NEGOTIATING IDENTITY: ABORIGINAL WOMEN AND THE POLITICS OF SELF-GOVERNMENT

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Abstract/Résumé

This paper takes a feminist postmodern look at the intersection of race, class and gender in Canadian politics by researching the multiple levels of identity available to contemporary Canadian Aboriginals, and the implication of these for the success of a policy of self-government based on identification with a collectivity called 'Aboriginal'. Series of multiple regression analysis for all related variables and path diagrams is employed to show the causal relationship between socioeconomic/ demographic conditions and ethnic identity. The paper recommends a firmer focus on the foundational socio-economic dynamics that shape and mediate Aboriginal identity to avoid marginalization of non-identical concerns.

Cette étude examine le féminisme postmoderne a l'intersection de la race, la classe et le genre dans la politique Canadienne, en recherchant la diversité des niveaux d'identité disponible aux Aborigènes Canadiens contemporains; et ses implications pour la réussite d'une politique d'autonomie basée sur l'identification de la collectivité au nom "d'Aborigène". Une série de multiples analyses de régression pour toutes les variables relationnelles et les schémas trajectoires est utilisé pour démontrer la relation causale entre la socio-economie/conditions démographiques et l'identité ethnique. Cette étude recommande que, pour éviter la marginalisation d'inquiétudes non identiques, un accent plus précis mis sur les dynamiques socio-économiques fondationelles qui déterminent et servent d'intermédiaire de l'identité Aborigène, serait extrêmement important.

Introduction & Research Question

This paper takes a postmodern feminist look at negotiated boundaries in the intersection of race, class and gender in Canadian politics. Aboriginal self-government is generally seen as a programme to restore justice to the relationship between the Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal people of Canada. The policy has become the political context within which a group of Canadians are being invited to negotiate their identities and regain access to social, economic and political resources of a society in which they have been marginalized. This study researches the multiple levels of identity available to contemporary Canadian Aboriginals and the implication of these for the success of a policy of self-government based on identification with a collectivity called 'Aboriginal.' The proposition of this study is that, construction and reconstruction of Aboriginal identity are linked to social, political, economic and cultural contexts and this means that it would indeed be myopic to conceptualize Aboriginal identity as naturally inherited or uniform, or to focus on healing without *simultaneous* attention to the foundational socio-economic dynamics that shape and mediate Aboriginal identity. To illuminate how Aboriginal identity can vary as it is mediated by social institutions, this study selects and analyzes just the category of 'women' from data drawn from the 1991 Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS), and researches the multiple levels of identity using a series of multiple regression analysis for all related variables and path diagrams to show the causal relationship between the variables.

The five-volume, 4,000-page final *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People* (RCAP) issued in November 1996, in its 440 recommendations called for immediate changes in four main areas: healing, the building of Aboriginal institutions, economic development, and human resource development. The RCAP report concludes that the 150 years of government policy to absorb Aboriginal peoples into Canadian culture was wrong; successive assimilation policies had failed because Aboriginal people had a sense of themselves as a people with unique heritage and rights to cultural continuity. This led to the report's recommendation that Canada needed to understand that Aboriginal people are nations. According to the RCAP report, the case for self-government is built on the right to self-determination: Aboriginal peoples trace their existence and their systems of government as far back as memory and oral history extend and in self-government they will, in effect, be exercising their God-given right to govern themselves (RCAP, 1996b). Aboriginal nations should be permitted to fashion their own institutions and work out their own solutions to social, economic, and political problems. The report stipulates that the right of self-government cannot rea-

sonably be exercised by small separate communities, whether First Nations, Inuit or Métis. It is envisioned to be exercise by groups with claims to the term 'nation.' However, because historically Aboriginal nations were undermined by disease, relocation, only few operate as collectives now. These now would be reconstituted or would have to reconstruct themselves as nations. Their bond would be those of culture and identity, not blood – their unity would come from their shared history and their strong sense of themselves as people (*ibid.*). This means that Aboriginal nations would be political communities comprising people of mixed background and heritage. While membership in Aboriginal nations would not be defined by 'race,' the above summary illuminates that the RCAP report is nonetheless solidly predicated on identity–ethnic identity: Aboriginal identity. Underlying the RCAP report is the premise that the experiences of Aboriginal peoples are similar enough to constitute in some sense one identity. The report assumes that by virtue of being born a Native or Métis, an Aboriginal person has shared that experience, identifies with that label, and therefore would fall into a category similar enough to be regroupable into an exclusive 'nation.'

The concept of ethnicity refers to the cultural features of a category of people. The Government of Canada, recognizing Aboriginal self-government as an inherent right under section 35 of the *Constitution Act 1982* giving the Aboriginal peoples right to govern themselves, also perceives of this right as based on ethnic identity. The federal government's "[r]ecognition of the inherent right is based on the view that the Aboriginal peoples of Canada have the right to govern themselves in relations to matters that are *internal to their communities*, integral to *their unique cultures, identities, traditions, languages and institutions*, and with respect to their special relationship to their land and resources" (Indian & Northern Affairs Canada, 2004:4; emphasis mine). One major objective of the federal policy on Aboriginal self-government, therefore, is for the preservation and development of Aboriginal peoples' distinctive cultures. Ethnic identity then becomes the basic principle for appealing to sentiments of common origins and shared common identity to mobilize Aboriginal interest groups.

This underlying assumption and hence approach to restoring basic rights to a people may not be all wrong. After all most people of Aboriginal descent share a history of being racialized – where legislation divided people arbitrarily into racial categories (Indian and non-Indian), and then mandated differential treatment, differential claims, and differential access to resources to each group. For Aboriginal women in particular, there is the shared experience of the struggle against racist and capitalist induced gender stratification, made worse confounding by the

burden of poverty and destitution of their families and communities. Recognizing the errors of the full array of assimilationist government policies and seeking to correct the domino impact of historical injustices by preserving Aboriginal unique cultures, identities, traditions, languages and institutions is, thus, not an unreasonable approach to restoring basic rights to a marginalized people. Yet, while ethnic mobilization may be a flexible mobilizing strategy, focusing on this to the neglect of other recommendations of the RCAP report could raise the policy of self-government to a sentiment rather than a principle. In planning and implementing the principles of ethnic identity politics strategists should constantly bear in mind that ethnic affiliations are also symbolic expressions of fundamental social infrastructure itself. Sadly in Aboriginal self-government policy is quickly becoming little more than a sentiment in this neglect. Indeed both national and international human rights institutions have quickly observed that Canadian federal government response to the socio-economics of the restorative process recommended by the RCAP report has been rather slow. The Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC) in its 1999 Annual Report, reiterating views in its previous annual reports, pointed out that:

> [G]overnment response to the 1996 Report of the [RCAP] has been slow...[and while we] would not wish to minimize the significance of steps such as the January 1998 establishment of the $350 million Healing Fund, nor deny the good intentions underlying the *Gathering Strength*, the government's official response to the Royal Commission's report,...much more attention needs to be given to pressing issues such as urban Aboriginal unemployment (CHRC, 2000:36).

In its 2001 Annual Report the CHRC, once again pointed to the continued failure by the federal government to heed their advise in 1996 (when the RCAP Report was initial released) to adopt a comprehensive 25-year strategy for the political, social, and economic development of First Nations communities. This national institution of human rights has had to agree with Aboriginal groups that while "the need to reform governance...[was important]...Aboriginal policy should be addressed from a broader perspective. Governance issues were important, but so too were the abysmal social and economic conditions still all too common in many communities. What was needed,...was a more comprehensive approach rather than piecemeal reform" (CHRC, 2002:10).

