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# Feeding the Roots of Cultural Identity: Indigenous Wellness in Canada

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## Abstract

While responses to native addictions and mental issues are continued priorities, the overarching focus is to recognize the diasporic status of indigenous peoples, to improve native wellness, and to establish cross-cultural identity for all Canadians. Historical culture, ways of knowing and language support strength-based approaches, alongside which relational structures—elders, families, communities, creation—play essential roles in native whole health. A comprehensive Continuum Framework guides federal, provincial, and territorial stakeholder efforts toward native wellness, supported by engaging indigenous communities. Indigenous wellness balances the physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental quadrants of whole health. Balanced well-being is enriched by (i) purpose in individuals' daily lives through education, employment, caregiving, and cultural ways of being and doing; (ii) hope for the future grounded in a sense of core identity, indigenous values, and spirit; (iii) a sense of belonging and connectedness with all relations and culture; and (iv) understanding and deriving meaning from individual, family, and community lives as part of creation and rich history. Indigenous philosophy can be understood and appreciated through the lenses of various Western theoretical approaches that are constructionist by design, whereby Canadians may get one step closer toward achieving a cross-cultural identity. This shared vision requires innovative leadership, sustained commitment, and effective partnerships.

**Keywords:** indigenous wellness, cultural identity, wholeness, two-eyed seeing, diversity, health

## 1. Introduction

Canada is marked by cultural multiplicity as a result of its rich history and accommodating immigration policies [1]. These factors result in a national identity marked by increasing human diversity, which Canadians are rightly proud of. As Canada seeks to prosper in a global economy, one should hope that its diverse character is optimally utilized to lead by example from a human rights perspective, which gives it a competitive advantage. Yet, still more can be done at home base, specifically when considering the need for deepening understanding and respect given the presence of diaspora within Canada created by tensions between its Western populations (including select country immigrants pocketed in distinct neighborhoods) and indigenous peoples (also referred to as natives). The latter group has lived in what is now Canada long before the first European settlers

arrived here and colored this country's past and continues to do so today and into the future. Hence, Canadians together need to invest more in integrated human and cultural potential and embrace our combined power as a diasporic nation from the roots up and out.

As Canada's indigenous peoples work to rebuild strong identity by revisiting their roots, it creates golden opportunities to ponder connection points and strengthen bridges in the interest of collectivistic and individualistic fusion at the same time when Canada's inhabitants become more globally mobile with sustained international contact and exponentially adopt multiple national and/or international identities also.

The presence of a diaspora associated with a country is a powerful economic and social source of knowledge and ownership. When smartly managed, it creates opportunities to connect, circulate information and create new knowledge, and to build trust and co-responsibility through confidence in the spirit of cross-cultural unison. While the discussion in this chapter focuses on Canada, highlighted implications can be inferred around the globe.

## **2. Intramural diaspora**

Although referenced as far back as 1594, the term *diaspora* originally referred to colonies of Jews who settled in a scattered fashion outside ancient Palestine (i.e., present-day Israel) after the Babylonian exile thousands of years ago in 586 BC [2]. Diaspora effectively refers to a physical dispersion or spreading of people with a common origin, background, type, or ethos for reasons of religion or eschatology, philosophy, or politics, where the attachment to the original remains and the original ideology of nationalism or "one nation" is fraught for all practical purposes. Today the term refers to any people who were forced to or live by choice in places away from their ancestral or established homelands [3]. Often diaspora is irrevocable, so that new and creative means need to be found to address its implications effectively.

Canada's historical actions related to settler colonization as Europeans took lands from its indigenous peoples, combined with the practice of removing approximately 150,000 native children from their communities to be assimilated via residential schools between 1840 and 1996 and concerted efforts to outnumber them, render this group a diasporic culture within its national borders. The dispersion by the interventions of Europeans convinced of their superiority, and the later displacement of native families by putting large numbers of indigenous children in foster care in the 1960s (called the Sixties Scoop) by state authorities, resulted in alienation [4]. This led to distorted and sometimes romanticized memories of indigenous homeland with an understandable desire to return to what was before rather than to assimilate midair, and a wedging of heightened consciousness of past experiences. The historical events left them marginalized, and many suffered broken or different identities defined by these experiences [5].

