

ABORIGINAL CULTURAL IDENTITY

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This paper is dedicated to the memory of Professor Jens Peder Hart Hansen (University of Copenhagen) who contributed so much to the health and well-being of Indigenous peoples throughout the Circumpolar world.

Abstract / Résumé

In the history of contact between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada, there has been an imbalance in acculturative influences. Generally, Aboriginal peoples have been changed substantially, with serious erosion of their cultures and identities. However, this dominance by Euro-Canadian peoples has also been met by resistance by Aboriginal peoples. Policy and programme changes to alter the relationship between these two sets of people are suggested, including a reduction in pressures toward assimilation and segregation which have historically resulted in the marginalization of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada.

L'histoire des contacts entre les Aborigènes et les Eurocanadiens témoigne d'un déséquilibre sur le plan des forces d'acculturation. En général, les Aborigènes ont subi de profonds changements, incluant une érosion de leur identité culturelle. Néanmoins, la domination culturelle eurocanadienne s'est aussi heurtée à la résistance autochtone. L'auteur propose des modifications aux politiques et aux programmes destinées à transformer les relations entre ces deux groupes. Ces propositions comprennent une réduction de la pression en faveur de l'assimilation et de la ségrégation, pression qui a eu historiquement pour conséquences la marginalisation des peuples aborigènes canadiens.

Introduction

When individuals experience intercultural contact, the issue of who they are comes to the fore. Prior to major contact, this question is hardly an issue; people routinely and naturally think of themselves as part of their cultural community, and usually value this attachment in positive terms. Of course, other life transitions (such as adolescence) can lead people to wonder, and even doubt, who they are. But it is only during intercultural contact that their cultural identity may become a matter of concern (Berry, 1992).

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples established a research project on Aboriginal cultural identity, and commissioned reports on the subject. This paper is based on one of those reports, and draws upon concepts, data and analyses that were carried out as a consultant to that project (Berry, 1994).¹ The main line of argument in this paper is that intercultural contact between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada (both historically, and at the present time), has initiated a process of acculturation (at both the cultural and psychological levels), during which Aboriginal peoples have experienced cultural disruption, leading to reduced well-being and to identity confusion and loss. It is further argued that since this process has resulted from interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, the key to reestablishing a sense of well-being and a secure cultural identity resides in restructuring the relationships between these two communities.

This paper contains four sections: a discussion of the concept of cultural identity, as it derives from the social science literature; a brief review of the process and consequences of intercultural contact; a summary of the main findings; and a discussion of their implications for policy and programmes that may lead to more positive identities, and to cultural and psychological outcomes that are more fulfilling.

Cultural Identity

Cultural identity is a concept that has deep roots in social science research. Wylie (1961) catalogued almost a thousand studies, spanning a century of research. Since that time, research has continued at a high level, with the result that there has been a proliferation of concepts and terms (see for example, Knight and Bernal, 1992; Breakwell, 1992; Kalin and Berry, 1995). The following indicates how the concept of *cultural identity* is used in this report.

To begin, self-concept is a term with two components. The first (self) has two possible meanings: one is the self as subject or agent (i.e., the "knower"), and the second is the self as object (i.e., the "known") (Taylor

and Dubé, 1986). The other component (concept) refers to one's knowledge or beliefs. Altogether, then, the term self-concept means what an individual knows or believes about oneself (Wylie, 1961:1).

Such knowledge can range widely over a variety of topics; however, it is possible to distinguish knowledge that a person has about oneself as an individual (e.g., one's abilities, attitudes and personality traits), and knowledge a person has about oneself in relation to other individuals or groups (i.e., social aspects, such as gender, class, ethnicity, nationality).

The notion of identity is closely linked to self-concept. Basically, it is the way in which one identifies oneself, for example in response to questions such as "Who are you?", or "How would you describe yourself?". Responses can usually be placed in two categories, similar to the individual/social distinction noted for self-concept. Statements such as "I am honest, I am bright, I am physically active" would be components of one's personal identity; statements such as "I am Canadian, I am Albertan, I am Cree", would be components of one's social identity (Wong-Rieger and Taylor, 1981).

However, the notion of identity is usually considered to go beyond the belief or knowledge that is emphasized in the notion of self-concept. Identity usually implies a sense of attachment (Aboud, 1981; Hocoy, 1996; Keefe, 1992). In the view of Tajfel (1982), social identity is "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from one's knowledge of one's membership in a social group (or groups), together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership". That is, there are both knowledge (perceptual) and evaluation (affective) aspects of social identity.

There are many social groups that can serve as means of achieving a social identity. Some are related to social class, others to political parties or clubs and associations. Perhaps the most important form of social identity is one that links an individual to some large collectivity such as nation, culture or ethnic group. There is now a large literature on national, cultural and ethnic identity, one that serves as a basis for this study (see Phinney, 1990; UNESCO, 1985).

In principle, it does not matter from a social science point of view which of these three terms is most appropriate for understanding Aboriginal identity. The choice of *cultural identity* as the appropriate concept here signals the view that Aboriginal peoples in Canada share many cultural attributes, and frequently a common history in relation to the larger society, even though there are many specific cultures in the strict sense of the term. The alternative of *ethnic identity* might signal the view that Aboriginal peoples are an ethnic group like any other ethnic group, while the alternative of national identity might possibly signal certain political aspirations that are

not part of the contemporary agenda, and might be confused with the larger nation state (Canada), rather than being taken to refer to First Nations.

In this paper, the term *cultural identity* will be used to refer to a complex set of features that together indicate how one thinks of oneself in relation to Aboriginal peoples. First, it includes the knowledge aspect: one's perception or belief that one is Aboriginal. Second, it refers to the sense of importance or attachment that one has to an Aboriginal group or groups, in effect indicating whether being Aboriginal is considered to be an important aspect of one's social identity. Third, it involves positive or negative feelings about being Aboriginal, indicating whether the person gains positive or negative self-esteem by seeing oneself as Aboriginal. And fourth, it refers to the degree of identity maintenance that a person desires, indicating whether one wants to keep and display one's Aboriginal identity, or conversely to change or hide it. Figure 1 illustrates these distinctions.

These four features are conceptually independent of each other, but they exist in a logical and psychological sequence: for example, unless one perceives oneself as Aboriginal, the next three features are irrelevant and unless being Aboriginal is important, it probably doesn't matter if one likes or dislikes being Aboriginal, or whether one intends to maintain or change it.

Although the Figure shows simple alternative choices (e.g., "No" vs "Yes"), in reality each choice is the end of a dimension along which people's responses can vary, from "strongly no" through to "strongly yes", or "very little" through to "very much" etc. In this study all four features are of interest, and attempts have been made to assess each of them.

Another important distinction in the identity literature is between symbolic and behavioural identity (Gans, 1979). In the case of symbolic identity, there may be a clear perception of high importance and positive esteem about one's identity, and probably a desire to maintain it; however, what one actually does to express it may not be much in evidence. There are many possible reasons for persons not to behave in ways that are consistent with their inner feelings. These include abiding by laws or rules (e.g., prohibitions against speaking one's language, or practising one's religion), fear of ridicule or discrimination (e.g., in social, housing or employment situations), and a sense of shame (e.g., from having internalized the negative views about one's culture that may predominate in the larger society). The first four features of Figure 1 may be considered to be in the realm of symbolic cultural identity.

Behavioural identity involves the expression of these underlying beliefs and feelings about one's identity in one's daily life. Speaking one's language, practicing one's religion, dressing and eating, and engaging in social

Feature

Response Alternatives

Perception

"Do I see myself as an Aboriginal Person?"

1. No (Exit) 2. Yes

Importance

"Is it important or not to be an Aboriginal Person?"

3. No (little) 4. Yes (much)

Esteem

"Do I like being an Aboriginal Person?"

5. No (change) 6. Yes (positive)

Maintenance

"Do I want to remain an Aboriginal Person?"

7. No (change) 8. Yes (maintain)

Behavioural Expression

"Do I express my Aboriginal Identity in my daily behaviour?"