In 1999 the United Nation's Human Rights Commission also expressed concern that Canada was yet to implement the recommendations of the RCAP and advised specifically that "decisive and urgent

action be taken towards the full implementation of the RCAP recommendations on land and resource allocation" (Canada Parliamentary Research Branch 2000:3). Meanwhile earlier in December of 1998 the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, also finding a "direct connection between Aboriginal economic marginalization and the ongoing dispossession of Aboriginal people from their lands as recognized by the RCAP," had expressed strong concerns to the Canadian Government that the recommendations of the RCAP were yet to be implemented despite the "urgency of the situation" (*ibid*:3). Ironically, even though the federal government had recognized Aboriginal self-government as an inherent right and set about to negotiate individual or group self-governments agreements with First Nations over two decades ago, well before the RCAP recommendation, and although negotiations have been continuous ever since, very few agreements have been reached to date. In 1999 the Inuit took over government of the Nunavut Territory of 350,000 square kilometers of land in the Eastern Artic, while the signing of a treaty with the Nisga'a people gave the Nisga'a a large land settlement with significant powers of government similar to those of municipal governments. The failure of self-government negotiations is in itself an issue of concern that the CHRC is asking the federal government to investigate urgently (CHRC, 2002:10).

The main approach of this study is to conceptualize ethnic identity as a dependent variable mediated by a broad combination of socio-economic and demographic factors. This is to demonstrate that the vision of political communities comprising people of mixed background and heritage with claims to the term 'nation' by culture and identity, could gloss over the need to address specific variations that could exists in this group who all make claims to Aboriginal ethnic identity and culture. The main proposition of this study is that, it would be myopic to conceptualize Aboriginal identity and changes in its construction and reconstruction without linking these to their intersections with social, economic, and demographic contexts. The rational for this proposition is the argument that even within a category these differences are crucial. The different narratives that script Aboriginal peoples' lives or the different ways in which Aboriginal people are socially constituted affect their conceptions of themselves. The different positions of socio-economic power, have implications for the self-government objective of preserving and developing Aboriginal culture because of the impact of these positions on ideas, perceptions and expectations of ethnic identity. In other words, the degree to which Aboriginal individuals are equipped to access and inculcate Aboriginal culture, and identify with Aboriginal identity is related to their location in varying socio-economic and demo-

graphic positions.

Since the success of the program of self-government is heavily predi-
cated on diverse groups of Aboriginal people working together, these
socio-economic differences have important implications for the success
of Aboriginal self-government. It raises the question of how well the na-
ture and importance of these social diversities are recognized and how
well strategies plan to address these needs and voices. The aim of this
study, therefore, is to provide insight into how this intervention in the
lives of Aboriginal peoples could be maximized to increase the potential
of success of the policy of Aboriginal self-government.

Conceptual/Contextual Framework

Nationalism has become the central way for organizing group or
collective identity throughout the modern world. In different regions of
the world nationalism is continuously being reproduced and is employed
as the rhetoric of identity and solidarity in which citizens of the
postmodern world most readily deal with the problematic nature of state
power and with the problems of inclusion and exclusion (Calhourn,
1994:305). In other words, nationalism is not necessarily a *sin qua non*
to, nor does it follow state building in a neat correlation. Rather, where
the boundaries of the power of the state do not coincide with the will or
identity of its members or with the scale of action undertaken by other
collective actors, nationalism becomes an important issue for political
mobilization and for redistribution. In Canada's constitutional identity
politics, Aboriginal peoples have strongly objected to the historical no-
tion of two founding peoples—the English and French. Their focus in
this objection has been to pursue their right to self-government based
on their unique status as Canada's First Nations. Two images come to
mind when considering the factors that make for an autonomous politi-
cal community capable of self-determination. One is that of ethnic or
cultural similarity of members of a political community; the other is that
of common citizenship defined by membership in a political community
(Calhourn, 1994). These, however, are simplistic images that ignore the
importance of the social institutions, networks, and movements that knit
people together across lines of diversity internal to nations and states.
Focusing on ethnic and territorial boundaries tends to ignore the spe-
cifically sociological problems of social integration. The ideas of nation
and social integration need to be joined. This union is important be-
cause whereas the idea of 'nation' is the "bounded nature of all political
communities and the embeddedness of all claims to constitute a dis-
tinct and autonomous political community," social integration is that "web
of relationships that constitutes a people as a 'social collectivity' exist-

ing independently of common subjection to the rule of a particular state" (*ibid*:308). Both the political and the social are important constituents of what constitutes national or group identity.

The sociological interest is: how is group or collective identity constructed and how is it transformed? It has been theorized that the continued importance of group identity is located in the very processes and structures that influence their construction, deconstruction and reconstruction over time, and primary among these processes and structures are changes and differences in social, economic, political and cultural contexts and how they influence the problematic and possibilities of identities (Shulz, 1998). In effect, understanding the socioeconomic and political processes through which individuals locate themselves helps us to comprehend the processes through which individuals define themselves and understand themselves in relation to others. The salience of these processes lie in the fact that, "identities both reflect and potentially disrupt and recreate social and political relationships within the group, and between the group and other groups" (Shulz, 1998:336). In sum the social mediates identity formation and identities go back to impact the very processes that shape them.

It is, therefore, not a sociological contradiction that the Aboriginal peoples of Canada should pursue the path of unification when they consist of different nations and peoples. Indeed, most identity politics involves claims about categories of individuals who putatively share a given identity. This, however, allows a kind of abstraction from the concrete interactions and social relationships within which identities are constantly renegotiated, in which individuals present one identity as more salient than another, and obtain some sort of continuity and balance among their various sorts of identities. The reality of identity is that it is dynamic not static, multiple not monolithic or homogeneous, and is a social construction not at all naturally inherited. As a social group Aboriginal peoples share a history of genocide, as well as a history of dispossession of land, disenfranchisement, poverty and ill-health. Culturally, the label 'Aboriginal People' involves an enormous diversity of people, groups and interests located within varying socio-political economic and demographic situations. They do not make up a single-minded monolithic entity, speaking with one voice. Aboriginal people spring from many nations and traditions. The Aboriginal people of Canada comprise First Nations, Inuit and Métis people. In the 1996 census over 800,000 people reported Aboriginal ancestry including, 554,000 North American Indian, 210,000 Métis, and 41,000 Inuit, representing approximately 3% of Canada's total population (Statistics Canada, 1998). There are several tribal groups living in over 600 bands with basic differences in outlooks,

lifestyles, language and dialects, belief systems, history, experiences, and economic basis despite many commonalities. The First Nations alone comprise more than fifty nations with much in common, yet each has their cultural differences. First Nations are distinctly different from the Inuit whose culture is shaped by the demanding northern environment. Blending traditions from Aboriginal and European ancestors in a unique new culture, the Métis also identify themselves as a people with distinct history culture and language. Some Aboriginals even consider them-selves members of more than one Aboriginal group (*ibid.*). Among Aboriginals there are differences also in terms of demographic charac-teristic. According to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, Aboriginal youth, for example, constitute the largest segment of the Aboriginal population with an estimated 56.2% of Aboriginal people under the age of 25 (RCAP, 1996a). As a result of the residential school system and other assimilationist policies, generations of Aboriginal youth have been deprived of culture, language, and religion. These have experi-enced identity and culture in different ways from other generation such as the elders, for example, who are the living embodiment of Aboriginal traditions and culture.

