CULTURE AND POWER IN THE WORKPLACE
Aboriginal Women's Perspectives on Practices to Increase Aboriginal Inclusion in Forest Processing Mills

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I. INTRODUCTION

Forestry has grown to be an important component of Aboriginal economic development initiatives. The majority (80 to 85 percent) of Aboriginal communities in Canada are situated in forested regions where isolation often precludes many forms of economic development (Parsons & Prest, 2003). In this context, forest activities have been proposed as a viable solution to the economic difficulties of Aboriginal communities in the provincial norths. Many of Canada's commercial forests lie on Aboriginal lands, both recognized and unrecognized, and Aboriginal peoples have increasingly sought and gained control over forest lands (Notzke, 1994). Ensuring that the economic benefits of forestry and of the forests are distributed to Aboriginal peoples has thus become an imperative for the business community and government. Aboriginal involvement in the forest industry has varied from full or partial ownership of forest enterprises, to special management agreements, to hiring initiatives of non-Aboriginal owned forest companies. From the perspectives of many First Nations Bands, Tribal Councils and other Aboriginal parties, improving the economic well being of their members through increased employment opportunities has often been an intended outcome from forestry development initiatives (Anderson, 1999; National Aboriginal Forestry Association [NAFA], 1994; Parsons & Prest, 2003).

Literature on Aboriginal economic development, while addressing forestry initiatives, has paid little attention to the success of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal owned forestry firms' efforts to hire and retain Aboriginal employees. Despite the increased participation of Aboriginal people in the forest industry as a whole, Aboriginal people have continued to be under-represented in forest processing employment, particularly in management and professional occupations (Mills, submitted). This paper examines practices implemented by forest processing firms to increase retention of Aboriginal employees in the

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workplace from the perspective of Aboriginal women workers.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research has suggested that Aboriginal workers face more challenges obtaining and retaining their jobs than non-Aboriginal workers. One comprehensive study of a firm that was having difficulty retaining Aboriginal workers found that in comparison to non-Aboriginal workers, Aboriginal workers felt that they were: held to higher performance standards, more closely scrutinized, less likely to be promoted, more likely to be blamed for difficulties, and less likely to be recognized for successes (Mulligan, 2001). In addition, Aboriginal workers felt that management participated in discrimination and harassment towards Aboriginal workers and that the union did not consistently represent their interests. Aboriginal workers also reported that there was no understanding of time needed for funerals, no acknowledgment of important Aboriginal holidays and that there was not anyone who understood Aboriginal issues and concerns who they could go to.

Firms and governments have introduced a wide range of organizational changes to support Aboriginal attraction and retention (Domvile, 2005; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2003; Kennedy, 1999). Proposed strategies have included both measures that focus on making organizations more aware of and responsive to Aboriginal culture (sensitivity to deaths in the extended family, culturally appropriate days off, flexible work arrangements, cultural awareness training for managers and other workers), and measures that address racism and inequality experienced by Aboriginal workers (ensuring that Aboriginal people have equal opportunity for promotion, enforcing discrimination and harassment policy). Best practice models of Aboriginal inclusion have also often recommended mechanisms to acquire Aboriginal input such as exit interviews and Aboriginal worker committees.

The outcome-oriented nature of the above work has impeded a deeper examination of Aboriginal inclusion practices themselves. Literature from other disciplines, such as education, has remained divided in terms of how Aboriginal inclusion should be achieved. The cultural revitalization literature has supported the integration of Aboriginal culture into institutional practices as the route to empowering Aboriginal people. However, this emphasis has been challenged by others who have asserted the primacy of dealing with structural issues of inequality.

Colonization de-valued Aboriginal people as a race and culturally inferior to the dominant non-Aboriginal culture. Theorists, such as Marie Battiste (2000), have asserted the importance of reclaiming the value of Aboriginal culture in order to create strong independent Aboriginal identities. Similarly, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples [RCAP] (1996) recognized that "[c]ultural education and awareness will be vital to the rediscovery and revitalization of an Aboriginal nation. The objective of these activities and processes is to build strength and self-esteem." Institutions, such as schools and workplaces, can participate in this process of cultural revitalization by reconstituting themselves as multicultural settings, thereby empowering Aboriginal people. As Battiste (1994, 2000) has indicated, this requires more than an additive approach. The dominant culture underlying everyday practices needs to be called into question and de-centred. Unfortunately, as Verna St. Denis (2004) has described, the incorporation of Aboriginal culture has often emphasized alleged Aboriginal cultural differences at the cost of challenging the structure of racism.