The past actions left wounds still in process of healing no matter how many Canadian government officials and Catholic Church representatives have apologized and if government officials started to act on their duty as a principled part of the Honor of the Crown to consult with natives in any industry activities that may potentially adversely affect them. In response, the complexity of resulting feelings due to separation and banishment is expressed in variable and unique ways [6]. Yet, the ignorant and those not directly affected by diaspora still lack insight and cannot relate, so that these profound emotions become epistemic and part of the diasporic character of those negatively impacted.

In other words, indigenous peoples as a group contain all critical diasporic markings even when living within the vast geographical boundaries of Canada. These trends heighten the necessity to expand on the simple, extramural nature in which we conventionally define *diaspora*. We coin the term *intramural diaspora* for this purpose, as it has application value for multiple groups internationally also. Intramural diaspora opens the door for looking at marginalized and minority groups within a country that might otherwise fall through the cracks and allows for learning about diasporic implications specific to groups and their circumstances such as Canadian natives.

### 3. Indigenous peoples in Canada as a diasporic group

Canadian natives, also called indigenous peoples, are categorized into three distinctive groups of First Nations (60.0% with more than 600 bands of which some live on reserves), Métis (36.1%), and Inuit (4.0%) as recognized in the Canadian Constitution Act of 1982, Sections 25 and 35 especially [7]. According to the 2016 National Census, indigenous peoples are comparatively young in age and represent 4.9% of the total Canadian population [8]. Natives are growing in numbers for natural reasons (particularly based on fertility rate and life expectancy) and, importantly, also via self-reported identification. Indigenous peoples grow by more than four times the rate of the non-aboriginal population in Canada.

#### 3.1 Reserves as diasporic launch

While the number of indigenous peoples living in metropolitan areas within Canada is growing due to increased mobility and acculturation, significant population growth is evident both off reserve (+49.1%) and on reserve (+12.8%) where currently 44.2% of First Nations people with registered or treaty Indian status live [8].

An Indian reserve in Canada is specified by the Indian Act (another Canadian Act of Parliament [9]) as a tract of land with a legal title that has been set apart and held in trust for exclusive Indian band use by specifically Her Majesty, the Queen of England, as the sovereign in this country as a matter of constitutional law since February 6, 1952. Long before 1876, region-specific colonial authorities with the consent of some Canadian natives informally acted on the reasoning that reserves may be a viable solution to land disputes and other cultural conflicts between the natives and European settlers and numerous treaties were signed over the years.

Today's Indian reserves are federally regulated through administrative and political structures, which continue to typically cater for non-reserve communities. Existing gaps in services and infrastructure identified through environmental audits, such as the regulation of waste disposal, water monitoring, and air pollution, are noted and a concern, as these are typically handled provincially and municipally for non-reserve communities with efficient systems in place.

Soon after indigenous peoples signed the treaties, pragmatic issues associated with reserves were born from the fact that they understood that lands and resources would be shared and that traditional practices such as food gathering and ceremonial interventions, among others, could continue undisturbed. Instead, natives were indefinitely confined or forced to develop the land into more modern agricultural practices. This issue was exacerbated by native displacement to lands on which housing was designed for nuclear family units rather than extended family systems, which forcibly disrupted social networks and broke up long-established kinship systems that regulated traditional practices.

Furthermore, natives were displaced onto lands that were generally less fertile and poorly suited for agriculture, which later became the grounds for the



government taking away lands and engaging in discriminating legislating practices. This occurred on top of marginalization from the capitalist immigrant workforce, overt racism, urban centralization of industry accompanied by its technological advances lying far away from reserves, and later cultural genocide instigated by implementing assimilation programs such as the residential schools [10]. It is no wonder that poverty with associated socioeconomic, environmental, abuse, and mental problems raised their ugly heads as a result. Conflict between natives and others in Canada originated from land and still is centered around land today.