Urban Aboriginals also form an important entity among Aboriginal peoples. Although the majority of registered Indians live on Reserves, the majority of total Aboriginal people live off reserves. The continuing demographic trends of Aboriginals according to the 1991 Aboriginal Peoples Survey and the 2001 Statistics Canada census on Aboriginal residence clearly show an increasing number of self-identifying Aboriginals (from 50% to over 60%) do not live on reserves but live in urban areas (RCAP, 1996b:531; Statistics Canada, 2003). More than two-thirds of all self-identifying Métis live in urban areas (*ibid*). Many non-reserve Aboriginals are without a formal collective land-base and many do not even now identify with a particular land-base. Yet self-government negotiations are with band location, and the current trend is for the federal government to negotiate specifically with band councils. In subsuming all under one experiential identity founded on life in a particular location or a particular land-base, the nation model of self-government by this automatically excluded a large segment of Aboriginals from the very process that sought to redress their marginalization. Urban life with its diverse cultures and lifestyle would also have had some impact on the lives and identity (re)construction process of urban Aboriginals. Among all racial or ethnic groups in Canada Aboriginals are the most disadvantaged in terms of income, employment, nutrition, housing, and health and many Aboriginals, for lack of life opportunities in reserves, have migrated to urban areas to seek better fortune, yet inequalities

persist. A study comparing the off-reserve Aboriginal population with the non-Aboriginal population on the basis of four health status measures—self-perceived health, chronic conditions, long-term activity restriction and depression—found, for instance, that Aboriginal people who lived off-reserve in cities and towns are generally in poorer health than the non-Aboriginal population after socio-economic and health behaviour factors were taken into consideration (Statistics Canada, 2002). In addressing urban issues, the RCAP report acknowledges the marginalization of Aboriginal peoples in urban areas stating that many "urban Aboriginal people are impoverished and unorganized. Yet no coherent or coordinated policies to meet their needs are in place, despite the fact that they make up almost half of Canada's Aboriginal populations. They have been largely excluded from discussions about self-government and institutional development. Aboriginal peoples in urban areas have little collective visibility and power" (RCAP 1996b:531). Yet in addressing urban Métis, for example, the RCAP Report has no concrete alternative for non-territorial Aboriginals proposing an off land base governance of sorts encompassing "locals" who choose to participate in them (RCAP 1996b:161). The RCAP report, furthermore, still imagines Aboriginal communities in urban centers as a culturally secluded community and seems unable to envisage the potential impact of this demographic feature (urbanization) on Aboriginal identity (re)construction and/or transformation. The report definitely envisions retaining Aboriginal identity as part of the solution to urban Aboriginal inequities and recommends that, "maintaining cultural identity requires creating an Aboriginal community in the city" – this is despite acknowledging that after "three decades of urbanization, development of a strong community remains largely incomplete" (RCAP, 1996b:531). This re-affirms the concern that perhaps the importance of the impact of this demographic structure may still not have sunk in.

In sum, there is always the danger that 'Aboriginal Identity' would be essentialized in implementing the policy of self-government to the negligence of these variations among such a wide group of peoples. Aboriginal identity is seen as a *sine qua non* to participation in self-government and to the ability of the reconstituted 'nations' to work together. To what extent, however, does the programme truly plan for the multiple realities of Aboriginal peoples? To what extent do the peoples, to whom this policy is directed, agree on issues and solutions? By grouping people and ideas in this way, could the policy marginalize non-identical concerns? Since the success of the program of self-government is heavily predicated on diverse groups of Aboriginal people working together, these differences have important implications for the

policy. It raises the question of how well the policy has recognized the nature and importance of these diversities, and how it plans to address different needs and voices as it mobilizes varying political bands of people into a bureaucratic project of 'nation.' For Aboriginal groups, it raises questions of what the suppressing a primordial attribute of ethnic identity (ie. race) could mean when all settles down and the realities of dealing with redistribution sets in. Since self-governance is dependent on Aboriginal groups working together as a people and nation, it becomes crucial to understand and plan for the complex articulation that surrounds the label 'Aboriginal People.'

This study explores the above concerns from a social postmodern feminist approach. Feminist postmodernism claims to provide comprehensive tools in analyzing how well we recognize difference. The paradigm seeks to do this by offering new ways of conceptualizing the categories that order social life. To adequately analyze any category without naturalizing it, this perspective integrates a de-construction or de-essentialization by locating that category in *history, social institutions* and *social processes*. Postmodern feminists argue that the focus on identity such as those of gender, race or ethnicity is problematic as there is the tendency to naturalize or universalize these social categories thereby failing to see important differences *within* that category (Nicholson & Seidman, 1998). From de-constructing and de-essentializing the concept of identity, the postmodern approach rejects definitions of racism and ethnicity that ignore the myriad differences *among* and *within* racial and ethnic categorizations. Thus identity such as race and gender are re-conceptualized as social and historically located constructs whose meanings shift in different social contexts. Identity or any categories of analysis such as gender, class, race, or ethnicity, is seen as historically emergent rather than naturally given, as multivalent rather than unified, and as the result of struggles for power and the present instrument in the struggle of power (Nicholson & Seidman, 1998). For postmodern feminists, therefore, an identity has several aspects including nationality, ethnicity, gender, family, social class, caste, marital status, and levels of education to mention a few. Consequently, categories or identities are seen as multiple, unstable and interlocking, there is nothing universal or natural about identity (Nicholson & Seidman, 1998). Race and gender, for example, are not biological givens; they are completely socially constructed.

Identity is presented as the subject positions which are made available and mobilized in specific historical contexts (Chhachhi and Pittin, 1996). Historically, for minority groups, the various aspects of identity have been sites for the construction and reconstruction of subordination,

conflict activism, and political struggles (Johnson, Nagel & Champagne, 1997). As identities are also not unilateral or constant, their salience varies with situational and political factors (Shulz, 1998). In a struggle for access to economic resources, for instance, women may present their identity as 'mothers' rather than as 'wives,' and then present their status as equal partners with men in political struggles. The category 'women' then is not at all a monolithic concept but is distinguished by race, ethnicity, class, and even by the stage in the life-cycle. Women also have multiple positionings in the family, home, community and the state. With all these multiple positions come multiple identities. From their comparative research on factory workers in India and Nigeria, Chhachhi and Pittin's (1996) concluded that in the interaction of identity and social processes, the interplay of multiple identities are important issues that must be brought to bear in analysis and strategic planning. Their studies found, for example, that women saw themselves on a variety of bases. Among the significant features that identified respondent in both countries were religion, gender, place of origin, education, marital status and position in the labour process. Gender did not create an automatic basis of affinity among these women and neither did ethnic origin. Rather solidarity was built around various social positionings or identities that were selectively mobilized as a basis for organizing depending on the issue at hand (*ibid*:115). Chhachhi and Pittin, thus, propose the more fruitful concept of multiple identities located in the context of the family, community, workplace, the state, and all relevant sites as possible basis for solidarity. Feminist postmodern theorists hope from such analytical base to generate conceptual and political strategies that can continually expose and deal with diversity, inequalities, oppression, social injustice and sites of conflict and change (Marchand and Parpart, 1995; Nicholson & Seidman, 1998).

With this approach, it becomes possible to examine whether the appeal to a common culture and heritage—ethnic identity—could potentially neglect areas of conflict that can arise from the diversity of lives and values of Aboriginal people. As argued above, ethnic or national identity is similarly subject to the interplay of social processes, and it is limiting to ignore the influence of social and historic processes in shaping the content and meaning of collective and self-identity. There is the interplay between individual agency and social or cultural patterns in shaping individual and collective identities (Bourdieu, 1976; Nagel, 1996). Ethnic identity is negotiated by individual actors and other members of the group, as well as those outside the group. These negotiations also occur within relations of power. Ethnic group boundaries as well as the meanings associated with being a part of the group or outside the group

are shaped by differences in access to political, social, and economic resources. Access to resources varies among groups and within group by age, gender, ethnicity and economic status. According to Shulz (1998), differential access to resources influences the extent to which individual actors are able to create chosen identities and the meanings associated with these identities. They also dictate the extent to which identities are imposed or challenged by those outside the group. Her study on intergenerational changes in the construction and reconstruction of In-dian identity found distinct patterns in self-identification (as Navajo and as Indian) among older and younger Navajo women occupying different socio-economic, political, and cultural positions. For example, women born before the self-determination movements of the 1960s who grew up in the contexts of Navajo communities distanced themselves from and actively disrupted negative and stereotypic representations of 'In-dian,' drawing on their specific tribal identities to do so. Women born after 1960, on the other hand, were less likely to distance themselves from 'Indian' identities, yet they also reframed the meanings associated with that identity.