Focusing on Aboriginal cultural difference holds the risk of shifting the emphasis from racist practices to assumed characteristics of Aboriginality. While culture is a vast and constantly shifting matrix of knowledge, beliefs, art, values, and customs of a people, Aboriginal culture is often constructed as homogenous and unchanging (St. Denis, 2004). This cultural difference exists as an object disconnected from the contemporary cultural practices of many Aboriginal people. Thirty years ago, Vine Deloria (1969, p. 92) critiqued this notion of the authentic traditional Indian, writing, "Real problems and real people become invisible before the great romantic notion." Emphasizing culture can make solutions to racial inequity appear deceptively simple: all that needs to be done is to educate workforces about, and implement policies to accommodate, Aboriginal cultural difference. Further, in casting inclusion as an issue of the compatibility of Aboriginal culture rather than as a product of unjust practices of racial

domination, the cause of unequal distributions of power is obscured (Schick & St. Denis, 2005).

Structural inequality refers to the uneven distribution of material resources and power within an institution. This is intimately related to the culture of a workplace, and to racism. Examples of structural inequalities include discrimination in hiring and promotions, uneven application of workplace rules, as well as the cumulative impacts of subtle everyday exclusions and discriminations from co-workers and management (Essed, 2002). Structural inequality overlaps with cultural difference through cultural racism. Rather than referring to biology, cultural racism discriminates against people on the basis of cultural difference (either real or imagined). However, in this essay, we delineate cultural difference from structural inequality resulting from racism. We use cultural difference to refer to company practices towards Aboriginal inclusion that address imagined or real Aboriginal cultural differences and structural inequality to denote company practices that aim to address historical and present structural inequalities.

In this paper we examine how Aboriginal women working in the forestry processing mills talked about company practices of Aboriginal inclusion based on cultural difference and structural inequality. Of particular interest to us was how Aboriginal women workers spoke about company practices of Aboriginal inclusion based on cultural difference and structural inequality and how these related to feelings of empowerment in the workplace.

III. METHODS

This research formed part of a larger study that interviewed 40 women working in forest processing firms located in the northern prairies. Of these women, 12 self identified as being of Cree, Métis or Dene ancestry. This paper is based on interviews with these 12 women who worked across five different forest processing mills.

Our sample of Aboriginal women workers presents a preliminary look at often neglected voices within the forest sector. Aboriginal women consist of a small portion of total forest processing workers, comprising 2%, or approximately 335 of the 17,150 forest processing workers across Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba in 2001 (Mills 2006 unpublished data). Since our research only represents a small proportion of this population (3.6%), this research cannot be presumed to represent the population of Aboriginal women working in forest processing mills. Rather, through a deeper exploration of how these particular women discussed Aboriginal inclusion in the workplace, we examined the ways that some Aboriginal women responded to the question of Aboriginal inclusion in terms of incorporating cultural difference and changing structural inequalities in the workplace.

Semi-structured interviews with Aboriginal women probed for the strategies that the firm had taken to represent the interests of Aboriginal workers. Questions asked what the firm could do to represent Aboriginal culture in the workplace, the challenges facing Aboriginal workers and how the firm represented Aboriginal workers. The women were also asked whether they had experienced discrimination and harassment, and whether they thought challenges and opportunities in the workplace (in terms of promotion, hiring, and retaining their job) were different for Aboriginal workers.

We examined the women's responses to these questions by categorizing the different practices discussed (both those that were emergent and those that were asked about directly) as either based on cultural difference or on structural inequality. We then examined the text to determine whether the women talked about the practices in a positive or negative way. We used textually-based discourse analysis. This involved exploring both the content and the action of the women's talk in response to questions about Aboriginal culture in the workplace. The action of the talk refers to how what is said functions to create meaning. According to Norman Fairclough (2003), there are three analytically separable elements involved in the processes of meaning-making. These are the production of the text (focus on the speaker), the text itself (the instance of language), and the reception of the text (focus on the listener). Thus, as researchers, to try to understand meaning we need to account for our positions as researchers, the position of research subjects, and how the relations between researchers and subjects play out in the text.

