and Community

My interviewees and I constructed ourselves in response not only to my interview questions but to each other. I supported their self-construction in the interviews. They each discursively produced themselves not only as particular kinds of individuals but as members of a community and civic agents. They all presented themselves as non-confrontational in a way that can be construed as common to many rural residents' conscious of their locality. In this same manner, I as the interviewer from a neighboring community, was also non-confrontational. We must all continue to interact with, and at times rely on co-operation with, a limited surrounding population.

I assisted each interviewee to become comfortable by providing supportive and encouraging statements and assisting them in clarifying the meaning of their statements. By doing this, it is conceivable that I also contributed to their meaning. It is also conceivable that the resulting agreements or statements are the mutual work of *both* of us, not simply the interviewee's "pure" or "uncontaminated" meaning extracted by the researcher (which is the goal of a positivist researcher). We helped each other come to and reinforce an understanding that we all lived in the wider rural area a long time, which was an important consideration to both of us in each interview. This permitted us not only to rely on shared and taken-for-granted knowledge but also respect one another as co-resident in a wider but local rural setting contingent on the ethical and social constraints instituted by that locality. In other words, this mutual respect was of some importance to

us as *rural* people – local people of longer standing. We *wanted* to get a sense of how long we had lived in the area or been part of the community.

The distinctions made between public/private conversations by my interviewees touched on these ethical and social constraints. A public/private distinction was most prominent in Dave's interview. It is possible that he had a smaller circle of like-minded people with whom to discuss his thoughts, but it is clear he didn't want to discuss them in a wider circle of private conversations and especially not in a public forum. Clearly, Dave understood this social constraint. On the other hand, the two women I interviewed had a wider circle of co-workers who seemed to be more active in their discussions and in their support of the Police College. In one case, the interviewee's own support of the civic venture was active and clearly evident. This appears to speak to the existence of a differential social placement and a divergence of interests, even in small community. It seemed that these interviewees oriented themselves (at least in the interviews) toward an association with a wider circle of folks on the pro side of this civic issue who were touting a discourse of development and employment that spoke to their own economic and social location. It is possible that the public discourse of jobs and community development trumped other messages such as community culture. I think that is could also be possible for some residents that associating with supporters could involve a certain degree of prudence – to avoid being seen as "that" person who is confrontational or negative. Is it possible that some of the so-called supporters kept their true opinion under cover?

I want to dispel any notion as to the intention of my thesis project – originally, I had set out to gather evidence – data – that would prove (or a least indicate) what rural

actually is, and to clearly make evident the forms of communication that actually take place in rural communities, and what forms of power are actually at work in rural communities. I wanted to find, conclusively, evidence that rurality actually existed in some incontrovertible, objective way and the communicative practices that define the uniqueness of rural communities.

However, I'm not so sure that was what I accomplished. The interviewees did not articulate specifically what "being rural" is to them, and it is possible that, in my interpretation of their responses, I may have created that myself. It is evident, though, that I assisted my interviewees in a mutual recreation of a time when they lived through a civic decision-making process in which their lived reality, social place, and identities came into question.

I believed then and still believe now that they trusted me with their private thoughts and sense of reality to continue to sort through the political, social, and economic aftermath of the small-town civic pandemonium they experienced. By private thought, I mean thoughts they may have kept to themselves or shared only with trusted others – even several years after the cancellation of the Police Training College. Ultimately, I do not know in any objective sense if they trusted me enough to share their true thoughts. However, I have evidence of the way we cooperated in building a sense of who we were to and with each other in our mutual conversation which is the interview.

Scope and Limitations of This Project

Throughout this academic journey many descriptions of interesting and important social phenomena crossed my hands and computer screen as I read, thought, and wrote about the concepts of rurality, communication processes, and social agency. Many of the

books and articles I read were tangential to my thesis but not specific, therefore, I have pulled away from those readings in manner much like pulling burdock from my hair. Some were very interesting, but necessary to let go of, because they led me into dead ends; others were compelling but not central to my thesis topic as it ultimately took shape. I eventually admitted that I didn't need to read and do everything here.

Although *matters* of community and municipal development are clearly integral to my topic, this thesis *is not* about municipal planning or planning processes. It is more about power and the ways we (interviewees and I) responded to the manner in which power affects our identities and our sense of agency. I believe that those with the official status and power to move development proposals forward need to be sensitive to and respectful of the informal discussion and reflection that often escapes formal consultation. I also believe that they, and we all, need to acknowledge in meaningful ways how power is given shape in a dialectic between the local, provincial, and national patron-client relations. Moreover, it is necessary to acknowledge the brokerage of power in reference to that dialectic that takes place at the local level.