Shulz's (1998) study demonstrates, among other things, that differ-ences as well as changes in social, economic, political, and cultural contexts influence the problematic as well as the possibilities of identi-ties: "Identities both reflect and potentially disrupt or recreate social and political relationships between and within groups" (*ibid:*336). The de-essentializing and de-centering tendencies of the postmodern para-digm will inevitably provoke conflict with political projects that rely on strong classificatory systems, whether based on conceptions of ethnicity, nation, race, or gender (Razack, 1998). Yet such an approach is deemed useful to enable the analysis of differences *within* and not just *among* ethnic and racial categories, and to expose contextual differences as well as the effect of change and social processes on human identity reconstruction and transformation. Indeed, it is this very characteristic which gives postmodern theorizing on categories or identity its strength. Its analytical tools, to some extent, are able to reveal new relationships, new structures in differing and changing contexts.

An attempt at deconstructing the Aboriginal identity just among Aboriginal women through a socio-historical analysis will reveal that needs, concerns, perceptions and experiences differ despite imputed homology of Aboriginal identity. Historically, Aboriginal women played a prominent but varied role in the political and cultural life of many tradi-tional Aboriginal societies. Though women's lives before colonial contact were certainly not free of social equity problems, the introduction of trade and hunting exchanges, a money economy and the elevation of

men's hunting activities as a result of contact with European influence and capitalist economic practices, altered socio-political organization and power relations with significant implications for gender roles and relations and ideological valuation (see e.g. Das Guptas, 2000). Subsequently, policies and laws imposed by colonial and successive federal governments ruptured cultural traditions and introduced discrimination against women. Women were doubly disadvantaged by the sexist nature of the *Indian Act* and other laws rooted in Victorian ideas of race and patriarchy. For much of this century, Aboriginal women were not allowed to vote in band elections. They could not own property and were treated as the property of their husbands in many contexts (Hamilton, 1996). Today Aboriginal women are organized in ways that allow them to press for action on issues that concern them. They may have joined with the men folk in demanding the right to self-determination but their representation to the Commission suggests that Aboriginal women want to be a prominent voice in self-government (RCAP, 1996b; 1993a). Aboriginal women have been differently situated and are likely to hold some differing expectations. Social indicators on urban Aboriginal women, for example, reveal vital information that show the diversity of concerns. Urban Aboriginal women tend to have higher levels of education than Aboriginal women in general (RCAP, 1993a). The majority of urban Aboriginal women migrated into cities to escape abuse and oppression within the family system—an experience which the close knit family unit in their reservation as well as distrust of law enforcement authorities prevented reporting (RCAP, 1996). Fair-skinned Métis people face discrimination within the Aboriginal community as do Aboriginal women married to non-Aboriginal men and living on reserves. All these women would have their own concerns about the implication of self-government for themselves as the federal government maintains negotiation of self-government with band councils founded on life in a particular location or a particular land-base. Naturalizing Aboriginal identity will prevent the analyses of *intraracial* discrimination and exploitation. And because only this one measure of reality is seen as most significant, the policy is likely to underestimate the implications of other equally important factors. Focusing on only one aspect of identity may be useful in political organization it however leads to the tendency to be polematic—by emphasizing one social category, other important social categories are not adequately analyzed. The focus on race for instance, often means gender is de-emphasized, thus, failing to analyze how gender constructs for women within a racial group. In the politics of Aboriginal self-government one aspect of identity—ethnic origin—has been selectively prioritized and activated to facilitate the creation of alliances in

the struggle by the Aboriginal people of Canada for recognition. Ethnic identity, however, is only one marker of identity. Doing away with racism does not automatically eliminate sexism, class or other forms of oppression.

Ethnic Identity: Culture and Language

Thus far this paper has argued that Aboriginal identity is not constitutive in ethnic identity alone. Let us leave that argument briefly for now though and look in detail at the two components of ethnic identity which would be employed to create the composite index of the dependent variable for the regressions. One all important aspect of ethnic identity and one which is salient to its continuity and survival is culture. Culture is the way of life of a people—it is the knowledge, language, values, customs, ideas, behaviour as well as the material objects that are passed on from persons to persons and from one generation to the next in a human group or society. An enormously stabilizing force providing a sense of continuity, culture in ethnic identity is that one factor that creates a variety of bases of identity and knits people together. Among any large and heterogeneous group culture is a strong source of unity as it knits people together by a common discourse, but culture can also be a force that generates conflict, discord even violence between peoples within a heterogeneous group. Peoples' perception of culture is intricately linked to their location in society with respect to their ethnicity, class, gender and age.

Language, a nonmaterial cultural component, is a set of symbols that express ideas and enable people to think and communicate verbally or nonverbally with one another. While culture is the whole way of life of a people, language is the principal instrument by which culture is transmitted from one generation to another and by which members of a common culture communicate their meaning and make sense of their shared experience. In this sense, a shared language is essential to a common culture. Now because language defines the world and experience in cultural terms, it literally shapes our way of perceiving—our world view. Most Aboriginal languages, for instance, focus on describing relationships between things rather than using language to rank, judge or evaluate as in many Western languages. As one Aboriginal author illustrates "No we don't have any gender. It's a relationship.... The woman who cares for your heart—that's your wife. Your daughters are the ones who enrich your heart. Your sons are the ones that test your heart!" (Ross, 1996:116). Individuals, through language learn about their cultural heritage and develop a sense of personal identity in relation to their social and ethnic group. Like most human communities, Aboriginal

peoples in Canada speak about language and culture in the same breath as language also permits a group to distinguish themselves from another cultural group and to maintain group boundaries and solidarity. Language for Aboriginal peoples is an extremely important tangible symbol of Indigenous culture and group identity because Aboriginal people's cultures are oral cultures – in these communities cultures are transmitted through speech rather than the written word. When language is lost, transmission of Aboriginal cultures becomes highly handicapped. Language creates and perpetuates perceptions about hierarchical rankings of race and ethnicity in society by transmitting preconceived ideas about the superiority of one category of people over another. In Canada, the English language has been associated with prestige and power and the superiority of one culture over others. History bears witness that the eradication of Aboriginal languages was one exploitative prong employed by missionaries and Jesuit priests operating residential schools and later by successive Canadian federal governments in their attempt to erase Aboriginal cultures. At residential schools Aboriginal children were forbidden to speak any Aboriginal languages. An Ojibway woman's description of this experience illuminates the horror of this shameful record in Canada's history; "Boarding school was supposed to be a place where you forgot everything about being Anishinabe. And our language too. But I said, "I'm going to talk to myself"—and that's what I did, under my covers—talked to myself in Anishinabe. If we were caught, the nuns would make us stand in a corner and repeat over and over, "I won't speak my language" (Ross, 1996:122). This rupture in language transmission from one generation to another dislodged from the minds of children the world view embodied in the languages, alienating them from their families and hence their cultures. The rupture in language transmission has resulted in the low regard that many Aboriginal people hold for traditional language proficiency. Currently it is mainly the elders who speak fluent Aboriginal languages; in the 1996 census only 26% of Aboriginal persons reported an Aboriginal language as their first language while even fewer spoke it at home. Aboriginal elders, leaders and educators believe that without their language their culture will be lost as it would be impossible to translate the deeper meanings of words and concepts into the languages of other cultures. Linguists agree that language shapes the way people perceive the world and how they describe and relate to it (RCAP, 1996b). When traditional language is lost to a person, it is difficult to achieve any of the manifold continuous cultural adjustments that are essential to both legitimate processes and the sense of common membership in a political community. The intimate relationship between language, culture and

thought or self-perception underlie the insistence of Aboriginal peoples that language education be a priority in schools that will be under Aboriginal control in self-governing areas (*ibid*:464). Aboriginal people maintain it is impossible to separate language and identity. Language is perceived as the quintessence of a culture. But language is connected to identity in another important way; "its presence and use in a community is symbolic of identity emblems of group existence. Using a language is the ultimate symbol of belonging" (*ibid*:612).