We approached this project as non-Aboriginal researchers seeking to understand and challenge racism. While we cannot discount the

impact that our social location as non-Aboriginal researchers has had on our research (St. Denis & Schick, 2003), we have also had the freedom to expose ourselves to the writings of the racially oppressed in what Hurtado and Stewart (1997) refer to as cross-over politics. In this way, we can begin to gain an (incomplete) understanding of and sensitivity to marginalized subject positions as interviews serve as a point of translation across racial and class boundaries (Best, 2003). In our transcripts, the interviewer sought explanation of terms at points during the interviews, but even more tellingly the participants sometimes tried to ensure mutual understanding with phrases such as "do you understand."

The Aboriginal women's representations of workplace inclusion and exclusion did not only reflect their varied perspectives as Aboriginal people, but also their positions as women. Since both women and Aboriginal people were underrepresented in forest processing mills, Aboriginal women comprised a particularly small proportion of workers. Yoder (2002) used the notion of tokenism to describe the greater visibility of marginalized groups when they form a small minority in the workplace. According to Yoder, the outcomes of tokenism for marginalized groups have included social isolation, increased stress and a higher pressure to perform. Furthermore, for women of colour in male-dominated workplaces, the intersection of race and gender led to different experiences of tokenism from non-Aboriginal women (Yoder & Berendsen, 2001). The experiences of the Aboriginal women in this study thus likely differed from those of Aboriginal men and from non-Aboriginal women, two groups who are sometimes able to use their status as men to pass as non-Aboriginal (see Henry, in press) or their status as non-Aboriginal to pass as men. It is from this intersectional position, disadvantaged by race and gender, that Aboriginal women workers conveyed their understanding of workplace inclusion policies for Aboriginal people.

Through the interviews, participants acted to translate their stories across race and class divides to researchers to voice their concerns to a larger audience. Our own research goals were to work to understand and represent marginalized voices in the workplace. Examining some of the constructions of corporate inclusion strategies employed by Aboriginal women provided an alternative lens through which to understand company practices.

IV. RESULTS

For the Aboriginal women interviewed both structural inequality and cultural inclusion initiatives were important. Although the importance placed on having Aboriginal culture represented in the workplace varied among the women, addressing structural inequality was important to almost all of the women interviewed. In both cases, however, redistributing power to Aboriginal workers was understood as integral to the practice's success.

In response to questions about the inclusion of Aboriginal interests and culture in the workplace, the women described firm practices that they had experienced and those that they thought would be beneficial. These included both practices based on Aboriginal cultural difference and those that intended to address structural inequality (Table 1). There was no clear correspondence between a focus on cultural difference or structural inequalities and whether practices were described in a positive or negative fashion. Instead, how practices were conceived and implemented often determined how they were discussed by the women interviewed. As a result, some practices were described both in a positive and a negative light such as Aboriginal worker committees and Aboriginal awareness training sessions.

Eight out of 12 women talked about practices addressing Aboriginal cultural difference in the workplace positively. Favourable accounts of the incorporation of Aboriginal culture in the workplace were often situations where Aboriginal people had control over their implementation. Suggestions of practices that were or would be beneficial included worker controlled initiatives to invite Elders to the mill, having Aboriginal Day off, and employment contracts that allowed for the importance of extended family in relation to bereavement leave. More negative renditions of practices to include Aboriginal culture in the workplace included presentations by non-Aboriginal experts, the use of Aboriginal employees to sell the company as culturally aware, and decision making that contradicts company's policies.

Table 1. Women's discussions of firm practices (both desired and experienced) and whether they described them in positive ways or saw them as negative or tokenistic.

	Positive	*Negative*
Cultural difference	1. Culturally appropriate employment contracts • 41 bereavement leave that includes extended family [4, 14, 18, 37] • 42 Aboriginal day off [10, 14, 37, 38, 40] 2. Aboriginal worker controlled incorporations of Aboriginal culture [4, 14, 36, 37] 3. Flexibility to accommodate worker's personal circumstances [14, 18, 36, 37]	1. Cultural awareness sessions led by non-Aboriginal managers, or external experts [2, 14] 2. Asking Aboriginal people to represent the company at career fairs or events as an Aboriginal face [10] 3. Promotion of pro-Aboriginal and family friendly culture without follow through [4, 26, 37, 38]
Structural inequality	1. Having Aboriginal managers/promoting Aboriginal people [4, 10, 14, 24, 37] 2. No discrimination from employers [2, 8, 18, 26, 36, 37, 38] 3. Worker committee to address issues pertaining to Aboriginal workers [26, 40] 4. Address racism among workers [2, 26]	1. Not being listened to • 41 Aboriginal committee with no power [10] • 42 No voice in day to day operations [14, 37] 2. Discrimination and harassment policy not enforced [10, 36, 37].