9. No 10. Yes

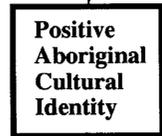


Figure 1: Features of Symbolic and Behavioural Aboriginal Cultural Identity

relations with children and adults in culturally-appropriate ways, are all examples of the behavioural expression of one's cultural identity. We may now add a behavioural expression feature to Figure 1 to represent one's behavioural cultural identity. Those who wish to maintain their identity may or may not express it (for the reasons given above), while those who are not motivated to maintain it are unlikely to exhibit an Aboriginal cultural identity. However, under some circumstances (e.g., community or family pressures, or for commercial or employment opportunities), an individual may be induced to behave superficially as an Aboriginal person (represented by the dotted line in Figure 1), without the presence of the underlying (symbolic) identity as an Aboriginal person. These possible relationships between symbolic identity and behavioural identity are illustrated at the bottom of Figure 1.

Beyond these five components of cultural identity, there is a sixth aspect that is concerned with relationships among components: this is known as identity consolidation vs identity confusion. Not all identities are consolidated in the sense that they are clear or consistent; many are "conflicted" or inconsistent in the sense that individuals don't know who they really are, or they have incompatible ideas and feelings about themselves. In terms of Figure 1, where a "positive Aboriginal cultural identity" exists, this is evidence of a consolidated identity. However, a confused identity is indicated when there is a negative orientation to any of the five components of identity, or when there is inconsistency among, or uncertainty about, one's orientations to the five components.

In summary, Aboriginal cultural identity is viewed here as an internal (symbolic) state (made up of cognitive, affective and motivational components) and external (behavioural) expression of being an Aboriginal person (individual emphasis), and a member of an Aboriginal community (social emphasis). A positive Aboriginal cultural identity is comprised of a number of interrelated features, including the perception of oneself as Aboriginal, considering this to be important, having positive feelings about being Aboriginal, wanting to remain an Aboriginal person, and expressing these in one's daily behaviour. Various degrees of a negative Aboriginal cultural identity are comprised of: not seeing oneself as Aboriginal; but if so, not considering it to be important; but if important, not liking or enjoying it; but if so, not wanting to maintain it; but if so, not being able to express it in daily life. A consolidated cultural identity exists when there is consistency among components; a confused identity is present when there is inconsistency or uncertainty.

Psychological Acculturation

It is clear that contact between cultures brings about changes at both the group and the individual levels. A central concept in understanding this process is that of acculturation. Acculturation was first identified as a cultural level phenomenon by anthropologists such as Redfield *et al.* (1936) who defined it as culture change resulting from contact between two autonomous cultural groups. Acculturation is also an individual-level phenomenon, requiring individual members of both the larger society and the various non-dominant groups to work out new forms of relationships in their daily lives. This idea was introduced by Graves (1967), who has proposed the notion of *psychological acculturation* to refer to these new behaviours and strategies that individuals use in these culture contact situations. One of the findings of subsequent research in this area (Berry, 1997) is that there are vast individual differences in how people attempt to deal with acculturative change (termed "acculturation strategies"). These strategies have three aspects: their preferences, or how they would like to acculturate ("acculturation attitudes"; see Berry *et al.*, 1989); how much change they actually undergo ("behavioural shifts"; see Berry, 1980); and how much of a problem these changes are for them (the phenomenon of "acculturative stress"; see Berry *et al.*, 1987; Berry and Kim, 1988).

Perhaps the most useful way to identify the various orientations individuals may have toward acculturation is to note that two issues usually predominate in the daily life of most acculturating individuals. One pertains to the maintenance and development of one's cultural distinctiveness in society, deciding whether or not one's own cultural identity and customs are of value and should be retained. The other issue involves the desirability of inter-cultural contact, deciding whether relations with other groups in the larger society are of value and should be sought. These two issues are essentially questions of values, and may be responded to on a continuous scale, from positive to negative, (with a "Yes" response indicating agreement, and a "No" response indicating disagreement with the question). In Figure 2 is a framework showing four general acculturation strategies that are available to individuals and to groups living in culturally diverse societies, towards which individuals may hold attitudes; these are assimilation, biculturalism, separation, and marginalization.

When the first question is answered negatively ("no"), and the second is answered positively ("yes") the *assimilation* option is defined, namely, relinquishing one's cultural identity and moving into, and becoming part of, the larger society. This can take place by way of absorption of a non-dominant group into an established dominant group; or it can be by way of the

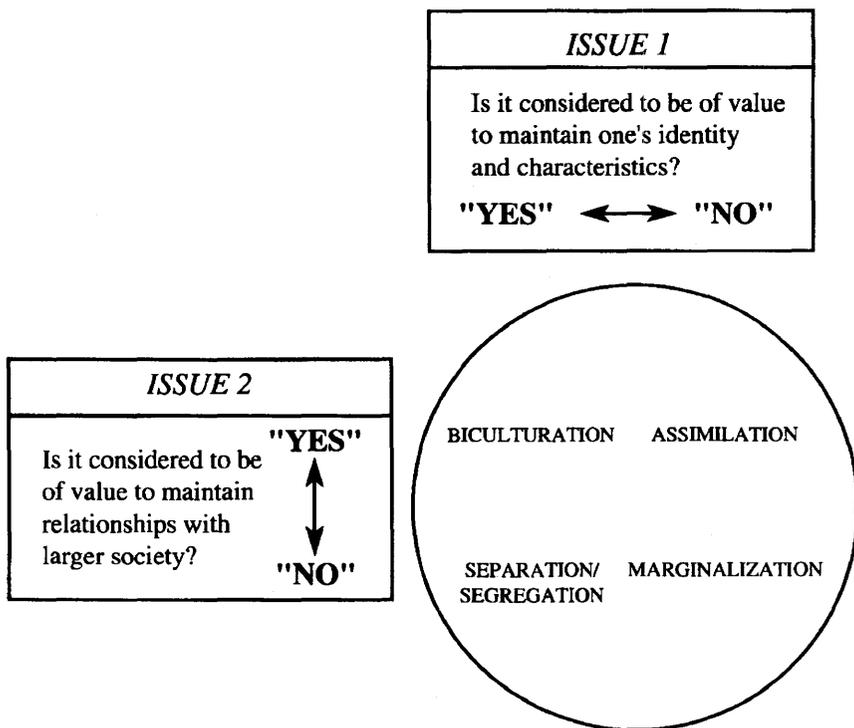


Figure 2: Four Acculturation Strategies Based on Orientations to Two Underlying Issues During Culture Contact

merging of many groups to form a new society, as in the "melting pot" concept.

The *biculturation*² option implies a positive orientation toward the maintenance of the cultural integrity of the non-dominant group, as well as the movement by the group to become an integral part of a larger societal framework. When this occurs, there is a large number of distinguishable cultural groups, all cooperating within a larger social system, resulting in the "mosaic" that is promoted in Canada. This mosaic is usually considered to be an ideal, one that is often challenged by reality. However, research evidence clearly demonstrates that those who prefer, and are able to achieve biculturation are generally those with relatively good mental health and a positive cultural identity (see e.g., Berry *et al.*, 1987; LaFromboise *et al.*, 1993; Trimble and Medicine, 1984). In much of the literature (see Berry,

1997), this bicultural strategy thus appears to be the one most suited to the needs and well-being of most acculturating peoples.

When there are no relations with the larger society, and this is accompanied by a maintenance of cultural identity and traditions, another option is defined. Depending upon which group (the dominant or non-dominant) controls the situation, this option may take the form either of *segregation* or *separation*. When the pattern is imposed by the dominant group, classic segregation to "keep people in their place" appears. On the other hand, the maintenance of a traditional way of life outside full participation in the larger society (i.e., separation) may derive from a cultural group's desire to lead an independent cultural existence. In these terms, segregation and separation differ primarily with respect to which group or groups have the power to determine the outcome.

Finally, there is an option that is difficult to define precisely, possibly because it is accompanied by a good deal of collective and individual confusion and anxiety. It is characterized by striking out against the larger society and by feelings of alienation, loss of self and cultural identity, and by acculturative stress. This option is *marginalization*, in which groups lose cultural and psychological contact with both their traditional culture and the larger society. When imposed by the larger society, it can lead to the total destruction of the non-dominant group. When it becomes relatively permanent, it constitutes the classical situation of marginality (Stonequist, 1935). Identity problems are most likely to occur among marginalized individuals and groups, and is evidenced by the presence of identity confusion (as defined earlier).

Attitudes towards these various ways of dealing with acculturation have been assessed in many cultural groups. In most studies, individuals have a general preference for one of these strategies over the other three (Berry, *et al.*, 1989); however, there are also variations in this general preference depending on two factors. First, individuals explore their various options during the course of development, trying out one strategy at a particular age, then trying another. For example, children entering a school where they are culturally isolated may seek first to assimilate, but when rebuffed they may try separation, and perhaps become marginalized as a result. Second, differing strategies may be used in different daily contexts: individuals may prefer separation in family and community life, assimilation in work settings, and biculturation in education.