If this is so, then the sociological question is: How much of Aboriginal culture do people identifying with the Aboriginal identity possess? How are they equipped to inculcate and maintain Aboriginal identity and ensure continuity of Aboriginal ways of life? This paper is hypothesizing that the ability and opportunity to inculcate Aboriginal culture is mitigated by socio-economic and demographic factors such as age, whether they live on a reserve or urban centre, their level of education and their income level. Elders see themselves as transmitters of culture. They see themselves as ambassadors who should be allowed into schools to teach Aboriginal children about cultural values and tradition, and believe the policy should make provision to compensate them for their role as spiritual and cultural counselors (RCAP, 1993a). Middle-aged and older Aboriginal people who were exposed to assimilationist residential school system have not had the opportunity and may not have the interest to learn traditional values and culture. Residential schools were not the only intrusions into Aboriginal communities. Non-Aboriginal social workers removed thousands of children from their families and cultures to place them in the child welfare system. Aboriginal children adopted out through this system lost their connection and identity. As they grew older and their Aboriginal features appeared the adopted society shunned them (*ibid*:33). This intrusive institutionalization of several generations of Aboriginal people, damaging the ability of culture and the community to function or survive, is one of the underlying causes of the social problems in Aboriginal communities today.

Many Aboriginal young women face the same situations as their older counterparts—cultural confusion and a sense of lost identity. Many wind up living on the streets in urban centers "because of abusive situations at home" (1993a:41). Child, sexual and elder abuse was common but not talked about. As a result of the distinct lack of cultural awareness among government personnel and social and welfare workers in urban centers and, therefore, the lack of social support services appropriate for their needs, most fall into prostitution. This not only becomes an issue of exploitation but also an issue of cultural degradation as these young people experience the loss of individual and cultural identity, low

self-esteem, joblessness, institutional dependency and a lack of self-confidence, homelessness, addictions, suicide and AIDS (*ibid*:33). Aboriginal people who do not live on reserves have less opportunity to learn Aboriginal culture. Those who live on the reserves are faced with negative images about their identity because of the social problem in these communities. Aboriginal young women more than men, leave the reserves, migrating to urban centers to improve their education. Here, they also face cultural dislocation and lack the opportunity to participate in Aboriginal culture. Urban schools do not teach Aboriginal culture. Indeed Aboriginal people face racism and degradation of their identity within mainstream educational systems (RCAP, 1993b). There is a strong tide against the survival of Aboriginal identity in an environment that is usually indifferent and often hostile to Aboriginal culture. For substantial numbers of Aboriginal people therefore, daily activities and lifestyle require fluency in English or French, distancing them even further from learning any Aboriginal language or way of life.

If Indigenous languages and cultures are the salient ingredient for the survival of ethnic identity then Aboriginal identity is facing genocide. As this study later demonstrates, the socio-economic processes that characterize Aboriginal peoples' lives are the very agents that are contributing to the death of language and culture. Social processes affect those markers that constitute ethnic identity—knowledge of language and opportunity to inculcate Aboriginal way of life, their sense of self-worth and esteem. These socio-economic and demographic situations and processes are those factors that mediate how identity is constructed, reconstructed and transformed in society. Ethnic identity, of course, is unlikely to be the identity which trumps all others. Partially in competition with her ethnic identity, an Aboriginal woman may feel a strong sense of identity stemming from her occupation, her gender, her family, her community, her political activity, as well as her religion. These varied social positionings, however, have the ability to affect how her ethnic identity is constructed and reconstructed both by herself and by society. Making race the ultimate arbiter of what is known and experienced, therefore, is not without a few problems.

Using statistical applications this paper attempts a deconstruction of the category 'Aboriginal woman.' The interest in employing this postmodern feminist approach, as discussed earlier, stems from its rejection of the claims of universality of central categories and the assumptions about oppression in the matrix of social relations. Proponents of identity politics often claim to have 'difference' recognized as legitimate *within* a particular field. However, internal to the various identities on behalf of which political claims are made are various

differentiated subgroups. The focus of these regressions is to research the multiple levels of identity available to contemporary Canadian Aboriginal women. Specifically it would examine the extent to which socio-economic and demographic factors such as age, level of education, residence, and income level impact and influence the degree to which Aboriginal women have inculcated and are equipped to learn Aboriginal culture traditions and language—the basic survival ingredients of ethnic identity.

Methods of Analysis

To explore the hypothesis that socio-economic factors influence ethnic identity, this study analyzed a subset of data drawn from the 1991 Aboriginal Peoples Survey (hereafter APS). The 1991 APS was developed through extensive consultation with Aboriginal peoples in Canada, in all regions in Canada. Its main objective was to provide a unique source of information on the employment, educational, language, mobility, health, lifestyle, housing and other social characteristics of Canada's Aboriginal peoples. The APS database contains information for two groups of people—Aboriginal persons who identify with an Aboriginal group, and those who do not identify with an Aboriginal group but who reported Aboriginal ancestry. Only persons with Aboriginal ancestry who also identified with an Aboriginal group were however selected to complete the APS questionnaire.

In order to capture the variability that can exist *within* group identity a subset consisting only of 'Aboriginal women' was selected from the 1991 APS for this particular study. This consists of all women respondents in the APS who both reported Aboriginal ancestry and also identified with an Aboriginal group, a total of 19,431 respondents aged between 15 and 89.

Operationalizing Concepts

The Dependent Variable: A composite measure was created to capture the new variable 'Ethnic Identity' which was used as the dependent variable. This measure sought to capture the degree to which respondents who reported ancestry and identified with an Aboriginal group had inculcated the two crucial/important markers of ethnic identity—language and culture. An index was created based on two variables in the APS survey data—ability to speak an Aboriginal language and participation in traditional Aboriginal activity. The original APS response categories of yes/no were recoded into 3 scores: a value of 2 was assigned for those who said yes to both questions, that is, those who spoke an Aboriginal language and participated in traditional Aboriginal

activities. Those who said no to at least one of these questions were coded 1. And those who said no to both questions were coded 0. All cases which fell under the 'not applicable' and 'not stated' categories for both questions were coded as missing cases.

Independent Variables: The four independent variables regressed on the dependent variable included *residence, highest level of schooling, age* and *employment income*. The variable residence was transformed into a dummy variable. As the interest of the study was to investigate the relationship between residence on Reserves and ethnic identity, those who lived on Indian Reserves or settlements were recoded 1, all those who lived in urban centres and other areas were recoded 0. The value of zero here means not living on an Indian Reserve. In interpreting the results therefore, 'an increase' would mean living on an Indian Reserve as opposed to not living in an Indian Reserve. The original APS response categories for the highest level of school were too numerous. This variable was, therefore, collapsed and then recoded to reflect the absence of formal education, those who finished elementary school, those who completed high school, those with post high school diplomas and certificates which were below a bachelor's degree, and those who had a bachelor's degree and above. All cases which fell under the 'not applicable' and 'not stated' categories for each of the four variables were coded as missing cases. A series of multiple regression analysis for all related variables in the model was carried out using the SPSS computer package.