In the context of working in mills that were often unfriendly for Aboriginal people, all of the women interviewed felt that practices that addressed structural inequality facing Aboriginal people in the workplace were important. This talk was concerned with practices that addressed racism in the workplace and that ensured that Aboriginal workers were treated without discrimination by employers in hiring, promotion and day to day operations. Similarly, Aboriginal women discussed the lack of enforcement of discrimination and harassment policy, and the passing over of Aboriginal workers for promotion opportunities negatively.

Discourse Analysis

We found three major themes to how our sample of Aboriginal women workers negotiated questions of the inclusion of Aboriginal culture in the workplace. In the first theme, we explored how women variously reported attempts to incorporate Aboriginal cultural difference as empowering and disempowering. It was empowering to incorporate Aboriginal culture when the presenter was someone respected as a cultural authority by the Aboriginal community and the women identified with the version of culture presented. It was disempowering when a non-Aboriginal presenter promoted a version of Aboriginal cultural difference that women did not identify with. This relates to the second theme, that Aboriginal people needed greater power within the mill for appropriate or empowering inclusion of Aboriginal culture to occur. Finally, some women stressed that including cultural difference was less important than addressing fundamental issues of racism and structured inequality in the mill.

Incorporating Cultural Difference as Power

Many individuals now emphasize the role of the revitalization and assertion of distinct Aboriginal culture as key to reconstituting strong independent Aboriginal identities (Batiste 2000). However, the assertion of cultural difference as a source of empowerment depended on the person and the presentation. First, the individual needed to identify both with the version of culture presented and its appropriate incorporation into their workplace. Second, the presentation or activity needed to respect and involve those deemed traditional cultural authorities by Aboriginal people. As the RCAP (1996) stated cultural education and awareness often requires the participation of Aboriginal elders. One woman reflected on an Aboriginal Elder's visit to the mill.

> I: What do you think of that might support cultural values in the workplace?
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> . . . .
>
> P4: I don't know like when we started up here there was an Elder had come out and blessed the mill here (pause) that was the first time anything had ever been done. One of our new guys, [name] now his wife had mentioned it to him and that's how it came about. I was quite interested as to why they did that all of a sudden. It was pretty good and he was talking to us there, asking if we wanted to, if he wanted to bless us or something like that. I know there were a few guys that went and spoke to him, they were real interested in it. But there had never been anything really around there. That was the first time any Elder had ever come out there, sort of to be in the building.

This response demonstrated the agency of Aboriginal workers to integrate Aboriginal culture into the workplace. The Elder's visit was organized by Aboriginal people, and sensitive to the desires of Aboriginal workers. The Elder consulted with workers about their desires, "asking if we wanted." And during the visit agency is presented as belonging to workers, who "went and spoke to him" and "were real interested." This story illustrated a positive incorporation of Aboriginal culture into the workplace since the event was able to empower Aboriginal workers who were able to shape its occurrence and help determine its direction.

Stressed throughout the narrative was the unusualness of an incorporation of Aboriginal culture into the workplace that respected traditional cultural authorities in the Aboriginal community. The speaker introduced the story as outside of the ordinary, pausing and then stating "that was the first time anything had ever been done." A few sentences later she again emphasized that this incident was a break from the normal pattern since it happened "all of a sudden." And she closed the story as she introduced it, as the "first time." The speaker thus emphasized not only that she felt that having an Elder come to the workplace was a positive incorporation of culture, but also that other practices of cultural awareness had not achieved the same level of respect for Aboriginal culture.

Thus, while many Aboriginal women interviewed were supportive of the inclusion of difference in the form of Aboriginal culture within the workplace, they portrayed the company's version of the incorporation of Aboriginal culture as superficial. Another woman contrasted a presentation on cultural awareness implemented by the managers with an Elder's visit to the mill.