The attitudes that individuals hold toward these four acculturation alternatives can be taken as an indication of their identity (Clark *et al.*, 1976). Those who favour biculturation usually are comfortable with a joint or dual cultural identity (e.g., "Greek-Canadian"); those who favour assimilation

usually adopt a "national" identity (e.g., "Canadian"); those who favour separation usually adopt a single cultural identity (e.g., "Greek"); and those who score high on marginalization usually are uncertain about who they are (i.e., experience "identity confusion").

Studies with a variety of Aboriginal peoples in Canada over the period 1970-1988 using this approach (Berry *et al.*, 1989) have revealed a general preference for the bicultural strategy of acculturation, along with a dual identity (e.g., "Cree-Canadian"), signifying a sense of attachment to both Aboriginal and the larger societies. Next in preference has been the separation strategy, along with a particular cultural identity (e.g., "Cree"), signifying a predominant sense of attachment to a particular Aboriginal culture, and with little (if any) attachment to Canadian society. Far behind in preference are assimilation and marginalization, both of which signify a rejection (or non-availability) of an Aboriginal cultural identity. These earlier studies clearly demonstrated that most adult Aboriginal peoples in Canada know very well who they are, at least in the sense of labelling themselves as Aboriginal persons.³

This research-based conclusion does not mean, however, that all is well. On the basis of early consultations, The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples concluded that threats to the cultural identity of Aboriginal Peoples was a problem area that required examination. The present study was an attempt to carry out that examination.

Method⁴

This study attempted to assess all six aspects of Aboriginal cultural identity using individuals in 10 learning circles (focus groups) from a variety of communities, comprised of 10 to 12 persons each. A series of activities was developed and presented to participants. The group discussions over a two-day period were videotaped, and coded according to an interpretive framework developed by the research team. Table 1 provides a list of the communities and activities. Information was extracted from these activities with respect to participants' cultural identity, the experiences that influenced it (positively and negatively), and views and recommendations about how to improve one's cultural identity.

The sites for the learning circles were selected by RCAP staff in order to gain a wide variety of views about cultural identity. They covered geographical space from east to west to North, as well as status and gender diversity. In consultation with each community, interested individuals were selected by the researchers to gain broad variation in intercultural contact experience and cultural backgrounds among individual members of each learning circle. In all, 116 individuals participated.

Table 1: Learning Circle Location and Activities

Location	Number of Participants
1. Victoria Artists	12
2. Victoria Métis	11
3. Inuvik Youth	12
4. Inuvik Adults	12
5. Saskatchewan Treaty	12
6. Winnipeg Métis	12
7. Winnipeg Inmates	12
8. Québec Adults	10
9. Halifax Elders	11
10. Halifax Women	12
Activities	
1. Responding to a Dream Story	
2. Important Life Events and Experiences	
3. Factors that Diminished or Strengthened One's Cultural Identity	
4. Factors that Deprived or Denied One's Cultural Identity	
5. Discussion of Kinships and Relationships	
6. Discussion of Recommendations	

The 15 activities that were used to structure the discussions were developed by the researchers to encompass virtually all important aspects of cultural identity, including those outlined in Figure 1. They also raised issues about the origins of one's identity, in past events and experiences with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal individuals, groups and institutions. These activities served as vehicles for participants to discuss their lives, and to reveal and project themselves, using culturally-appropriate themes (such as dreams, relationships with Elders and with the environment). Six of the 15 activities were used to provide data for this paper.

An analytical framework was developed according to which the videotapes of the two days could be examined: Various aspects of cultural identity and experiences were coded, and some were rated on 7-point scales (independently, in order to ensure reliability).⁵ These analyses were particularly directed toward obtaining information about the five compo-

nents of cultural identity (Figure 1), and the four acculturation strategies (Figure 2). Composite scores from the two raters are used in this paper.

Identity Findings

Although last in the sequence presented in Figure 1, behavioural identity is the most concrete. Fortunately, data from a national survey are available to set a broad stage for the other aspects of identity that were obtained in the present study. In Figure 3, results from the Aboriginal Peoples Survey (Siggner, 1993) are presented for four groups (Indian On-Reserve, Indian Off-Reserve, Métis and Inuit), for two self-reported activities (language use, and activities related to one's culture, such as food, dress, music, crafts), divided by age (adults 15 years or older, and children). For language use, in the total adult population 64.5% of Indians on Reserve, 23.1 % off-Reserve, and 17.5% of Métis claimed that they were able to use their Aboriginal language; 74.6% of Inuit were able to do so. There is a similar result for children, but with even lower levels: 44.3%, 9.0%, 4.9% and 67.0% respectively. For "participation in traditional Aboriginal activities", the pattern is repeated. For adults, the participation rates were 65.2%, 44.8%, 39.8% and 74.1%; and for children, they were 57.5%, 39.5%, 28.7% and 70.2% respectively.

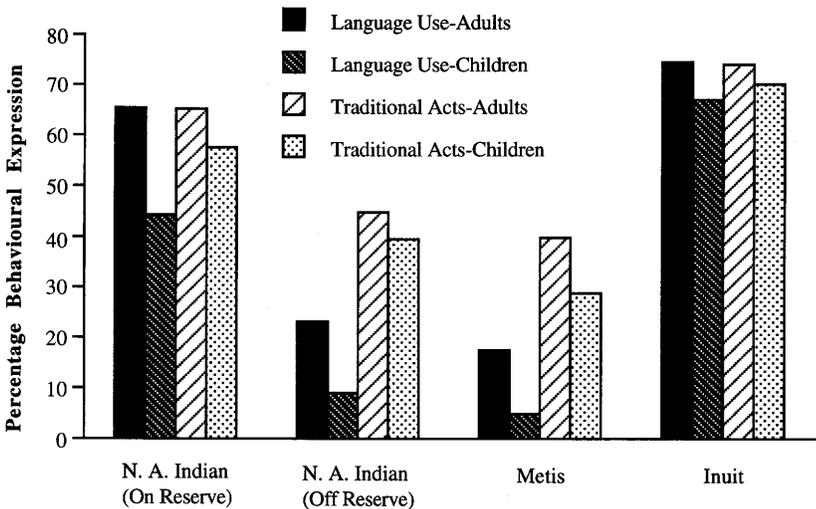


Figure 3: Behavioural Expression of Cultural Identity (From A.P.S., 1993)

Even without statistical analyses, it is clear that there are important variations in behavioural expressions of cultural identity across the four groups of Aboriginal peoples, between adults and children and between domains (language vs participation in traditional activities). With respect to group, Inuit are always highest and Métis lowest, with on-and off-Reserve Indians placed in between. With respect to age, adults are always higher than their children. And with respect to domains, traditional activities usually are higher than language. (this is more true for the off-Reserve and Métis groups, and minimally so for on-Reserve and Inuit groups.)

These national survey data show a fairly high degree of behavioural expression, but one which varies substantially across groups. In addition, they can be interpreted as showing major behavioural cultural identity loss (or perhaps identity denied) with degree of EuroCanadian contact. This is the most plausible explanation for the variation across the first three groups, and possibly for the Inuit. It is also the most likely explanation for differences between adults and children, assuming higher participation of children in EuroCanadian life through school and media exposure. Evidence from other studies (e.g., Berry and Bennett, 1991) indicates that higher levels of EuroCanadian schooling are associated with lower levels of Aboriginal language and syllabic script knowledge and use. Differences between language use and traditional activity participation may reflect differential loss or may reflect partial recovery in recent years.

Within the present study, evidence of behavioural expression was obtained from the learning circles during self-introductions (how frequently individuals expressed their Aboriginal identity) and from a summary rating by the two raters of activity 1 (see Table 1): on 7-point scales, the two scores across the 10 groups were 4.80 and 5.98, suggesting a moderately high level of behavioral expression. While this might have been somewhat inflated because of the context (i.e., a secure Aboriginal environment), many indicated that such behavioural expression is characteristic of their daily lives as well. One participant⁶ indicated that: "In the mainstream society I do positive things. I facilitate Métis cultural workshops. I go into schools and do lectures. And through my music, I perform in the Métis community, but also the mainstream society. I'm promoting the Métis Nation all the time." Other participants have always expressed their cultural identity throughout their lives: "I have not changed. No matter where I live, I've always taken my Nativeness with me." And for others, their future includes continued traditional practices: "To me, spirituality is first, and everything comes from that." In addition to declaring unequivocal support for the ongoing behavioural expression of cultural identity, many acknowledged its importance in their past. "I will not, as long as I have breath in me, give up

my principles of the Native way, or sacrifice that. The Native Way has carried me to this point."