Path diagrams (see Appendix B) showing the causal relationship between the variables were subsequently drawn from the results. They consist of two identical charts, one showing the Theoretical Model (Figure 1), and the other the Observed Model (Figure 2). Arrows from one variable to the other, indicate a direct causal relationship. The direction (positive or negative) of the relationship between variables is indicated. Straight lines (not arrowed) between any variables indicate possible correlation though these possible relationships are not tested. The independent variables *residence* and *age* are treated as exogenous variables and the relationship between them is not tested. The Observed Model shows only those path coefficients which were statistically significant. A dotted line on the observed model indicates paths that were not significant. The residuals error terms are also estimated. A summary of the direct, indirect and total effects of the paths is illustrated in Table 2 (see Appendix A).

Hypotheses

The research hypothesis is that where an Aboriginal woman lives,

her income level, age and educational level affects the degree to which an Aboriginal woman has inculcated Aboriginal language and culture (which we will call the measure of Ethnic Identity). There are mainly three null hypotheses for the three models tested in the analysis. In the first model which tests the effect of all the independent variables simultaneously on the dependent variable, the null hypothesis is that residence, age, income, and level of education do not affect measure of Ethnic Identity, that is: $Ho:B_{residence} = B_{age} = B_{schooling} = B_{income} = 0$. The first model also tests the hypothesis that the coefficient of multiple determination is zero ($R^2 = 0$). In the second model residence, age, and highest level of schooling are regressed on employment income, and the null hypothesis is that these variables do not affect employment income. In the third model, residence and age are regressed on highest level of schooling and the null hypothesis here is that these two variables do not affect level of schooling. The alternative hypothesis for each model is that Ho is not true.

Results

The study sought to investigate the relationship between socio-economic and demographic characteristics and ethnic identity. The data was analysed using the statistical package SPSS 9.0 to generate three multiple regression models for the direct and indirect effects of the independent variables on the dependent variable. The level of significance (alpha) was set at 0.05. Initial testing of the data for assumption of independence as well as for autocorrelation indicates that none of the variables are highly correlated as they are all well below the level of 0.7. The Durban-Watson statistic of 1.59 appears to satisfy the assumptions of autocorrelation of the residual error terms.

Figure 2 (in Appendix B) diagrams the relationships within the observed model after the multiple regressions are run. The observed model confirms the postulations of the theoretical model. All the proposed paths were statistically significant and in the predicted direction of the relationship. The results of the regression models which is discussed below amplifies the nature of the observed path diagram. The results of the first regression model which tests the effect of all the independent variables simultaneously on the dependent variable, also shows the goodness of fit statistics that tells us how well the model fits the population. When all the independent variables in the model—*residence, level of schooling, age* and *employment income* were regressed on the dependent variable *measure of ethnic identity,* the goodness of fit test yielded an R^2 of 0.165, an adjusted R^2 of 0.165 and an F ratio of 439.91 (p= .000). With the p-value being less than the level of significance of

0.05, we can reject the null-hypothesis that R^2 is zero and conclude that at least some of the coefficients are not zero. In other words, some of the variance can be accounted for by this model. Indeed the model is quite useful as almost 17% of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the variance in the independent variables. The estimate for the residual error term for measure of ethnic identity is 0.914.

The first model indicates that the independent variables had statistically significant effect on the dependent variable. All the paths were statistically significant ($p<0.05$). This means that we reject the null hypothesis of no association. As predicted, residence positively affected ethnic identity. The results showed a coefficient of 0.336 (t=33.71, p=.000) indicating that when all other independent variables were held constant, one standard deviation increase in respondents residence resulted in 0.336 standard deviation increase in measure of identity. Since residence was transformed into a dummy variable, an increase in residence simply means living on an Indian Reserve. In simple language this result means that the degree to which an Aboriginal woman has inculcated Aboriginal culture and language increased if she lived on an Indian Reserve than if she did not live on a Reserve. With respect to highest level of schooling, a coefficient of -0.092 was obtained (t = -8.11, p=.000) indicating that when all other independent variables were held constant, one standard deviation increase in respondents level of schooling resulted in 0.092 standard deviation decrease in measure of identity. This simply means that higher levels of education negatively affected the markers of ethnic identity—Aboriginal culture and language. There was also a negative relationship between employment income and ethnic identity. The coefficient of -0.023 obtained (t= -2.12, p=0.034) indicate that when all other independent variables were held constant, one standard deviation increase in respondents employment income level resulted in a 0.023 standard deviation decrease in measure of identity. This means that the degree to which respondents had inculcated Aboriginal culture and language decreased as their employment income increases. Age positively affected ethnic identity. The coefficient of 0.136 obtained (t=13.62, p=.000) indicates that when all other independent variables were held constant, one standard deviation increase in respondents age resulted in a 0.136 standard deviation increase in measure of identity. This means that older respondents had inculcated more Aboriginal culture and language.

In the second model, residence, age and highest level of schooling were regressed on employment income. The coefficients were all significant ($p<0.05$). With an R^2 of .245 and adjusted R^2 of 0.244 (F=1568.340, p=.000), we reject the null hypothesis of no association and confirm the predictions of the theoretical path diagram. The estimate

of the residual error for employment income is 0.869. As predicted, the level of schooling had a positive effect on income (t=58.89, p=.000) with one standard deviation increase in respondents level of schooling resulting in a 0.448 standard deviation increase in employment income when age and residence are held constant. As is well documented in most empirical research, the higher the educational level the greater the employment income. Age also had a positive effect on income (t=15.54, p=.000). One standard deviation increase in respondents' age resulted in 0.113 standard deviation increase in employment income when level of schooling and residence were held constant. Residence negatively affected employment income (t= -16.48, p=.000) with one standard deviation increase in respondents residence (living on a Reserve) resulting in 0.124 standard deviation decrease in employment income when level of schooling and age are held constant. In other words, the level of employment income decreased if the respondent lived on an Indian Reserve than if they did not.

In the third model, residence and age were regressed on level of schooling. With an F=829.955, p=.000 we reject the null hypothesis that age and residence does not affect the level of schooling (p<0.05). The residual or variability not accounted for by residence and age is estimated at 0.950. As predicted, both age and residence negatively affected level of schooling. The relationship between age and schooling was negative (t= -18.00, p=.000), with one standard deviation increase in respondents age resulting in 0.138 standard deviation decrease in the level of schooling when residence was held constant. In simple terms, as the age of the respondents increased the level of education decreased. Residence negatively affected employment income (t=-36.18, p=.000). One standard deviation increase in respondents' residence (that is, living on a Reserve as opposed to not living on a Reserve) resulted in 0.278 standard deviation decrease level of schooling when age was held constant. In other words, the respondents living on an Indian Reserve had lower levels of schooling compared to those who did not.

Figure 2 summarizes the direct, indirect and total effects of the independent variables on the dependent variable. All the path coefficients of the observed path analysis were statistically significant (p<0.05). Residence had a strong and direct positive effect on measure of identity (0.336). Residence also indirectly affected identity through level of schooling (-0.278) and through employment income (-0.124). Age also had a direct positive effect on identity (0.136), and indirect effects through level of schooling (-0.138) and employment income (-0.113). As predicted both level of schooling and employment income had negative direct effects on measure of identity (-0.092) and (-0.023) respectively. Level of school-

ing also had a positive indirect effect on measure of identity through employment income (0.448).

The total direct effects on the dependent variable was 0.357, total indirect effects 0.029 and the total direct and indirect effects was 0.386. The residuals or variability that was not explained by the independent variables in each model have been stated above in the results of the regressions.