> I: And have you participated in any Aboriginal Awareness Program as an employee at [the mill]?
>
> P14: Well we did have, when I first started there, we did have part of our orientation, cultural and diversity (pause) now they didn't even have an Aboriginal person come in and talk, they had the managers talk about it. It didn't really stick with me. Although when we first opened up again here we did have an Elder come and do a smudge and then when we re-opened they did a smudge too.
>
> I: And how did you feel about that?
>
> P14: I was okay with it.
>
> I: Did you see it as a positive thing?
>
> P14: Oh, yeah I did. There were a few snickers. Especially when there was smudging and stuff, there were a few snickers, like I could hear people behind me thinking, or you know saying like "oh that smells like pot" and I'm thinking "oh well,

> each to their own." I mean I grew up with that, my Dad did stuff like that so.

This woman had reservations about company efforts to promote Aboriginal awareness through manager presentations on diversity. She distinguished between Aboriginal people and managers, and implied that managers lacked the skills and knowledge to discuss Aboriginal culture. The ineffectiveness of the manager presentation to create an inclusive environment was evident with her statement "It didn't really stick with me."

In contrast, an Aboriginal Elder leading a ceremony at the mill was constructed as a more positive incorporation of Aboriginal culture at the mill. The speaker communicated the complexity of how she understood the situation by discussing the negative comments of other workers: the problem of racism, a theme we shall return to again later. She then reinforced importance of this incorporation of Aboriginal culture for her personally by construing it as meaningful through connection to the cultural practices in her family. She, thus, communicated that she had gained personal value from the respectful incorporation of Aboriginal culture, while noting that this did not always occur. Another woman echoed this sentiment of the inclusion of Aboriginal culture as tokenistic.

> I: You said there was some training at the beginning?
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> P2: Oh yeah, it was cultural sensitivity. They had a speaker come in for three days, an Anthropologist, a non-Aboriginal Anthropologist and there was mixed reactions about it. All the non-Aboriginal people liked it and the Aboriginal people didn't care for it because everybody is supposed to be the same why were they being put out like a special group. And there is a lot of traditional Aboriginal people and then there is a lot of contemporary you know — cultures evolve. They don't stay on the horse, like do you know what I mean? And I know a lot of Aboriginal people were like (pause) it was painful for them. It was like oh please I just want to be treated like everybody else. It was interesting but by holding that and having that it made a statement by the company that racism would not be tolerated, that's what it said. But the methodology was (pause) for me it being a non-Aboriginal anthropologist being an authority [on] Aboriginal Culture, which I always find so Eurocentric. But (pause) again that's just my own opinion.
>
> . . . .
>
> I: So that's all they mentioned was Aboriginals?
>
> P2: Yeah, it was called cultural awareness. This was a guy who has done cultural sensitivity for the RCMP — we know how well aware the RCMP are.
>
> I: The guy that came in, the Anthropologist you mean?
>
> P2: Yeah cause one of our resource guy is an ex RCMP so he knew of this guy because this guy was used for decades for RCMP training, but (pause) no comment.

Again, this speaker placed heavy emphasis on the inappropriateness of having presentations on Aboriginal culture by non-Aboriginal experts. She indicated that the delineation of a non-Aboriginal anthropologist, someone outside the Aboriginal community, as the expert on that community was "Eurocentric." This professional was ever more tainted as "a guy who has done cultural sensitivity for the RCMP," as she sarcastically remarked on the level of awareness or lack thereof among police officers in the prairies. The relationship between the police and Aboriginal people on the prairies is antagonistic and fraught with tension. While Aboriginal people consist of only a small percentage of total population (13% in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and 5% in Alberta, according to 2001 Census figures), they have been grossly over-represented in the justice system (>50%), something researchers have contributed to a complex of factors including age, poverty, and under-education, as well as over-policing (LaPrairie, 1997; Monture-Angus, 1999). In Saskatchewan, there have been several high profile incidents of police mistreatment of Aboriginal people, most prominently the suspected police role in the death of Neil Stonechild (Wright, 2004). The speakers' sensitivity to the inappropriateness of the non-Aboriginal anthropologist highlighted the necessity of greater attentiveness in selecting presenters on Aboriginal culture that are respected by and empowering for Aboriginal people.