### **3.2 Intramural diaspora as an opportunity for progress**

The uninformed may not realize that the borders of allotted reserves are often different from original, indigenous territories, which are often larger and which house ancestry and the ceremonial sites for cultural and spiritual practices, as well as socioeconomic activities. Entry into the larger territories is vital for native wellness as a whole and specifically for maintaining roots for a strong indigenous identity. These are difficult to uphold when traditional territories are lost or inaccessible for indigenous peoples in Canada, but with resilience they survived in spite of generations of struggle, ironically thanks to segregation. This is not totally surprising as diasporic groups are known to stick together through shared experience [4, 10].

For national progression it means though that indigenous peoples' original connection to their land needs to be honored as a critical step in representing Canada cross-culturally as one nation. Advances made in this respect will signal recognition and acknowledgment of the complex relationship we have with each other through this land. Land offers sustainability, and when subsistent ways of life are lost, a collective dependence is created on governments. One-directional proposals such as abolishment of reserves (and thereby Canadian governments' obligations to indigenous peoples) or the assimilation of natives into non-aboriginal diverse society are largely uninformed suggestions for oversimplified solutions. Collaborative work with a shared goal of striving toward effective solutions includes opportunities to capitalize on diaspora. For instance, we could find commonality and unique strength between collectivistic and individualistic philosophies and ways of life and cultivate healthy roots for what it means to have *cross-cultural identity*. This term refers to a mutual embracing [11] of seemingly opposing cultural identities, the lesser known of which needs to be put under the magnifying glass and explored in verifiable ways as we will do in the next sections of this chapter.

## **4. Diaspora creates cultural identities**

Canadians may identify as native or indigenous in two parallel and not always complementary ways. The more known and arguably expected way relies on law and state regulation [12]. The second way is more intricate to track down as it looks at long-standing family tradition and community practice as it pertains to cultural identity. This chapter gravitates toward the latter, less traveled road in the context of diaspora.

Like culture, identity is a complex concept to define precisely, as it contains both the personal self and the self in interaction or relation with others. The emphasis on either self or group may be different depending on the theory, methodology, or philosophy followed as the boundaries that each draws provide a different framework in which to describe the meaning of the concept of identity. Both culture and identity are often featured in communication, psychological, sociological, anthropological, philosophical, ecological, and related disciplines, each providing different lenses for study.

Broadly speaking, *cultural identity* has to do with shared experiences, enactments, and negotiations of social identifications by group members within particular settings [13]. The settings may include important qualities delineated by human rights, such as gender, age or generation, race, ethnicity, ethno-linguistics, nationality, social class, and disability. They may also take other contextual directions, such as (social) media, politics, environmental issues, health and healing, as well as technological advancements (think artificial intelligence) and globalization. In either event, the settings are socially constructed to show and teach group members expected ways of being and acting [14].

The different settings enable us to look at cultural identity using different approaches. When dynamic interaction and developing properties are brought into the discussion of cultural identity, an interpretive approach is at stake [15]. This line becomes more critical in nature when this discussion is contextualized in history, politics, religion, and the like [16] to help crystalize the cultural identity of a group. A third position concerns the strength of psychological and emotional attachment between group members, including cultural values, norms, customs and practices, and beliefs, which lends a social-scientific approach to cultural identity, recognizing that individual identity lies at its core [17].

Given these approaches, *cultural identity* can be defined as a fact of unwavering being by close similarity or affinity, which characterizes who or what a particular group of people is, remains, and becomes in spite of life experiences and changes. Within cultural identity lie choices and rights that are shaped over time by co-creating, reinforcing, and morphing features.

While we look at cultural identity as a single diasporic entity in this chapter, it should be noted that it is possible and plausible for individuals and groups to possess multiple cultural identities given different boundaries that can be drawn. The different cultural identities may intersect, communally adapt and evolve, and morph into hybrids. Identification with one culture may act as a support when identification with another culture is damaged. At the base though, all cultural identities contain elements of the personal and social, expressed through dynamic communicative systems.