Discussion of Findings

This study primarily sought to show differences that can exist within one particular identity. Three important issues arise from the results. First, it becomes clear that Aboriginal identity is not monolithic; just within the subgroup of 'Aboriginal women' there are important differences. The observed path model confirms the theory that socio-economic factors variously and differently affected how much of Aboriginal language and culture an Aboriginal woman had inculcated. The results illustrate that Aboriginal women located in different socio-economic and demographic positions have varying degrees of the important markers of ethnic identity even though they all have Aboriginal ancestry and have identified with an Aboriginal group. Aboriginal identity is not naturally inherited neither is it uniform.

Secondly, the results of all three models (Regression 1, 2 & 3) as well as the direct and indirect effects obtained in the Observed Path Model (Figure 2), illustrate how the matrix of socio-economic and demographic relations differently affects the lives of Aboriginal people and hence Aboriginal identity. Residence had the strongest total effect on Ethnic Identity. As predicted in the theoretical model (Figure 1), the results of the observed model showed that Aboriginal women who lived on Reserves were more likely to have culture transmitted to them than those who did not. Migrating to urban and other areas where the Aboriginal way of life was not dominant, as well as living in a society which degraded Aboriginal culture did not encourage the learning or continuity of traditional culture in the lives of these migrants. Those who still lived on Reserves had the opportunity to interact with and learn traditional culture from their families, neighbours and the elders. The *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People* stated that those who migrated to the cities often found themselves living on the streets without adequate social support services where it was easy to fall prey to substance abuse, prostitution and crime (RCAP, 1996b). In these conditions Aboriginal youth find it difficult to seek help from families back home on Reserves, further alienating them from their cultures where they could find healing for their eroded self-worth. With these social conditions, it

is not surprising, therefore, that the results confirmed that Measure of Ethnic Identity increased if respondents lived on an Indian Reserve than if they did not. Residence also indirectly negatively affected identity through education and employment income (Figure 2 & Regression 2 & 3). As the results showed, the level of education and employment income decreased if the respondents lived on an Indian Reserve than if they did not. With lower educational levels on Reserves, lack of jobs and marketable skills, and more people here typically on social assistance than employed, this relationship is well predicted. It is noteworthy that despite the negative indirect effects, residence still had the strongest *total effect* on Aboriginal ethic identity.

Education had the strongest negative effect on ethnic identity. Level of schooling had a direct negative effect on identity. It also indirectly affected identity through employment income. There was consistent evidence, therefore, that the higher educational level an Aboriginal woman had achieved the less of Aboriginal culture and identity she had inculcated. As predicted, higher level of schooling or education, higher employment income and younger ages were associated with lower measure of ethnic identity. As previously discussed, young Aboriginal women who migrated from Aboriginal communities and Reserves to urban centres, did so mainly to improve their education. These therefore earned higher incomes than those on Reserves. As a result of the distance from Aboriginal way of life and the alienation caused by urban life, urban Aboriginal women were more likely to lack the markers of ethnic identity—language and culture. However, the most important explanation for this observation is the fact that mainstream educational systems simply alienated Aboriginal students from their families and cultures. Formal education as introduced to the Aboriginal people has been assimilationist. Historically, the primary purpose of formal education was to indoctrinate Aboriginal people into a Christian, European world-view—to 'civilize' them. Residential schools were used to deliberately break the transmission of culture from one generation to another (RCAP, 1996b). The federal government, furthermore, enacted provisions in the *Indian Act* enabling it to withdraw funding from the education of Aboriginal people not residing on Reserves (RCAP, 1966b:435). Educational systems in the cities typically eroded identity and self-worth as Aboriginal students faced racism and degradation of their cultures. Education is a priority in the policy of self-government and Aboriginal people (and rightly so) are asking for control and jurisdiction over schools in self-governing territories so that education can serve as a vehicle for cultural and economic renewal. This finding is a strong argument for their fears and concerns. Education has worked with the long-term objective of weakening Indian

nations by causing the children to lose sight of their identities, history and cultural knowledge. To prevent cultural genocide while attempting to effectively compete and survive in western dominant society, Aboriginal jurisdiction in education would have to be extensive to cover not only the needs of those in the communities but especially those in urban centres. While the RCAP report, guided by the reality of social and cultural differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples of Canada, has set the stage for future negotiations between the federal and provincial governments and Aboriginal peoples, one major issue remains to be resolved: how will the growing number of urban Aboriginals be made participants in the policy of Aboriginal self-government?

As predicted, age had a positive effect on identity. Older persons, especially the Elders, spoke more Aboriginal languages and considered themselves custodians of traditional culture. As predicted, both age and residence indirectly and negatively affected identity through level of schooling. Older Aboriginal people tended to live on Reserves and these had achieved lower levels of education in their lifetime. This is mainly because even though schools were introduced by missionaries in the mid-1600s, until the 1950s Aboriginal people on Reserves had little access to more than primary schools (RCAP, 1996b:435). Then, as a result of many of the social problems discussed above, there was a high drop out rate for Aboriginal people. A study of urban schools in Saskatchewan in the late 1980s, for example, found that as much as 90% of Aboriginal students did not graduate from high school (RCAP, 1993a:77). There is a relationship between age and residence as most elderly Aboriginal people and people who retire go back to live among their own communities. This relationship was not tested for in this study.

The third issue is that, the intricate web of socio-economic positions and identity also tell an important story about the effect of socio-economic variables and ethnic identity. It becomes clear that not only do socio-economic situations and positionings have the ability to influence Aboriginal culture and its transmission; they in effect become important determinants of the very survival and continuity of Aboriginal ethnic identity. Poverty, poor health and housing, unemployment, low levels of education, the lack of appropriate social support systems—in sum marginalization—affect Aboriginal people's ability to identify with their culture. For instance, high levels of education which should improve an Aboriginal person's life chances, actually leads to the loss of Aboriginal cultural identity because past residential schools and current educational systems denigrated Aboriginal cultures. More than anything else, the very social and economic factors which script their lives lead to cultural genocide. It becomes clear, therefore, that recognizing and

respecting racial or ethnic identity should not be the main *raison d'etre* for strategy when implementing the policy of Aboriginal self-government. Marginalization is the cancer to be eliminated. This is not to say efforts at eradicating racism are not important. Renouncing racism is, however, not enough. It does not end poverty or inequality. The argument of this study is that the focus should strongly be on redistribution of socio-economic resources of Canada to Aboriginal peoples. Selectively identifying and focusing on ethnic identity glosses over the socio-economic and demographic factors that inform the multiple positionings or identities of Aboriginal people. Focusing on ethnic identity, without simultaneous active attention to socio-economic inequities, would turn the policy of Aboriginal self-government into little less than mere rhetoric, misdirect the adoption of strategies that could de-emphasize the root cause of denigration—the socio-economic marginalization—that has direct effect on the continuity of Aboriginal identity and way of life. Selectively focusing on only one identity also could gloss over the important variations of needs within the Aboriginal people and the multiple identities resulting from their various socio-economic and demographic characteristics, positionings. As the issue of urban Aboriginals show, efforts at addressing identical needs (ethnic identity) mean non-identical concerns (e.g. impact of urbanization, age, gender etc) could be dangerously ignored.

Limitations of Study/Recommendations For Future Studies

The limitations of using ethnic origin data are well-documented problems in research involving minority groups (Boxhill, 1984). One problem with the APS is low response rate. It is noted that the response rate fell as respondents failed to answer questions which could be considered intrusive. Typically in ethnic surveys, the interviewer is seen as an outsider prying into an aspect of their lives which an outsider would not understand. This problem is reflected in the fact that the total of 19,431 women respondents dropped to 8908 in the first model, (after coding all non-response to questions as missing cases), when asked questions pertaining to their ethnic identity. The number increased when more general questions were asked. A possible solution would be for Statistics Canada to use Aboriginal interviewers with whom respondents can more readily identify.