Turning to the first aspect in Figure 1, that of perception of oneself as Aboriginal, information was drawn from activity 1. Individuals were rated for explicit identity statements about themselves in the past, at present, and projecting into the future. Four categories were used: Aboriginal, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, non-Aboriginal and neither. Figure 4 presents the percentages of all self-references to each of the four identities at three time periods. There are two obvious features to Figure 4: first, perception of oneself as Aboriginal clearly outweigh all other perceptions; and second, there is an increase over the time periods in this difference, with future expectations of having an Aboriginal cultural identity higher than now or in the past. This pattern of identity perception corresponds closely to the separation strategy as outlined in Figure 2.

How important is it to have an Aboriginal cultural identity? Evidence on this aspect of identity came from the frequency of declarations and examples produced during the group interactions on all activities listed in Table 1. Although such expressions are relatively frequent, there are variations across groups with respect to periods in one's life, and whether the interaction was within or outside one's group.

→ Some participants expressed bitterness towards those who limited the importance of their culture and identity: "It's not right that an individual or group of people try to limit an individual's right to exercise his own unique background. One should be proud of who they are and where they come from." Others noted how little their true identity had meant for them in the past and how much they valued it now: "At one time being Native, and this culture, meant nothing to me. Now I have a different view. It is the most important thing in my life and I want to keep it."

The belief that their culture was not only important to them but also to the wider community was stated by many: "White man is now coming to Native people to learn how to heal. It might be late, but not too late. It is important that Native people share their experience and knowledge to try to keep a balance right now before we destroy ourselves within the global context or even the universe." And for others, it was important not only for them but for their families: "It wasn't until the 80s that I started to learn about my Native ancestry. When I started to do some research, I found out who I really was. And it was so important to me. And I could show my parents how important it was to them as well as me."

With respect to esteem, or how good one felt about being Aboriginal, an overall rating of self-esteem was made of each individual participant by the two raters over all the activities. The means of these ratings are

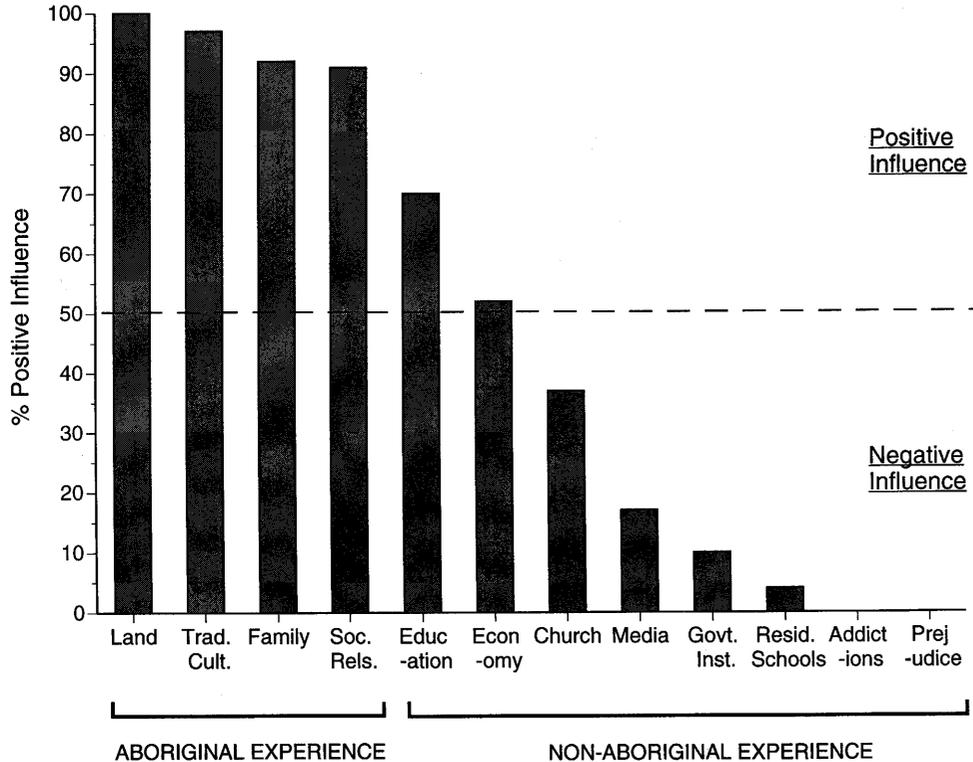


Figure 4: Percentage Perception in Four Identity Categories at Three Times (Left) and in Summary Self Descriptions (Right)

generally very positive (with an overall mean of 6.42 out of a possible 7). Some participants expressed how successful they had been in being able to feel comfortable in both the Aboriginal and larger society: "I feel very good about both societies. My work-related activities allow me to share my Aboriginal side with the non-Aboriginal very positively." Others noted how fortunate they had been to grow up in loving, sharing families and how they wished to help others: "I have given my whole being to Native people. I was lucky to have the childhood that I was given." Those who experienced doubt and fear found a solution through their own strengths: "I am not afraid of anything. I would think that the Spirit would be there to help me to know who I am. The Spirit says to be proud of who you are." And others whose self-esteem had suffered greatly found the courage to change: "I grew up very much ashamed of who I was. It's only in the last four years that I have started to be proud of who I am as an Indian person."

A desire for maintenance of one's Aboriginal identity was rated during all the activities, with an overall positive result (mean of 6.41 out of a possible 7). Such a wish to maintain one's identity often involved attaining a balance between Aboriginal culture and the larger society: "I have adjusted to the European way of doing things in terms of working for them, Even though it's difficult, living in an urban setting I can't practice the ceremonies, that part of our heritage. My job helps me to get back home to do that." Others felt that the way in which they will maintain their cultural heritage is to respect themselves and each other: "We have to begin to respect ourselves, respect our culture, our spirituality, respect others cultures. We must respect each other." Some participants felt the urgency of immediate action: "What's the matter with this society? We have to wake up. Even some of our own leaders. We all got to learn. That's where it's got to start, educating our young people." Others noted the importance of culture maintenance in their own lives: "I started to learn about my culture. This is something I can believe in. This is something I can grab on to. This is something I can feel proud of."

Wherever relationships among the five components of cultural identity were inconsistent or conflicted, or when there was uncertainty about them, identity confusion was noted during data analysis. Such confusion was noted by the raters whenever there was an explicit contradiction between the various aspects of identity mentioned by a participant, or a clear statement of identity loss (e.g., "I don't know who I am any more"). The range of evidence for identity confusion is presented in the statements that follow. For 37 participants some degree of identity confusion was found; 35 of these revealed confusion between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal identities, while 2 were because of confusion between two Aboriginal cultural

groups. The degree of identity confusion was also rated (on a 7 point scale) during data analysis; the mean level for these 37 individuals was 3.3. In some cases, it was possible to rate changes over time where participants referred to an earlier confusion about their identity but more recent consolidation; 9 of the 37 participants indicated that this was the case, while none indicated any change toward greater confusion.

While the existence of 37 participants with identity confusion (out of a total of 114) is serious cause for concern, it is evident that most participants (77) revealed no such confusion. However, where identity confusion was revealed, the range and depth of feelings were clear, and negative.

Children who grew up in Aboriginal communities (both Reserves and elsewhere) with strong links to their culture, (through language, traditional activities and spirituality) suffered both extreme cultural loss and identity confusion when they were removed to residential schools or foster care. Most participants expressed great discomfort in their new surroundings, but often they did not fully understand the effects of this action until recently. One participant noted: "I now realize how devastating the residential schools were for our people. It moulded them and made them embarrassed of who they are."

Psychological conflicts and contradictions between Aboriginal spiritual beliefs and introduced religious beliefs were also responsible for much of the identity loss and confusion that was expressed. Another participant stated "I was brought up in the reserve with a strong Catholic religion. I left at a very young age, because I was confused about who I was and what I was doing."