There are ways academic researchers can unwittingly broker power or influence the outcome of the research. I tried to maintain sensitivity and care in conducting the interviews with two primary reasons in mind. One being the positivistic western scientific methods, which are explained in the next paragraph; the other is my sensitivity to the real occurrence of violence (subtly and forthright) to Indigenous people – specifically the awareness of missing and murdered Indigenous women. This is a concern that I carry with me everyday as I go about my business and academic dealings in Western society. While not a central theme of this research, this important phenomenon is essential to my

theses. The lack of police response to murdered and missing Indigenous women is important because the contention I have with the authority of positivistic knowledge is the same authority through which police have claimed the right to police, disregard, and/or neglect Indigenous people. It is the same basic authority – colonial.

In the course of my self-reflection on the changing focus of this thesis, I came to recognized how some dominant Western scientific and academic processes that I learned in my primary, secondary, and postsecondary education were instilled in my mind as authorities that worked to invalidate rather than facilitate my own writer's voice. I recognized how the world view I had come to accept as I embarked on my Master's program came from a system that disregarded and devalued my indigenous perspective (and other perspectives). My initial attachment to a positivist perspective was formed by a long process in which the colonizing discourse of a particular kind of science was imposed in terms of a colonizing language.

To come back to the small-town setting of my project, there is a specific way in which the *employment relation* described by Marx as central to modern economic life, forces its way into the consciousness of small-town and rural residents. In such settings, job opportunities are increasingly perceived as precarious and scarce. The availability of diverse employment is limited, and control over these opportunities typically lies in head offices hundreds of miles away. This means that in rural or small-town communities, economic leverage is limited and dependent. Those who exercise power in small-towns manage the local levers of patron-client dependency: and the key lever for the past century has been *jobs.* Jobs would keep young people home, provide a better tax base, and make applications for more government funding credible.

Further discussions

My interest in rural studies continues to deepen. This exploratory qualitative study has raised a number of questions potentially applicable to other situations. I return to two of my initial questions: (a) how does social agency manifest in public discussion-participation, and (b) how do political and social relations provide or withdraw support to rural residents to participate in a civic discussion and agency? Further and wider exploration of these questions could provide means for community and broader discussions on crucial issues today such as our responses to climate change and ways of sustaining local water bodies, mountains, and lands, and also of sustaining the socio-political, cultural, and economical aspects of small-towns and the rural communities that inhabit them. As a First Nations person, I continue to be drawn to understanding how residents of small-towns and rural districts perceive themselves *as* rural; how would they define rural for themselves? I am also interested in knowing how First Nations people tend to define and value the idea of rurality.

I ultimately came to acknowledge the need to change how I thought of my place and my agency as an Indigenous woman in my research project. In doing so, I realized that the rural traits I identified in describing the interviewees are not simply rural traits. To smooth out interactional situations; to take care for another's sensitivities; to seek ways to avoid or to soften conflict; to try not to offend; to be particularly sensitive to implicit knowledge – these can all, to some degree, describe my gendered communicative practices and speech acts. They also describe to some degree practices and acts that were passed down through my own people. Due to time and scope constraints, I am unable to

address these fully here, but there is rich potential for another academic study that could make and discuss these linkages.

The issue of employment and jobs came up in what my interviewees said and in the content of newspaper articles covering the Fort Macleod Police College civic venture, over and over again. Employment and lack of political and economic control over their destinies are fundamentally important issues for small-town and rural residents. These topics are tangential to, but not the focus of my research, and are areas in which further study could certainly be pursued in regards to how they are made sense of in terms of local identity and agency.

Among the most interesting facets I derived from this research project is how the interviewees and I moved back and forth, to and from subscribing to view our lives from an urban perspective. All of us, including Dave, who used technology to a minimum, require products and services that can not be obtained in Fort Macleod. Our home lives, recreation, work, and interests have brought and still bring us to places (in person or virtually) where we can find goods and services and take part in activities not available in Fort Macleod or the surrounding small-towns. Our lives are not exclusively rural. How do we reconcile that with our deep experience of and advocacy for rurality?