#### 4.1 Implications of cultural identity in the context of diaspora

Cultural identity heightens awareness and encourages reflection; it is the seeking answer to the essential question of “Who are we really?” from which also flows “How do we want to empathically live?” A willingness to stand by found answers as it defines the present and orients groups toward a sustainable future with ties to the past is intrinsically mixed into cultural identity. It is observable through specific behavioral trends, chosen lifestyles, and esthetically expressed markers. Cultural identity encompasses the total of how the group continually construes itself through multiple behavioral and societal roles, which allows for descriptions of aspects of identity, and for determining which of these aspects may be whole or broken and in need of healing.

Dysphoria of cultural proportions can be an ill-fated result from traumatic diasporic experiences. For example, indigenous cultural identity is shaped through generations inhabiting land in Canada. When a double blow occurs by taking these inhabitants away from the land *and* by taking the land away from the inhabitants, cultural identity suffered severely. Loss of any group’s cultural identity can erode a sense of collective self and make communities dysfunctional. In drawing parallels with other forms of dysphoria, likely symptoms of cultural dysphoria may include any one or combined depression, suicidal tendencies, anxiety, maladaptive behaviors such as agitation, social isolation, and disgust at their own or assimilated culture. These symptoms may appear at early or late onset in the diasporic experience.

It follows that *cultural dysphoria* is the emotional distress a nation or society experiences as a result of dissonance in social and ontological expectations. In the context of diaspora, cultural dysphoria may occur with or after displacement from the geographical space of establishment or ancestry with which the group strongly identified, perpetuated by a newly assigned environment and lifestyle that do not match the original identity.

#### **4.2 Setting the stage for dispatching diaspora**

In order to channel the presence of intramural diaspora and address possible cultural dysphoria, the first step is to accept that we need (cultural) identity and cannot do without it [18]. Identity is a life-anchoring stabilizer that is forged in the social domain and that helps shape a sense of self through psychosocial processes. Description of cultural identity is a structured process whereby differences and similarities are ascertained not only through methods of contrasting and comparing but also through a synthesis of (indigenous) cultural description with (Eurocentric, Western) critical, interpretive, and social-scientific approaches.

The intramural diaspora of indigenous peoples as a minority culture within Canada is deliberately chosen as a fresco for mapping onto a theoretical platform marked by first-world, Western, and Eurocentric thinking that the majority of Canadians subscribe to. In particular, by choosing a strength-based subject matter such as native wellness descriptions, it serves as a powerful constructive springboard for discussing cultural identity in diasporic context. The objective is to open the door for fostering better blending and fusion between different worldviews so that Canada may move confidently toward a strong cross-cultural identity.

Since cultural identity is constantly evolving, it is imbued by unavoidable accuracies and inaccuracies as temporary points of attachment between what is described and who describes it, making it contextually and time-specific. Herein also lies a gem: cultural identity is never complete and should be described by multiple scholars and through different lenses. Ideally, not all scholars will be outsiders respectfully learning about another's culture, but some of them will speak effectively from within their own cultural teachings and actions, conveying the meaning and translations of their daily lived experiences in keeping with good validation practices.

When considering indigenous roots from a diasporic perspective, it is necessary to anchor ourselves in a methodology that will expose our own unique social perspectives and value systems, as these have a significant bearing on how we develop cross-cultural identity. The proposed approaches are used to guide the discussion in an attempt to further the achievement of cross-cultural identity for Canada and thereby help bridge the current diasporic divide that continues to persist in the minds of many.

#### **4.3 Anchoring diaspora in constructionist theory**

Ideally, cross-cultural identity is developed at ground level within a country, where active involvement in a process of meaning and knowledge construction can occur. In an increasingly globalized world, a representative cross-cultural identity is critical for success in productive inter-cultural relations at higher and broader levels. Hence, in this chapter Western theoretical perspectives on native wellness as rooted in indigenous culture are offered via meaning-oriented, critical, interpretive, and social-scientific approaches outlined below [13]. These approaches and the flow between them are constructionist by nature, and each can be broken down further by different underlying theories.