Further, the speaker problematized the construction of Aboriginal culture as tied to tradi-

tion. She acknowledged that many Aboriginal people are traditional, but also stated that many have "contemporary" identifications. In clarifying Aboriginal cultural change she challenged predominant constructions of Aboriginal culture, and facilitated racial translation with the non-Aboriginal interviewer, checking "do you know what I mean?" While she acknowledged that by incorporating cultural awareness training the company indicated that Aboriginal people were to be included and that "that racism would not be tolerated," she indicated that the way the session had been carried out was "painful" for Aboriginal people. The presentation dually disregarded local sources of authority on traditional culture and contained Aboriginal people as culturally frozen traditional beings different from non-Aboriginal people. Countering this, she twice emphasized a desire to be treated the same and not different (and inferior).

Having Aboriginal cultural values recognized in the workplace was important to some of the women interviewed. This included religious traditions, such as smudging, and the recognition of different family forms, as well as an appreciation of contemporary cultural events. For Aboriginal women, employment contracts that had been designed by and in the interests of non-Aboriginal male workers and managers did not allow for their different concerns.

Incorporating cultural difference requires power

Reversing the formula of cultural inclusion yielding workplace empowerment, several women described power as integral to the incorporation of Aboriginal culture. Thus, several women suggested that in order to ensure appropriate inclusion and accommodation of Aboriginal culture in the workplace, companies need to give Aboriginal workers greater voice [transcript numbers 4, 10, 14, 24, 26, 37].

> I: Can you think of any other ways that the firm could take Aboriginal interests into consideration when making decisions?
>
> P14: Maybe they should have some Aboriginals sitting in on their meetings so they understand because I think that's a big problem too that they don't understand the Aboriginal culture. Well you know, just. And there are a few fellows there that are very cultural and the lack of knowledge, it's never asked, any information or time or to share anything.

This woman presented a scenario where there was problem of translation between the managers who were non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal workers. Moreover, while the woman was knowledgeable of the company's efforts to improve retention of Aboriginal workers, she believed that Aboriginal workers were not asked about their cultural knowledge. In another woman's account of her experiences participating in an Aboriginal worker's committee set up by the company, she described her feeling of disempowerment and being tokenization by the company.

> I: Have you participated in any other kind of Aboriginal Awareness things?
>
> P10: Through work?
>
> I: Yes.
>
> P10: Um (pause) I have I'm just trying to think of what they are (pause) I'm just trying to think. There is a group that has to do with Aboriginal involvement.... But I went there every two weeks for six months and it was like it was run by management and they weren't there to (pause) well what they said was to get native input about and you know to have a better work place but they really didn't want you to do anything, it's just that to me, and that's why I left it. I left because it was just a front thing, to say that this was going on and we have an Aboriginal committee and we are doing this. But for you to [not] have any authority to do anything.
>
> I: What kind of things would you like them to do?
>
> P10: Well if they are going to have a committee like that it should be run by Aboriginal people that are out there and they should authority to do whatever (pause) set up things in place then (pause) not just go to meetings and we should do this or we're going to this fair, Aboriginal Committee. And then you they say, they have these expos, you know job expos. You get tired of being asked the day before they're having one, because you're an Indian go and work at this fair, career fair. Because then you face them saying, "you are representing us."

> I: Is there anything that you think they could change about that committee that you could have seen the committee doing that would have been helpful to kind of support Aboriginal cultural values in the workplace or?
>
> P10: I think if they would have got rid of all the management people that were in there, that were not Native, because it was more a control thing.

The woman described her frustration with her participation on the diversity awareness committee that she felt that it was "just a front thing," and not about empowerment or workplace change. She indicated the company was not doing enough to address racism in the workplace and that it was also not interested in listening to Aboriginal people to learn how to address these issues. Instead, the company had focused on using her as a company representative token Aboriginal at career fairs. Instead of feeling that she had power to influence the company, the respondent reported feeling that the Aboriginal Committee was being used by the company as a public relations tool. Responding to the question of how the company could support Aboriginal culture, the woman used an overstatement to highlight that the issue was one of "control." Thus, it was not merely the tokenizing of management practices that was the key issue, but rather who controlled the incorporation of Aboriginal culture in the company.

Structural Inequality

The Aboriginal women interviewed stressed that addressing structural inequality in the company was vital to serious Aboriginal inclusion. These included efforts to challenge racial inequalities in the workplace, such as addressing racism or promoting Aboriginal workers into positions of power. One stance taken by several Aboriginal women was that Aboriginal culture did not need to be brought into the workplace in order to have an inclusive workplace [2, 8, 24, 26, 36].