Gender is also a legacy intertwined with urban/rural divisions and inequities. One of my interviewees indicated that she had been too busy to get involved in the civic discussions surrounding the Police Training College. I assumed her after-work hours were taken up with domestic responsibilities in her role as mom and wife. Some of my own concerns also brought to light gendered issues for me, both as an interviewer and as a First Nations woman. I had previously mentioned above that I began to reflect on the

extent to which my non-confrontational approach to interviewing was perhaps not only a characteristic of my rural background, but to some degree also gendered communicative practices. It would be interesting to take a deeper look at gendered and other varieties of communicative practices in rural communities. How might such practices support or facilitate civic agency and different forms of leadership in their respective social locations and communities? On a more general note, rural areas now receive urban-centric mass communications by broadcast and via the internet. So, in a sense, their collective self-consciousness as being rural is likely being influenced by this access. They have gained the ***ability to see themselves through urban eyes***; for example, in comparing the perceived diversity of urban society with a perceived lack of diversity locally. This doesn't necessarily mean they will lose agency; however, it may mean that the new rural will comprise of new forms of collection self-construction and civic agency.

Conceivably, the most important question brought about by this thesis is how we (both writer and small-town/rural readers) can apply and expand an understanding of how our social and discursive practices produce and reproduce forms of social agency in our communities when we face civic development issues - me in my work within my own rural community, and you in other rural and even urban communities. It is now a common occurrence in Southern Alberta (and other rural areas) to be confronted with the possibility of civic endeavours and projects that have the potential to grow or strengthen the local economy or to skew it towards progressive dependency on urban priorities and international markets, or have irreversible and disruptive effect on local environments and ways of life.

Conclusion

This project proposes that diverse, informal, and ordinary voices - like those of my interviewees - are part of a distinctive communicative environment that is built in ordinary as well as extraordinary times through practices that construct relations, communities, and possibilities. As Bonner (1997) suggests, these voices can advance serious community engagement through thoughtful and critical dialogue. They should not be de-legitimated as merely individual or as uninformed. They are ongoing factors of an everyday social fabric in the ongoing process of being actively produced and reproduced.

My learning through this project included unlearning the idea that only one model of social science is possible, or is the only one that counts. Qualitative and reflective research is non-linear and messy; and it imposes unique challenges of an interviewer and writer, such as locating oneself in the thesis, ethically and truthfully. Self reflection is hard work – and is especially so in a complex social context given that our selves and subjectivities are socially formed. I struggled to value my own work; to decolonize my mind and to write from where I am (as Dorothy Smith would advocate). This research began from events in a time frame that became stories of how three people and I interwove our social agency and identity through our experience of the events covered by this research project. We all began from a place in time set by a community experience of and response to a decision-making venture and we reproduced ourselves as community members as we revisited that venture. In the end I learned the importance of academic self-reflection combined with social reflection *on* academia as a place in which, as Foucault pointed out, truth mixes with power.

I recognized how western scientific and academic principles and procedures that I learned in my primary, secondary, and postsecondary education were instilled in my

mind, but also how they shaped my mind. I came to recognize how my world view on entering my masters program came from a system that disregarded and devalued my Indigenous perspective (and other perspectives). I acknowledged a need to change how I thought of my place as an Indigenous woman in my research project. I had to both acknowledge and struggle to disengage my thinking from this indoctrination. Hence, in refocusing my perspective, I moved to a more descriptive but also more reflective explanation and interpretation of the interviews, my transcripts, and the documentary resources I worked with in this research project. As expected, I experienced a huge amount of learning through this process. However, perhaps the *unlearning* – specifically to unlearn my devaluation of my own knowledge – was the most significant education.

I'm not suggesting that my interpretations are definitive or authoritative; in fact, this project has led me to apply and question authority, control, and power. My interpretations reflect my perspective throughout this project, so too, my interpretations reflect on changes in my perspective and who I have become in that context. This is my reading of a journey undertaken in relation to three residents of a rural area and small-town who experienced a specific series of events.

My interviewees knew they were being interviewed by a fellow rural and local resident, and assumed that such a resident would know what they know. Together we created a sense of rurality and history of place. Together we sought to understand, through our experience of our economic, political, and social circumstances, a proposed development that had the potential to bring about substantial change to the local area. In the end, though, it did provide for all of us (in different ways) a political experience along with unanswered questions. In the interviews I listened to them think aloud about their

positions, identities, and agency within the community and how these affected their voice in the civic decision-making process. I was more than a listener; I was an encourager of, and in some ways an empathizer with their reflections. Each interviewee and I co-created a sense of community based on our shared locality as I prompted them (and myself) to remember the events and timelines of the Fort Macleod Police College venture. In doing so we, as neighbours, remembered and re-situated the waxing and waning of the dream of our rural watershed in the recent past.