#### 4.3.1 Critical approaches

Critical approaches in Western thinking set out to tackle the proverbial elephant in the room. Proponents uncover actualities that may have been missed otherwise. They pick apart, are suspicious of, or question specific assumptions or conclusions made about a culture. This is established by using critical thought to expose the possible existence of flaws or faulty claims and findings, especially when they are absolute. This careful analysis may also entail that said assertions are placed in a broader context that facilitate neutrality, which opens up the possibility of further discourse and brings about a deeper understanding of the issues at stake.

#### 4.3.2 Interpretive approaches

Interpretive approaches call for Western thinking to shift away from the observation and measurement of facts with a subsequent drawing of conclusions (also called positivism). Here the focus is on *verstehen*, a German concept denoting an understanding of subjective human experiences. Existing or found facts are decoded and explained through recognizing that there are many, equally valid points of view to be considered and to collectively draw meaning from. Claims based on facts alone may not always be correct or provide the full picture.

#### 4.3.3 Social-scientific approaches

Social-scientific approaches are systematic methods that aim to understand relationships by observing behavior of individuals or groups within a social environment marked by changes in time. The social environment under consideration may relate to shifts in gender role and identity, human inequality, power, politics, historical events, socioeconomics, and other factors that may be prominent characteristics in certain behaviors. These approaches look to understand social processes as outcomes of tension, usually felt between two seemingly opposing, coexisting groups.

These approaches also recognize that within the tension and mistrust, the separate cultural identities partially depend on each other to continue their existence; collectivism is understood in contrast to individualism, and the domination of Western culture enabled the marginalization of the smaller groups of indigenous peoples. Importantly, the acknowledged strain and unease existing between opposing groups also pave the way for democratic, central discourses that may facilitate cross-cultural identity.

### 5. Using diaspora to create cross-cultural identity

The overlay of Western theoretical approaches with indigenous descriptions of cultural identity is embedded in the concept of two-eyed seeing. The latter is an indigenous-based guide to arriving at cross-cultural identity by lacing seemingly opposing sides ascribed to different philosophies, shifting focus to bring about a unified perspective [19].

#### 5.1 Critical race theory as a critical approach

When differential racialization or racial injustice and domination are at play in ways that may predict or determine systemic bias, critical race theory is relevant for cultural identity in the context of diaspora. In Canada where a diversity of races



abounds, race is best understood in an ethnic sense, where a substantial number of Canadian citizens and permanent residents identify with two or more ethnicities.

Bias and inequity can be counterbalanced in three different manners under critical race theory [20]. First, demonstrations and references are sought to indicate that the racialized processes are ever-changing as time passes, as contexts and circumstances change, as experiences and needs shift, and as group objectives adapt. Another valued, constructive practice acknowledged by this theory is counter-storytelling, whereby cultural experiences are legitimized as sources of knowledge that can be used to challenge other (Western, Eurocentric) forms of knowing. A third practice is to act on verbal deeds of aggression against the culture to maintain the status quo, which may range from planned to subconscious behaviors and include name-calling, stereotyping, invalidations, and similar ploys targeted at the minority group.

In the first manner under critical race theory, it is important to pay attention to the fact that indigenous peoples are culturally heterogeneous. Different nations (called tribes in the USA) and smaller clans may be distinguished based on geographical area, lineage, language, art, and music. There are multiple systems of how culture is practically expressed, even when some similarities exist in what they symbolize and represent, and how they purposefully facilitate cultural meaning.

Picking up on the second manner under critical race theory, wellness as an indigenous form of knowing is centered in family and environmental relations. The creation story, as different native groups tell it to convey meaning, underscores the belief in one's connection to land, language, ancestry, and all beings of creation. Connections unfold in various degrees of balance between spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical quadrants of well-being within individual and communal personhood [21]. This view offers a holistic understanding of wellness wherein all that is needed to live life to its fullest is available to us so that it may be possible to create a meaningful cultural identity.

The holistic view rounds out conventional Western thinking that wellness denotes a state of being associated with health and fulfillment of individual life. However, modern views of wellness, regardless of indigenous or Western cultures, tend to agree that wellness is not merely the absence of disease or infirmity but that it encompasses different aspects such as those captured by the above four quadrants.