Children who found themselves placed in foster care with no valid or legitimate explanations as to why this happened were equally confused: "I was taken away from my family at an early age. I was placed in foster care—14 different homes. I was beaten, and I dealt with it by learning how to fight and later how to run." Though some children found physical comfort in their new surroundings, often they felt abandoned by their own people. One participant lamented: "I used to have a lot of resentment towards my own people. Why was I put in homes? Why did no one come and get me? I felt like an outcast throughout my life." Another participant recognized that she too was missing an important part of her self: "In my foster home, I had the basics—food, shelter, warmth, but no emotional love at all. I felt that I didn't belong anywhere."

Some participants expressed the need to hide their connections to their Aboriginal communities even from their partners because of discrimination in the larger society. One noted: "When I was growing up, there was so much discrimination, you didn't dare mention the word Micmac. I never told

a soul. My husband died and he didn't even know who I was. I even changed my name so nobody would know."

➤ Others found that their parents had hidden their Aboriginal ancestry from them, because they believed that by denying their roots they had a better future: "My mother didn't tell us about our heritage when I was small because of the shame she experienced in her life." Others expressed anger with their parents for refusing them the right to know who they were. Their parents felt that by "acting white" they had a better chance for success in their lives. In some cases this has caused not only confusion for individuals but also for their communities: "I still have a lot of anger inside of me. It is the same old story, the white man looks at you as an Indian. And you go to your Indian brothers and they look at you as a white man because your attitudes, beliefs and values are constructed in that area. It's a real struggle for me."

Some participants growing up in both cultures were initially confused as to where they wanted to go, resulting in goal conflict: "I grew up with my grandparents, but was forced to go to school in the white world. Coming out of both was hard for me. I learned to adjust to the white man's way, but that's not what I wanted. I wanted to go back but I knew my family wasn't there. So I had to learn on my own. I had to struggle, there is a lot of conflict for me." Another said: "It is like I belong everywhere, but nowhere, I keep going. I feel like I'm searching all the time." This orientation is the well-known sense of marginalization, outlined earlier in this paper.

➤ Others felt that racism and prejudice within the Aboriginal community itself caused identity confusion for them: "For myself, my father is Métis and my mother is Treaty. I like to think of myself as a Métis and Treaty. My Treaty people say we don't have a problem with you being Métis and we accept you as Treaty. My Métis part says you can't be a Métis person because you got a Treaty number. That's not right."

Some spoke of the results of identity confusion and how it has affected their future and their children's future: "One of the greatest needs I have is to belong. Another need I have is to be accepted as a Native person. I was ashamed of it growing up. I didn't teach my children to be proud. Now my oldest son won't admit his Native ancestry. I lost that."

Leaving Aboriginal communities for the larger society and seeing themselves reflected by the attitudes of others was frequently mentioned as a source of confusion: "When you live off the Reserve, you know what it is to be an Indian. That's when I really had an identity crisis. On the Reserve I was protected. Once I left, it was a slap in the face."

Some participants noted that how one's identity is defined by others impacts heavily on who you feel you are: "When you start listening to these

people in society telling us we are a bunch of losers, drunks, alcoholics or less than anybody else in society... that's when people start to get confused. And that's when your connection to the spirit becomes damaged."

Events and Experiences

The project attempted to discover what events and experiences had influenced participants' identity. Four of the activities (numbers 2, 3, 4, 5) provided a substantial list of happenings, which were categorized into 12 kinds of experience. These are listed in Table 2.

To find out the degree of positive or negative impact each kind of experience had on one's cultural identity, participants were asked to show the relative influence each had, by using circle drawings, and dividing the experiences into positive and negative ones. In this activity (number 3) individuals drew two circles (side by side) representing Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal influences on their cultural identity. Sectors were divided into two parts, representing their positive and negative contribution to a participant's cultural identity. The percentage positive influence of each category is shown in Figure 5; the balance represents negative influence.

The overall picture is very clear: experiences with the Land, Traditional Culture, Social Relations and Family are the most positive influences; experiences with Addictions, Prejudice, Residential Schools and Government Institutions are the most negative influences. These four most positive factors have been within the Aboriginal sphere, while the four most negative factors have been in the non-Aboriginal sphere of influence. Two of these negative factors (the impact of Government Institutions and experiencing Addictions) are relatively important sources of influence and have to be considered to be a serious impediment to the attainment of a positive, and consolidated Aboriginal cultural identity.

Many important statements were made by participants regarding various factors affecting their cultural identity:

Traditional Culture

Large numbers of participants expressed the underlying importance of a return to their traditional values and culture including language, Elders, spirituality, arts and community. Those who had never lost their connection to their cultures felt enriched by that contact and sustained by it during difficult periods of their lives. One participant stated: "I can remember my past from my grandparents. I always had that traditional perspective. It's been one of my saving graces—remembering what they taught me." Others spoke of their lack of knowledge and understanding of who they were and where they belonged. One expressed it like this: "Once I moved back into

Table 2: Events and Experiences Influencing Cultural Identity

Category	Factors Included in Category
1. Traditional Culture	Language, Elders, Spirituality, Arts, Community
2. Family	Parents, Siblings, Children, Grandparents, Aunts, Uncles, Abuse (Sexual, Physical, Emotional)
3. Land and Environment	Bush, Hunting, Trapping, Fishing, Nature, Land Rights
4. Social Relations	Friends, Clubs, Recreation, Sports, Fights
5. Residential School	Abuse, Discrimination, Lack of Education, Forced Religion, Forced Work
6. Education	Schooling (non-residential), Teachers, Curriculum
7. Prejudice	Discrimination, Racism, Stereotyping
8. Addictions	Alcohol, Drugs, Cigarettes, Gambling, Bingo
9. Economy	Employment, Unemployment, Poverty
10. Government Institutions	Police, Courts, Prisons, DIAND, Social/Welfare Services, Foster Homes, Health
11. Church	Conversion, Priests/Ministers
12. Media	T.V., Radio, Magazines, Films

a Micmac community it was comforting. It's like I found home. I wanted to go home. I'm home. It's good to be home."

For many, a new awareness of themselves is surfacing and they are now taking steps to connect with their own traditions. As one participant noted: "I'm Cree. It just gives me a starting point to say this is where my heritage began. It's a truth. And I am quite proud of it."

One frequently mentioned key element of traditional culture was the role of the Elders in their communities. Many participants noted how central they were to their own understanding of themselves. One stated: "Today when I live my life, I see reflections of what these old people told me. It

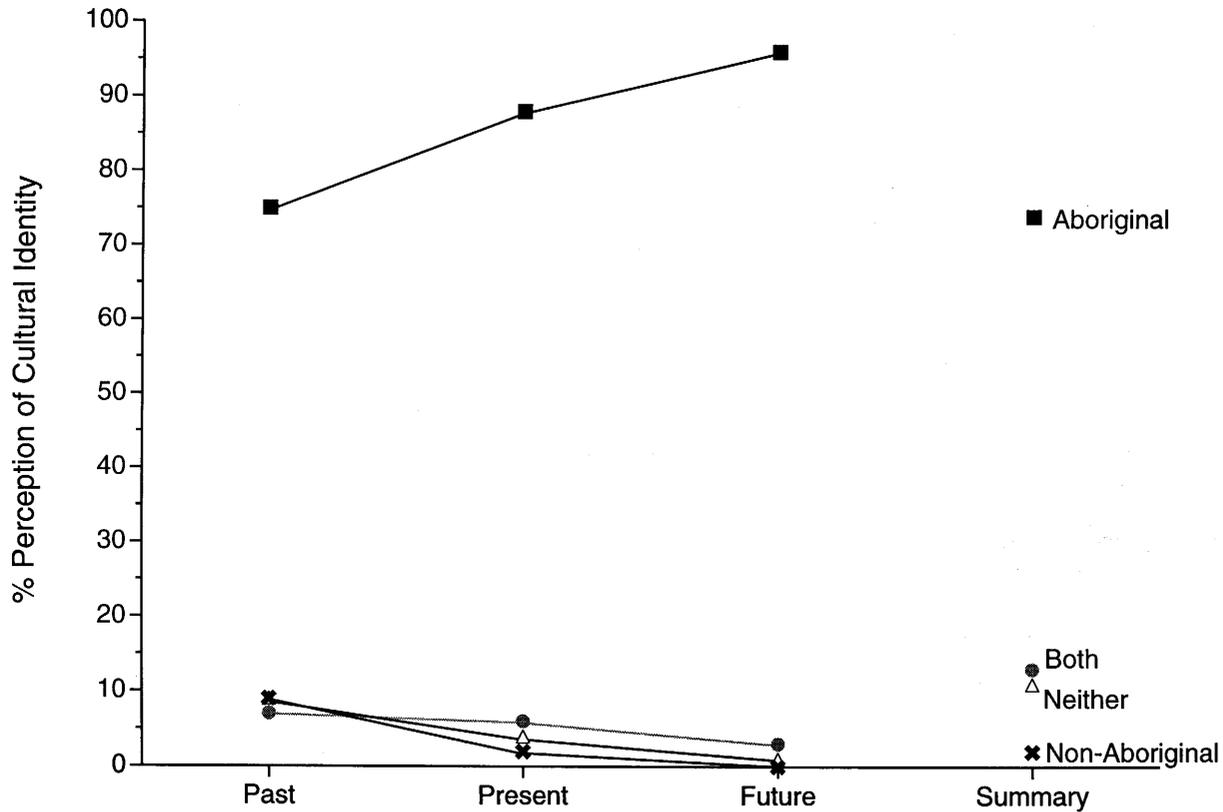


Figure 5: Percentage Positive and Negative Influence of Twelve Experiences on Aboriginal Cultural Identity

clicks. They were right. And it reinforces me." Many return to their communities for continued guidance from Elders. As one participant expressed it: "One value of my tradition is to listen to the Elders for the teachings of how to live, and the importance of extended families."