A related problem is that accuracy of any ethnic studies information depends on the reliability of the base population and the degree to which the underlying assumptions on each component represents the actual trend. The definition of 'Aboriginal populations' and 'identity' used in

the APS, for instance, depended on the respondents' subjective perception of their affiliation with their Aboriginal origins. Such affiliation can be affected by various factors such as legislative changes (e.g. The *Indian Act*), awareness of culture and traditional values (as argued in this study), and group cohesiveness. In such cases to derive a base population, it is necessary to clearly define base assumptions and still treat results of such studies with caution.

Another measurement problem was that, the way in which many of the original variables were coded in the APS made it impossible to combine a lot more variables in the creation of a composite measure to which the techniques of linear regression could be applied. With this study, only two variables—ability to speak an Aboriginal language and participation in traditional activities—could be combined to create an index of ethnic identity that did not violate the assumptions of linearity. A more extensive study might want to adopt a triangulation of statistical techniques or find more comprehensive variables than the APS can provide. The APS survey itself is dated. Subsequent federal surveys have merely sought to capture information on Aboriginal people who have come of the age (15 years) and included their data in the 1991 survey rather than conducting a new survey altogether. A lot of changes would have occurred in the lives of the original respondents since 1991 and a new, more comprehensive survey would provide more current information.

Finally, the main problem with evaluating such a policy lies in the enormous dimensions of the policy itself. This paper focused on the report of the RCAP, and hopes that by deconstructing basic underlying assumptions and issues central to the lived reality of Aboriginal peoples, policy planners will see more clearly the need to implement a comprehensive programme of restoration as recommended by both the RCAP and Canada Human Rights Commission. Future studies might want to evaluate whether what has been done thus far in federal response to the RCAP report is achieving policy objectives in reality. Future studies (using with more current Aboriginal social data) might want to select samples for studies and using techniques such as focus groups discussions of residents and of key informants in Aboriginal self-governing communities assess whether self-governing strategies, and the people to whom the policy is directed are talking the same language. The federal government, almost a decade ago, committed to dismantling the Department of Indian Affairs in recognition of the inherent right of Aboriginal people to self-government, yet, the future form of Aboriginal self-government still remains unclear, not even among Aboriginal peoples themselves. Then, of course, since identities potentially disrupt and recreate social and political relationships *between* and *within* groups, examining the

construction and reconstruction of identities over time, would also contribute to our understanding of social and political processes through which the individual and groups locate themselves in relation to others.

Concluding ....

In sum, grouping people and ideas in a polematic manner, increases the chances that the policy of self-government would likely marginalise non-identical concerns. Since self governance is dependent on diverse Aboriginal groups working together as a people and nation, it becomes crucial to understand and plan for the complex articulation that surround the identity 'Aboriginal People.' It may be more profitable for all concerned to conceive of a strategy for change that would have less to do with being inclusive than they would have to do with being accountable. In other words, because of the diversity of lives and values, identity politics organized around shared socio-economic political and demographic needs and interests would be a more representative and realistic approach to social organizing than an assumed identity based on shared natural commonality. Of course, for identity politics to have effect Aboriginal peoples cannot accentuate all their differences, yet they may adopt a common frame of reference within which their unity is more salient. The claim that their shared culture and ethnic identity is salient and even somewhat obligatory cannot be entirely coherent with an account of how we ought to deal with difference.

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APPENDIX A
Table 1
Correlation Matrix of Selected Socio-Economic Variables in Measure of Identity

	Residence	Employment Income	Age	Level of School	Composite Index of Identity
Residence	1.000	-.188	.016	-.217	.363
Employment Income	-.188	1.000	.048	.456	-.122
Age		1.000	-.194	.158	
Level of Schooling			1.000	-.202	
Composite Index of Identity				1.000	

Table 2
Summary of Direct, Indirect and Total Effects on Measure of Identity

	Direct	Indirect	Total
Residence	.336		
via Level of Education (i*c)		.026	
via Employment Income (g*d)		.003	
Total			.365
Age	.136		
via Level of Education (h*c)		.013	
via Employment Income (f*d)		-.003	
Total			.146
Highest Level of Education/Sch	-.092		
via Employment (e*d)		-.010	
Total			-.102
Employment Income	-.023		
Total			-.023
Total Direct	.357		
Indirect Effects	.029		
Total Effects	.386		

Figure 1
Theoretical Model Summarizing Direct and Indirect Effects of Selected Socio-Economic
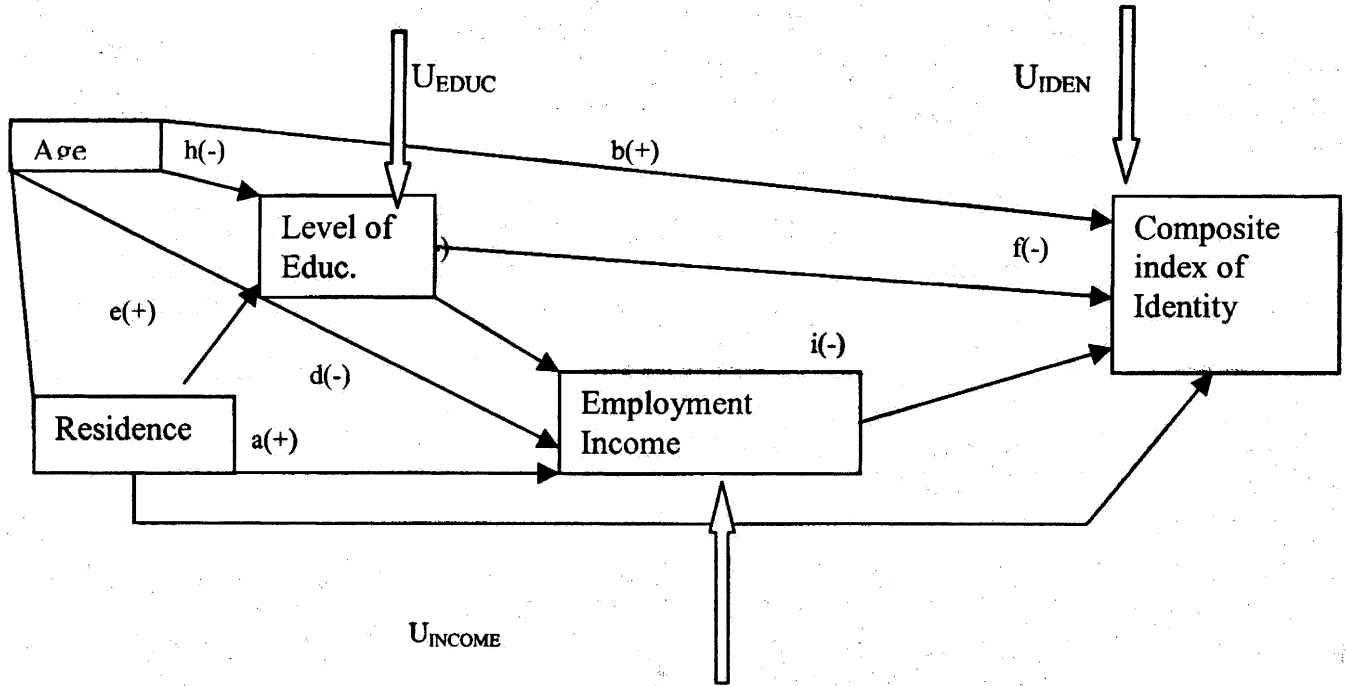**Variables Ethnic Identity**

Figure 2
Observed Model Summarizing Direct and Indirect Effects of Selected Socio-Economic
Variables on Ethnic Identity