The third manner under critical race theory provides an opportunity to make explicit that while the indigenous way of life is directed by spirit, there is nothing magical or mystical about it [22]. The spirit is placed central in life and is motivational and energizing and hence is critical to wellness and to a healthy way of being in the world. Spirit is best understood through creation stories where native knowledge is founded. Spirit creates order in relational space [23].

## **5.2 Postcolonial theory as a critical approach**

The critical characteristics of postcolonial theory are particularly relevant after a group underwent experiences of decolonization that significantly impacted their cultural identity. This theory seeks not only to expose Eurocentrism and Western imperialism but also to point out cultural intersections, hybrids, and diasporas [24]. As inter-cultural identity offers strength in globalization and suffers strength and quintessence in each one of perhaps multiple cultural identities to which individuals may belong, postcolonial theory is concerned with those caught in between, who find themselves on the margin in conflicted and fractured states of identification, i.e., those in diasporic states.

In Canada, there is a distinct movement toward the restrengthening of cultural beliefs, traditions, and sacred knowledge in the National Native Alcohol and Drug

Abuse Program (NNADAP) and Youth Solvent Addiction Program (YSAP) treatment centers, as well as in community-based programs. This is enabled through cultural intervention practices (CIPs) such as smudging, prayer and the creation story, sweat lodge and healing ceremonies, talking circles, use of drums, pipes and shakers, use of sacred medicines, cultural language, dances and songs, and many others as appropriate to help foster the renaissance of indigenous identity [21].

The movement is guided by a national framework, which places culture central to wellness and which is used to congregate and coordinate indigenous- and Western-oriented services and treatment methods among various systems and supports [22]. The thinking that supports this movement is that when indigenous culture becomes a way of life again through reflection and internalization, native wellness is realizable and sustainable. Transference of the meaning of cultural practices rather than the ritual and rule-based aspects of customs is critical in guiding the success of the movement.

### **5.3 Co-cultural theory as a critical-interpretive approach**

Moving on to more interpretive approaches while keeping a critical slant, one focus involves social class, cultural type, or diasporic group size, for example, when indigenous peoples as a minority group and non-aboriginal Canadians as a dominant group interact. History reveals that it matters whether cultural identity developed to be dominant or non-dominant as institutionalized power, influence, resources, and privilege are slanted toward former groups, putting latter groups at a disadvantage. It is postulated that whereas dominant groups interact from a position of passive and/or active acceptance of and guilt about the situation, minority groups display conformity with and separation from the situation at different times in interaction before integration of the two groups is possible [25].

Awareness of these prominent differences affects interactions among group members, which is the focus of co-cultural theory. The differences may be evident in hierarchies as associated with power, status, privilege, exclusivity, and assertive or even aggressive communication styles, all culminating in systemic bias in everyday life. Co-cultural theory promotes a mixing of several different factors to bring about effective communication and strong cultural identity, namely, (i) a focus on expectations and the preferred outcome to minimize ambivalence, (ii) acknowledgment of past experiences, (iii) a sharing of abilities, (iv) heeding of the situational context, (v) upfront consideration of perceived costs and rewards, and (vi) agreement on using an efficient communication approach [26].

Progressive treatment centers and communities in Canada put cultural protocols in place to combat diaspora and meet relational dynamics between (Western) program requirements and (indigenous) cultural practices. These protocols look at expectations, accountabilities, recognition, and compensation of both parties, how their skills and knowledge base may complement each other in a collaborative environment, how record keeping can be respectfully done, cultural diversity of practice, human rights and the right to choose, and how the wider community can be involved through a continuum of care and capacity building and cultural identity strengthening [23].

### **5.4 Cultural identity theory as a critical-interpretive approach**

Cultural identity theory as another critical interpretive approach focuses on five communication and relational properties classified as avowal (affirmation of membership to others), ascription (attribution of identity by individuals and groups outside the culture under study), scope (member size and generalizability),

salience (importance and accommodation relative to other existing identities), and intensity (enforcement of cultural identity) [16].