100%
 An overwhelming majority of participants declared that knowing their language was central to their cultural identity. Those who had maintained their language were very happy and proud to have it. A large percentage of those who had lost it were adamant that regaining their language was a top priority for them and their children. One participant declared: "One value of my culture is language. This is the most important thing to deal with for the next several generations."

Many felt that by previously having to suppress their language, they were pressured to deny who they were and to try and be somebody they were not. One participant lamented: "The language was the first thing I learned. I lost that when I went to Residential School. Today my children ask me where can they learn Micmac. I am sad that I can't teach them myself."

The belief that their spirituality will provide the foundation for a sense of who they are, and a feeling of security within themselves, is a constant theme throughout these discussions. After years of denying who they were, this process will evolve over time, but many participants have already begun that process. Two participants expressed their progress like this: "Some people are learning just like me. The spiritual side is slowly coming to the surface", and, "I'm dealing with my issues. I found I needed my spiritual side to heal."

This reconnection with their communities is the first step for many, and a hopeful one. As one participant remarked: "While searching for my identity, the comfort of the culture takes away the confusion. You feel like you are more at home."

Family

For many participants the presence, or lack, of a loving, sharing family (including the extended family) was a crucial factor influencing their cultural identity. Their sense of belonging stemmed from a secure place within the family and from shared goals within the community. Many participants stressed the large impact that family members have made on their ability to cope in the larger society. "Often when I'm having a hard time, I have those people (my grandmothers) to turn to. They are always with me. It has made living a lot easier, especially in the urban area."

Many kinds of familial deprivation were highlighted by participants. People generally were deprived of their extended family, and family history:

parents deprived of their children, children deprived of their parents; and Elders deprived of their grandchildren, of their rightful role to teach from experience and of the respect that comes with their age. All were considered to be important factors that diminished their sense of cultural identity.

Many stated that they wished to heal themselves in order to provide for a new generation that would be happy and well-adjusted. That was the specific goal of numerous participants who were also prepared to work towards that end.

Land and Environment

Living on the land and feeling the close connection to their traditional cultural activities were articulated by many participants as central to their cultural identity. They lamented that being forced to live away from their home environment caused many of them to lose touch with themselves and with their culture. Being able to hunt, trap, fish and go berry picking were mentioned as traditional activities that were important to them. As one participant noted: "The lands, birds, people. We know what they can give us."

Living away from the land, many had lost their traditional skills. One Elder commented: "The kids went to Residential School for 2-3 years. Boat was the only mode of transportation and they couldn't get back home. They lost everything. They forgot what they learned about living off the land and they couldn't speak their language."

Government

A large majority of participants felt that Government, mainly Federal and Provincial Institutions and Agencies had influenced their cultural identity in a very powerful way, largely negative but some positive.

Institutions such as Prisons were blamed for ignoring the cultural needs of prisoners. One participant stated: "Institutions need to recognize our culture. That's where the frustration comes here—the lack of opportunity to participate in our culture".

Government Agencies such as Social Services, Welfare and Housing were seen largely as negative factors in influencing cultural identity. Comments such as: "Social Services changed me completely by taking me away. No one was lazy until the welfare system came into our communities", and "Government is a real negative for me because of the lack of independence we are born into", reflect the frustration that many participants felt with the lack of power they experienced in their own lives due to Government policies.

Addictions

Substance abuse (alcohol, drugs, cigarettes) and gambling were often referred to by participants as an attempt to escape from or deny their cultural identity. As a result of repeated acts of discrimination people felt a diminished sense of pride and replaced it with a sense of shame. Substance abuse, in particular, provided a means to obliterating these feelings of shame and low self-esteem. One participant shared: "It's really hard to talk about. I came from a family of 17 before residential school. We are now a family of 8 after residential school, through the alcohol, drugs, suicides and suicide attempts. I even tried it and almost succeeded because I didn't know who I was."

Others have made a real effort to come to terms with their hurt and anger. It has not been easy but they have found the strength through reconnections to their traditional culture. One participant said: "It's been only 7 years since I sobered up and got away from drugs. My Indian spirituality has helped me out quite a bit. It's helped me to grow, to keep stable. To me it's very important."

Some participants still felt caught in limbo: "So we bring up our children. We are not really teaching them the Native ways, Native values. Now we see our kids as drug addicts, suicidals and alcoholics, in jails because they don't know their ways of life, their histories. We just aren't teaching them that."

Residential School

Without doubt, a major traumatizing factor influencing cultural identity was the experience of residential school. Children who grew up in happy families spoke of loss and confusion when removed from their communities to these Residential Schools for 10-11 months of the year. One participant recalled: "The first thing they did was to cut off my braids and throw them to the floor. Then they used a fine-tooth comb to find lice, but I didn't have any. Then they took away all my clothes."

In the schools, the children experienced discrimination. They were told that they were stupid, lazy and parasites on society. They learned that being Indians, they belonged to the Devil and that they would burn in Hell. One participant lamented: "All those things that I had learned at home, (respect, sharing, caring) were all taken away from me by those so-called men and women of God. I began to hate my people because they were the reason I was here at Residential School."

Although the children were at school to get an education, many felt that they had received the minimal amount. They were often used to clean and maintain the buildings instead of attending classes.

Many spoke of the abuse they suffered, emotional, physical and sexual. The rules were extremely harsh. They couldn't speak their language and for many participants this was one of their biggest losses—the ability to communicate in their own tongue. They couldn't wave or say hello to their siblings in the school and they seemed to be hungry most of the time. They learned to forget their own language and to learn to speak the language used in the schools.

Physical and sexual abuse were widespread. The children were not allowed to disclose what happened in the schools. One participant described her situation. "One of the rules was that we were never ever supposed to talk about the nuns, brothers and priests. And I think that is why our people are so silent about what happened there. They told us we would all burn in hell forever and ever. It took me so long to even talk about it. Participants reported being beaten with a strap that had 7 strips of leather tied with knots. And if they weren't being beaten, they had to watch those who were". One remembered: "They used to give a hell of a licking, not a spanking for the pleasure of it. Or for speaking my language. That's where I learned to hate."

These early experiences marked many of these children for a long period of time, and even today, many find the memories extremely painful to recall. As one participant expressed it: "Residential School is superimposed on everything else in my life."

Racism/Prejudice/Discrimination

Many participants expressed the view that acts of racism, prejudice and discrimination against them as individuals, and collectively as a people had extremely negative effects on their cultural identity. Often while growing up in their traditional communities they felt secure and content, but when leaving these communities they experienced rejection. One participant noted: "The biggest thing that impacts and triggers me off and gets me raging is institutional racism (University, Social Services, Hospital). But I didn't know what to do about it." One participant expressed the view that not only had she suffered a loss of cultural identity because of discrimination but so had her children: "I suffered terrible consequences as a child that caused me to deny I was a Micmac. I feel sorrow that this had happened because my children don't have a sense of who they are."

➔ But other participants felt discriminated against even within their own communities. As one participant recalled: "We were not welcome on the Reserve because I was married to a non-Native. We moved to the city and never tried to go back to the Reserve. I would love to live there but I don't know if I would be welcome."