The three interviewees expressed, at times indirectly, what they saw as the existence of an inequality of political power and of knowledge between an insider network and the general populace within the small-town. For example, there was an implication that the local power network close to the mayor who were "in the know" should have known what was coming, and that "the way you move forward with anything" in a small-town is by forming a circle of power networks. On the other hand, I noted an ambiguous sympathy for the mayor; that whatever his local *power* base and knowledge network, he tried to do good things for the town, but it was not sufficient to keep him in the know or give him leverage *provincially*. This sympathy, however reserved, seemed to indicate a common thread in informal rural civic discourse – that *we* (rural people) are together against *them*, who inhabit places of power in urban centres. My interviewees provided me with a window through which I could experience civic decision-making and local social agency, through their worldview or even their experiential *gestalt* and compare it to my own.

V*oicing* or acting on an opposing opinion on a civic issue may lead to social consequences for those standing behind their words. In a small-town where residents are

likely to be reliant on each other or have common community connections, voicing such a position publicly can be uncomfortable and awkward at the least. As noted by two of my interviewees, this situation can be a *vulnerable* one. Stating dissent can be interpreted as you are "one of those negative" people who are to be found in the community (or perhaps any community). It can also threaten one's support networks. Not wanting to bring trouble means following a "non-confrontational" line. This is common to rural residents, who must continue to interact with, cooperate with, and at times rely on a limited surrounding population.

In conclusion, there may be a First Nations parallel here. First Nations people have had to learn to live in, accommodate to, work with, and engage in activities within settler places and spaces. How do we manage or reconstruct the issues that come with that – like my struggle with an imposed academic Eurocentrism that I also internalized? Pulling burdocks out on one's hair is nothing compared to pulling Eurocentrism and other colonial legacies out of our minds and souls. I hope I have demonstrated in this thesis that an ethic of non-confrontation does not mean that rural people (and marginalized people) simply or passively give up agency and become blundering conformists. Privately and/or through networks of like-minded trusted relatives, friends, and colleagues, thinking and discussion takes place, and the possibility for individual and collective agency remains vibrantly alive.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Consent Form

Information Letter for Interview

Joslin Smith
University of Lethbridge
403-627-5318
smitaj00@uleth.ca

Dear: _____ Date:_____

This letter is an invitation to participate in my University of Lethbridge Masters of Sociology Thesis titled "Examining Power Structures and Networks of Communication in Rural Communities: A Case of the Proposed Police Training College in Fort Macleod." My program supervisor is Dr. Ramp from the Department of Sociology. This letter explains my project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to participate.

The focus of this project is to gain information on communication in civic-decision making in small town and rural areas. In particular, I am interested in the communication styles and characteristics employed by town and rural area residents who experienced and responded to the announcement and subsequent cancellation of the proposal and construction of the Police Training College in Fort Macleod. The project will help me learn more about the communication of public issues and develop skills in research design, collection and analysis of information, and academic writing.

Participation in this study is voluntary. A number of potential interviewees are being recruited. Although your input will be valuable, do not feel obligated to participate merely for the sake of assisting me personally. I am seeking interviewees who are willing and able to volunteer free of duty or any sense of compulsion stemming from any prior relationship we might have or any authority I might hold.

The interview will take approximately 30 - 70 minutes to complete and take place in a mutually agreed upon location and time. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time during or after the interview. If you decide to withdraw after the interview you may inform me through email or telephone up

to the time of my thesis defense. If you choose to withdraw – all recordings and notes made of your interview will be returned to you if you withdraw while speaking in person with me, otherwise, your information will be destroyed.

There are no anticipated risks related to this research. However, you may feel some discomfort discussing the issues as it may bring up strong emotions when you recollect your involvement with the proposed Police Training College. To assist you in dealing with emotions that may cause you stress, I have compiled a list of names and telephone numbers of counseling and/or mental health services, if you wish this information.

You may also find the interview to be very enjoyable and rewarding. There is no known direct benefit to for you to be involved in this study and no financial compensation, however, I can provide a small contribution towards your transportation costs to attend the interview.

Your personal information may be used or kept anonymous **as per your request**. If you decide to keep your personal information anonymous your name or any other personal identifying information will not appear in the Master's Thesis resulting from this study; however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used. Your comments and statements may be released in whole or in part in an academic public domain but you will be contacted to verify the content of your quotations before they are used. Keep in mind as you consider participating that the town of Fort Macleod is small and true anonymity cannot be fully guaranteed.