> I: Is there anything that the firm could do to promote, or do you think it would be a good thing to promote any other cultural values in the workplace?
>
> P2: Well, in most situations I think cultural is usually something just like religion so I don't know what steps they have taken.

This Métis speaker implicitly equated Aboriginal culture with traditionalism, and like religion she distinguished it as something out of place at the worksite. Also, in the context of this woman's earlier statement that "cultures evolve," her comparison of Aboriginal culture to religion could be understood to signal that whether Aboriginal people ascribe to notions of Aboriginal cultural difference is an individual choice. The statement "I don't know what steps they've taken" communicated a meaningful ignorance. She did not know what steps the company had taken to incorporate Aboriginal cultural difference because it was not important to her. Her response challenged the suggestion, implied by the interviewer's question, that all Aboriginal people are culturally different.

Following a similar line, when asked how the company could support Aboriginal cultural values, several women answered the question in a way that redirected the focus of the conversation from culture back to questions of the distribution of power within the firm [10, 26, 37, 24]. Thus rather than answer the question about culture, the women stated what they wanted to convey.

> I: And what can you think of that might support Aboriginal cultural values in the workplace?
>
> P24: Well I think first of all, like even if they did have, like someone who was Aboriginal working in management, because I know of people that belong to some of the, like the First Nations and that and who have applied out there but have never been accepted even for a simple secretary job.
>
> . . . .
>
> I: Okay, can you think of anything else that might support cultural values in the workplace, like in an ideal world, what could be in the workplace that would support cultural values?
>
> P24: I don't know.

In her response to a question about Aboriginal cultural values, this woman communicated her frustration with a lack of movement of Aboriginal workers into positions of power, or

even "simple" but desirable positions. When the question about Aboriginal cultural values was reiterated, the woman indicated "I don't know." Her emphasis on issues of structural inequity in the workplace emphasized this as a significant priority for Aboriginal inclusion, while questions of cultural difference were unanswerable and secondary.

It is also interesting to note the interviewer slides in rephrasing the question to ask about support for "cultural values." Here culture was presumed to be only a quality of Aboriginality. While every workplace has some sort of culture, the focus shifts from understanding how the dominant workplace culture operates and excludes, the Aboriginal woman's earlier attempted emphasis, to how the workplace should modify to adapt to the cultural difference of Aboriginal people. Thus, through a subtle move the loci of the problem moves from the workplace to the culturally different Aboriginal worker. But Aboriginal women continually articulated that the problem was not their inherent cultural difference as much as structural workplace exclusion. Aboriginal women emphasized that for the firm to adequately represent Aboriginal interests, Aboriginal people needed to be empowered within the workplace through promotion to positions of power and through other mechanisms to increase the input of Aboriginal workers (such as Aboriginal committees where Aboriginal people have voice).

V. CONCLUSION

The results of this exploratory study suggest that effective Aboriginal inclusion can take various forms, although there may be common fundamentals underlying favoured approaches. Structurally empowering Aboriginal women through equity in promotions, and ensuring Aboriginal representation in management and decision-making was universally supported in our sample. Similarly, all of the participants portrayed the effective implementation of discrimination and harassment policies to prevent the further marginalization of Aboriginal people in the workplace as important. Finally, some Aboriginal women presented the inclusion of Aboriginal culture as empowering, as long as Aboriginal workers' preferences were prioritized. Common to all of these successful strategies for Aboriginal inclusion is recognizing inequity in the workplace, and implementing policies and practices that seek to ameliorate power imbalances.

While these results cannot be generalized to all workers, they do provide important preliminary insights that help to formulate future research questions. Our results suggest that effective Aboriginal inclusion must seek to empower Aboriginal workers through both removing barriers to and providing new routes for Aboriginal workers' agency in the workplace. Future research needs include addressing the nature of these barriers and evolving mechanisms for Aboriginal worker agency in different workplaces in different geographic areas. How do affirmative action policies change workplace dynamics? What programs best address racism on the shop floor? And what role do cultural awareness trainings play? This preliminary study indicates that the solutions to such questions are not simple, but require complex understandings of the relationships between culture and power, and necessitate dialogue with the workers in question.

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