Church

Part of the confusion surrounding cultural identity can be traced to the introduction of Church-based religion into the lives of the participants; these new religions often conflicted with, and sometimes displaced, traditional beliefs. Children leaving their families and communities to enter the residential schools were exposed to a new religious belief system which often derogated the one that they had been taught at home. Many participants today still carry the anger and hurt they experienced in the Residential schools. As one noted: "I can't get over the Catholic (influence)... Where is the outrage? How can they call me savage when I have perfectly related to my spiritual side?"

Many participants discovered that they didn't feel comfortable with this new religion and quietly found their own solutions. One participant stated: "The Roman Catholic Church was beaten into me. The fear of God was pounded into me. After a while I started to see that I didn't need these beliefs. I started to learn about my culture. In my culture I didn't have anything to fear."

Others dismissed the imposed system of beliefs. As one commented: "I don't want to have anything to do with the Catholic Church. I don't need the Catholic Church. What is important to me is that I have that oneness with the Spiritual side."

But for many others, the conflict is still unresolved. One participant shared: "The conflict comes from the fact that I'm angry at the Church, but I can't connect with my anger without upsetting my family who are firm believers in the Catholic Church."

Social Relations

Relationships amongst family and friends were extremely important to the preservation of cultural identity. The extended family and other members of their Aboriginal communities provided an understanding of what it was to belong. Those participants who were removed from this community, or who felt alienated from it because of family break-up or discrimination, felt a loss of cultural identity.

Traditional activities such as story-telling, dancing, singing, sweats, feasts and sport days brought communities together and reinforced the value of their culture. Many participants felt that there was real need to provide opportunities for these activities again in order to reestablish strong cultural identities.

Media

→ Many participants felt that Aboriginal peoples had been portrayed very negatively in the press, in films and on T.V. Some grew up to be ashamed of their ancestry and to deny their own cultural identity. Expressions such as "savages", "half-breeds" and "drunken Indians" made them feel diminished as people and prevented them from feeling a sense of pride in themselves.

Education

A majority of participants lamented the fact that their formal education had not recognized their cultural needs and had subsequently impacted very negatively on their cultural identity. Specifically lacking were: A culturally relevant curriculum, including traditional activities, historically accurate information as part of this curriculum and a knowledge of other Aboriginal communities in the different regions of Canada. Also noted were acts of discrimination in the school system, a lack of Native teachers and the fact that many students had dropped out of school because they missed their home communities. One participant articulated a feeling of helplessness: "The system wants to keep us down. It cuts post-secondary education funds because so many of our young people want the education to try and make it better for Indian people."

Economy /

The opportunities for employment in the cities compelled many Aboriginal peoples to leave their communities to look for work. Many felt that living in the larger society caused many to lose their cultural identity. As a result they experienced many conflicts within themselves. One explained: "Learning to survive in the urban wilderness... put me into situations where I had to compromise the morals and values I was taught. It took away a lot of self-respect and dignity." Some expressed their disappointment with the fact that they couldn't return to live in their communities: "When I go back to the Reserve, there is nothing there. No job. No economic development." Many participants feared unemployment, resulting poverty and unsuitable housing in addition to a loss of their cultural identity.

Summary and Implications

A number of findings stand out in this research. First, cultural identity issues are clearly important to participants; they spoke openly and frequently about their feelings and experiences. Second, at the level of self-perception, participants have a very clear view of themselves as Aboriginal persons: the vast majority of participants identified as "Aborigi-

nal", and expressed this in a variety of ways within the secure environment of the Learning Circles. However, in less secure environments, particularly those where prejudice or cultural prohibition have dominated their lives, many participants spoke of hiding their cultural identity, to the point where it became confused, and even denied by them.

Denial, however, was not evident within the Learning Circles. Rather, many indicated their desire to regain, not just maintain, important aspects of their cultural identity. In particular, acquiring their language, regaining their spirituality, and generally learning as much as possible from Elders, was the central goal in the lives of many participants. Again, these expressions, however genuine within the context of the Learning Circles, may not be realistic possibilities under present circumstances, where many features of their lives have been negatively affected by non-Aboriginal experiences in the past, and remain controlled by non-Aboriginal institutions and agencies in the present. Healing the past, and changing the present to provide future possibilities thus appears to be the only appropriate course.

The past has terrorized the lives of many of the participants: residential schools, foster homes, abuse, prejudice and discrimination, prison and addictions have taken their psychological and cultural toll. Unfortunately, the past is also the present for many; the current reality will likely strike with force as soon as they leave the Learning Circle.

This overall pattern of findings and observations can be interpreted in a number of ways; this paper interprets them in relation to the process of acculturation at both the cultural and psychological levels. As outlined earlier, it is considered that: lives of contemporary Aboriginal Peoples have been massively influenced by the nature of the contact between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples; that this contact has initiated a process of acculturation (involving both cultural and psychological changes); and that one of the most important changes has been the disruption of cultural identity, leading to identity loss and confusion, and to an associated decline in social and psychological well-being.

Specifically with respect to the experience of Aboriginal peoples in Canada in their relationships with the larger society, many group level features of acculturation have been identified in this study. Contact between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples brought about many changes. These include: physical changes have included forced Reservation and institutional living, as well as an increase in urbanization; biological changes have included the process of mixing for Métis and other groups, an increase in substance abuse, and changes in diet and disease patterns; political changes have taken place mainly at the hands of government institutions, including DIAND, police, courts, and welfare institutions; economic changes

have involved shifts away from a land base to wage employment and unemployment; cultural changes have been widespread, and have included the loss of traditional culture and language, the imposition of residential schools, disruption of the family, and the influence of the church and media; and social changes have involved prejudice and a variety of new social relationships with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities.

At the individual level, massive changes in their daily behaviour were noted by many participants, including dress, eating, addictions, language, beliefs, work and recreation. Acculturative stress has resulted from these acculturative changes in their group and individual lives (see Berry, 1997; Berry, *et al.*, 1982; Berry and Hart Hansen, 1985; Kurtness, 1987 and O'Neil, 1986, for work on this concept in relation to Aboriginal peoples). The concept of acculturative stress refers to a form of stress in which the stressors (i.e., the problems giving rise to stress) are identified as having their source in the process of acculturation. There is often a particular set of stress behaviours, which occur during acculturation, such as lowered mental health status (specifically anxiety and depression), feelings of marginality and alienation, substance abuse, loss of self-esteem and identity loss and confusion (Timble and Medicine, 1984). Thus, acculturative stress is a phenomenon that may underlie many of the social and psychological problems of individuals that often accompany culture contact and change.

Cultural identity, the core of this project, includes all those features that were outlined earlier and sketched in Figure 1; they need not be elaborated again here. However, it is important to note that the notion of "Aboriginal cultural identity" implies both that such an identity is actually a part of an Aboriginal person's current self-perception, and that it has its roots in Aboriginal experiences. While the first implication is probably correct (given the selection process for participants, and the high level of self-perception of participants as "Aboriginal" found in this study; i.e., the Separation option in Figure 2), the second implication is probably not completely correct. Contemporary Aboriginal cultural identity has been forged over the centuries, and in the course of individual lives, in a foundry with two blacksmiths: the evidence presented earlier (Table 2) shows clearly that both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures have had profound impacts on the shape and substance of Aboriginal cultural identity as we have glimpsed it in this project. The finding that Aboriginal influences have been largely (but not entirely) positive, while non-Aboriginal influences have been largely (but not entirely) negative, points clearly to the importance of the Commission's key goal of establishing a new relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. It is likely that only if and when the two sets of cultural

influences are able to work in concert and in harmony will Aboriginal peoples be in a position to reestablish a consolidated and positive cultural identity.

With this general discussion of acculturation as background, we can now consider the question of how best to place the findings of this project into a meaningful framework. Taking all five components of cultural identity (Figure 1), the orientations that participants exhibit toward acculturation (Figures 2 and 4), and the pattern of events and experiences they thought had influenced their identity (Figure 5), we can draw them together in a general framework. In Figure 6 an attempt is made to portray the background factors (events and experiences in the two societies) that have led to Aboriginal cultural identity as revealed in this project. The Figure begins with the contact and interaction of the two originally independent and autonomous cultural groups. Clearly this interaction has not been egalitarian, and has been characterized by attempts at complete domination of Aboriginal peoples by non-Aboriginal society. While some aspects of non-Aboriginal society did change, the vast majority of the cultural changes took place among Aboriginal peoples. Simultaneously, there has been substantial and prolonged resistance by Aboriginal peoples to this attempted domination, leading to many features of contemporary Aboriginal society and a number of related negative and positive social and psychological consequences shown in Figure 6.