My MA Supervisor and Committee Members will be reviewing my writings with respect to work on my Master's Thesis paper. You will not have the opportunity to read the final paper before it is submitted to my supervisory committee. The results from this study will be presented in a Master's thesis defense as a requirement of the University of Lethbridge Master's program. The final approved copy of the written thesis will be in the public domain and available to read from the University of Lethbridge library and may appear in other scholarly presentations and publications. At no time, however, will your name be used or any identifying information revealed without your permission.

Notes and/or recordings collected during this study will be retained up to five (5) years after completion and approval of the thesis, in a secure location, and will then be destroyed. I will be the only person with access to the data. All computers and laptops (and any other technical equipment) used in transcribing will be password protected. All information and data collected from interviews will be stored and kept in a secure locked cabinet or on a password-protected computer in my home.

A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep for your records and reference.

This project has been reviewed and received ethics approval through the University of Lethbridge Human Subject Research Committee. Questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study may be directed to research.services@uleth.ca.

For questions or additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at *the above cell number or email address.* You can also contact my course instructor, Dr. Ramp**,** at 403-329-2551 or email at ramp@uleth.ca.

I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Joslin Smith BA

CONSENT FORM

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by **Joslin Smith** for a **Master's thesis** project at the University of Lethbridge. The thesis supervisor is Dr. Ramp. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses. I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in the course project paper or thesis to come from this research. I understand that my approval will be sought before any of my quotes are used.

I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time until the completion of the project by advising the student researcher in writing or in person. If I choose to withdraw during the interview, all recordings and notes from my interview will be returned to me, otherwise, the interview recordings and notes will be destroyed.

This study has been reviewed and received ethics approval through the University of Lethbridge Human Subject Research Committee. Questions about my rights as a participant in this study may be directed to the Office of Research Ethics at 403-329-2747 or research.services@uleth.ca.

For all other questions Joslin Smith can be contacted using the contact information provided on the previous page.

With full knowledge of all information previously mentioned, I am competent to agree and of my own free will, to participate in this study.

☐YES ☐NO

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.

☐YES ☐NO

I agree to the use of a pseudonym and general description of my occupation and/or status.

☐YES ☐NO

I agree to disclosure of my name and occupation status in the final report on this research and other publications stemming from it.

☐YES ☐NO

Participant Name: _____ Signature:_____
(Please Print Clearly)

Researcher Name: _____ Signature: _____
(Please Print Clearly)

Date: _____

Appendix B: Interview Guide

The Story Line

In 2004 the Alberta Provincial Government announced the construction of an Alberta Public Safety and Law Enforcement Training Center and put out a call for proposals. A bidding competition was opened to Alberta communities who were interested in submitting a proposal to host this Police and Peace Officer Training Centre in their community. Fort Macleod residents, under the leadership of Mayor Shawn Patience, and council members worked diligently to put together a winning proposal.

In September 2006, the town of Fort Macleod was chosen as the site for the Police Training College. After years of waiting for the government to move on the project, Premier Ed Stelmack, in 2011, announced construction of the proposed building and a ground breaking ceremony took place in Fort Macleod that same year. In July of 2012 Bird Design – Build Construction was awarded the bid to build the facility. A month later the provincial government cancelled the police college.

Fort Macleod was compensated for the funds used in preparing for the facility. In the 2013 local municipal elections, the residents of Fort Macleod elected a new mayor and voted to replace all but 1 councillor.

Interview Guide

1. How long have you been a resident of Fort Macleod or the surrounding area?
    a. What is your involvement in this community?
2. What has been your experience of living (and/or working) in the rural area and small town?
3. What was your involvement in the process of the Police Training College proposal?
4. Tell me about the individual/private conversations you had (or heard) regarding the Police Training College?
    a. Where did these conversations take place?
    b. Who attended (not names but friends or family)?
5. Tell me about your experience with the public meetings.
    a. How did you find out about the meeting?
    b. Who set up the agenda?
    c. Who was facilitating, presenting, answering questions?
    d. What are your thoughts on how the issues were defined? (framed or formulated?)
    e. Where there other ways of framing the issues?
    f. Where there other issues that did not get "air" time – and what were they?
6. How do you think the handling of the consultation around the Police Training College affected the relationships or friendships among the townspeople or the rural people?
7. In retrospect, how well was the community consultation handled by the town or by the provincial government?
8. What are your thoughts on the cancellation of the Police Training College?
    a. Do you think the cancellation had anything to do with the location in a rural area? Or the political stance of Southern Alberta?