The long term outcome of this historical sequence and contemporary situation can take one of three courses: one would be for Aboriginal peoples to remain suspended in the present social and psychological turmoil; a second would be to be for Aboriginal peoples to be destroyed and to disappear; and a third would involve their healing and recovery. All three possible outcomes are jointly in the hands of both the non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal societies. Under present arrangements, the first is likely to continue, but with increasingly severe consequences for both groups. If non-Aboriginal society increases the domination by employing more fully all those (mainly negative) practices noted in Figure 6 (upper left box), then Aboriginal peoples will likely approach destruction and eventual disappearance. However, if the domination is reduced or is removed, then those (mainly positive) influences residing and remaining in Aboriginal society (upper right box) may permit healing to begin and recovery of cultural identity to be attained.

The main findings of this study are consistent with conclusions based upon other examinations of contemporary issues facing Aboriginal peoples (e.g., Berry and Hart Hansen, 1985): contact and the resultant acculturation and domination have led to both substantial social and psychological problems among Aboriginal peoples as well as to numerous positive

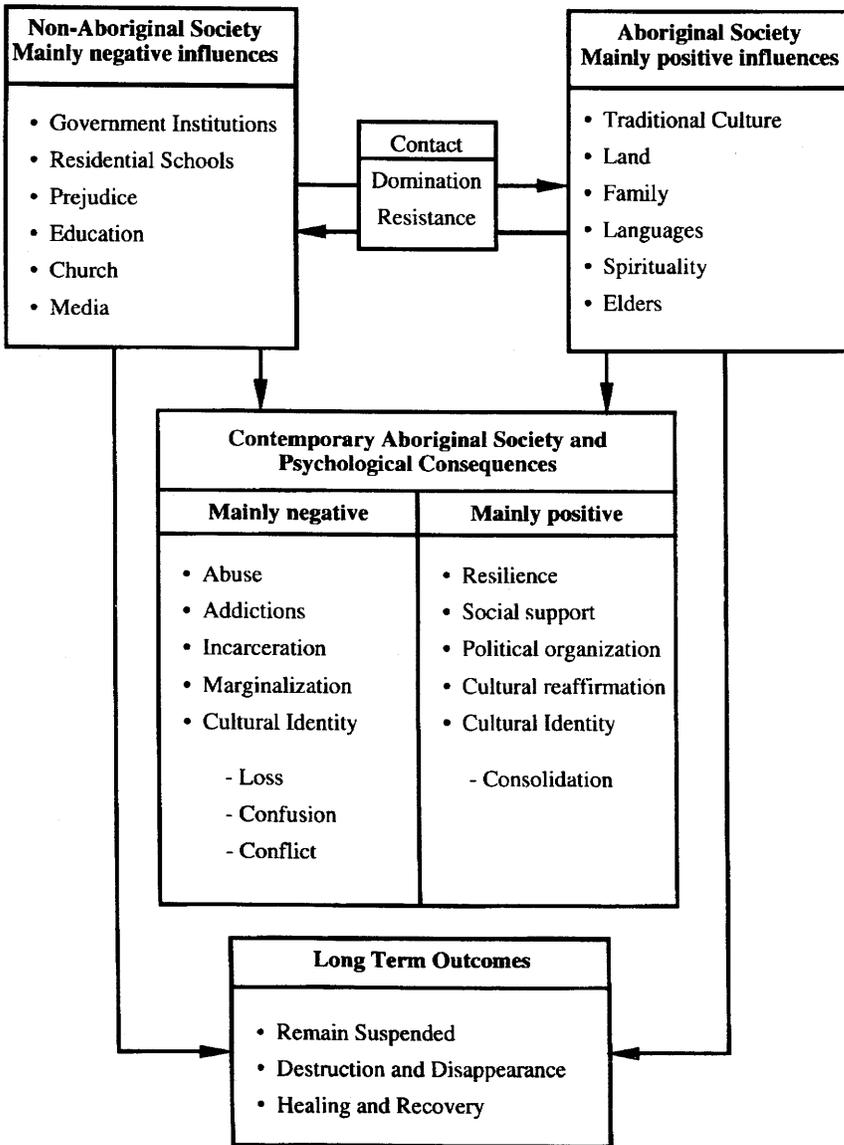


Figure 6: Acculturation of Aboriginal Peoples: Origins, Consequences and Long Term Outcomes

responses. The only solution that does not involve Aboriginal peoples remaining suspended in such a state, or their destruction and disappearance, is to eliminate the current domination and to heal the wounds of past domination.

Both of these changes involve Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples alike; since the problems have come about through interaction, their solution likewise can probably best be achieved through interaction (see Health and Welfare Canada, 1990). However, former interactions were largely conflictual and controlled by non-Aboriginal peoples, while to be effective in achieving these changes, future interactions should be cooperative and be largely controlled by Aboriginal peoples. Having asserted that these changes should involve both peoples, it should be noted that the first required change (the elimination of domination) is primarily the responsibility of the non-Aboriginal society, for it is from here that the most serious negative influences are perceived to flow. In contrast, it is also clear that the second change (healing and recovery) is primarily the responsibility of Aboriginal peoples, for it is among them that most of the positive influences and resources are perceived to be available.

Neither change, however, can take place without understanding, acceptance and support by both communities. That there is a strong desire for these changes among Aboriginal peoples is clear from Commission hearings, from the results of this project, and from most other contemporary statements by Aboriginal peoples (e.g., Erasmus, 1989). That there is sufficient support for such change among non-Aboriginal peoples is less clear. However, a recent review of non-Aboriginal attitudes towards Aboriginal peoples (Berry and Wells, 1994) suggests that there may well be enough goodwill in the larger society for joint action to succeed.

Such a programme of change has, at its core, the four "touchstones for change" called for by the Royal Commission (1993): a new relationship, self-determination, self-sufficiency, and healing. That the main policy implication to flow from this research project coincides with the views of the Commission, and with most informed contemporary views, should be taken as evidence of concurrent validation. Indeed it would have been a substantial inconsistency had the results of this study been otherwise.

The goal and the course are both clear; however, the means of attaining them are not. In my view, a strategy for change requires three components: committed leadership (from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal societies); active and forceful populations (again both groups) that demand change; and massive institutional and bureaucratic changes in the way relationships are structured between the two societies. The first of these three components (leadership) depends to a large extent upon choices made by the two

populations, and (for the second component) upon demands emanating from them. The third (structural changes) requires replacing the old notion of domination from sea to sea, by the new vision of diversity as a fundamental characteristic of Canada. In essence it requires respect by the pyramid for the circle, as the central image guiding human relationships in Canada: those whose lives have been organized by hierarchical principles (the pyramid view of how societies should operate), need to understand and accept the view of peoples whose main organizing principle is a circle of egalitarian relationships among people and their world.

Notes

1. The Aboriginal Culture Identity Project was a study developed by RCAP staff and consultants. The main researcher was Kim Hathaway, who also served as group facilitator during data collection sessions. Donovan Young and Rosalie Tizya coordinated the project for the Urban Research group, under the overall supervision of Marlene Brant Castellano. Joan Frances provided very helpful research assistance. John Berry served as consultant, advising on project design, and carried out data analysis and report writing. The full report, along with related projects, can be found in the RCAP research reports.
2. The term *Biculturation* is employed here to refer to the strategy of being competent in, and comfortable with, the two groups in contact (i.e., Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal societies in this case). In other writings the term *Integration* has been used, but is avoided here because of the obvious negative connotations of the term for Aboriginal peoples in Canada.
3. Research with Aboriginal children (e.g., Corenblum and Annis, 1993) has suggested a less positive picture. However, there is little evidence for the external validity of this research. That is, the experimental techniques used (e.g., "doll-choice") revealed a widespread non-Aboriginal identity. However, the relationship between these "doll-choices" and identities and behaviours in day-to-day life (outside the experimental setting) is not known.
4. Full details of the methods used in this study, including the selection of sites and individuals, the activities around which interactions were structured, and the analytical techniques used, can be found in the full RCAP report. Following is a summary of these methods.
5. Coding was carried out by Kim Hathaway and Brenda Restoule.
6. For many of the statistics-based findings that follow, attempts are made to use personal illustrations drawn from the statements made by individuals in the Learning Circles. These statements are not

necessarily *representative* of those made on a topic, but they do reveal the kinds of beliefs and feelings that were expressed.

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