Statistics Canada found in 2016 that indigenous peoples have grown by 42.5% over the past decade [8]. In part, this figure accounts for natural growth, while identifying as indigenous may have an economic benefit as it enables organizations to increase employment numbers for natives through equitable human resource strategies. In an era of reconciliation, negotiation, and renewal, the above figure also accounts for a growing trend in new declarations of collective Aboriginal identity on the census survey (despite sentiments to move away from this term). Under the Canadian Human Rights Act, it is not discriminatory to ask about heritage, and Canadians feel safer than ever to change their perceptions, trace their origins, and claim their identity, whereby they give meaning to who they are culturally.

### **5.5 Identity negotiation theory as an interpretive cultural approach**

Following a purely interpretive approach pertaining to cultural identity, individuals pay attention to satisfying their own needs and that of others in constructing their self-image according to the identity negotiation theory. Perception of interpersonal dynamics is key as it helps with fitting in with what the group deems appropriate and considers as the norm. Identity is presumably formed within five polar boundaries, namely, security versus vulnerability, inclusion versus differentiation, predictability versus unpredictability, connection versus autonomy, and consistency versus change [27].

The continuums flanked by each set of boundaries remind of five primary, unified concepts that describe indigenous culture and underpin wellness [21, 28].

1. The circle, more than any other shape, is the most expressive of the indigenous worldview. The circle symbolizes energy and denotes a continuous life flow, moving out simultaneously in four directions. This is illustrative of wellness also; growth and well-being can be seen as running like a sinuous current between security and vulnerability.
2. Life on earth is fundamentally seen as centrally bonded though a caring spirit, which is in and throughout all life and creation. This bonding is inclusive, yet at the same time, the indigenous worldview that all life is motivated by spirit is differentiating as people live their lives.
3. Native beliefs that everybody is predisposed to have the desire to be respectfully harmonious and in balance with creation throughout continuous stages of life add predictability. Practical challenges to this belief in everyday life are associated with unpredictability, as hardship and discord display as imbalances.
4. All universal things (human and nature) are inclusively relational and connected as personhood, without measures of power and hierarchy. While personal autonomy is recognized in these interdependencies, respect is mutual as individual actions and decisions impact everyone.
5. Indigenous culture is virtuously voiced and transmitted through original language. Unlike other forms of life, humans have a gift of free will in fulfilling their purpose, i.e., their roles and responsibilities to all else, whereby their cultural identity may continuously unfold from a position of consistency, to that of change. The moving pattern of unfolding, growth, and change occurs primarily as a circle toward the creation and recreation of life.

Identity negotiation is viewed as a critical method for effective assimilation, implying we can rise above diaspora. We should be aware that perceived differences and similarities between the cultures often comment on the product – cultural manifestations – rather than the relational process wherein the philosophical foundations of culture rest. This notion facilitates the immersion into another group and the internalization of the meaning of their culture. It is particularly relevant if the identity with their original culture is strong to begin with and/or when conflict between the two groups abound.

### **5.6 Cultural contracts theory as an interpretive cultural approach**

Often an emphasis on cultural practices is not sufficient for different groups to adopt a shared cultural identity, in which case an interpretive approach of co-creating an agreement may be needed, as postulated by the cultural contracts theory. A slightly more formal tactic may open up acceptance of different viewpoints and promote assimilation [29].

By better coordinating the member relationships around authority and power, rules and regulations, and a willingness to embrace equity and equality, disputes and long-standing feelings may become more negotiable. Flexible negotiation requires respect for each other, another foundational element of cultural identity [30].

For example, First Nations is a general reference to indigenous groups who are dispersed across Canada and differ significantly in customs and native languages: 614 First Nations bands consist of 11 language families broken down into 55 languages [22]. However, despite these distinctions, cultural values are commonly shared between different generations, such as the presence of spirit as a physical reality, and an animate creation that contains relations between all beings, human and other-than-human.

Cultural values are also preserved as sacred knowledge, which is kept in the indigenous peoples—wisdom keepers, elders, ceremonial practitioners, traditional doctors, sacred societies, and other cultural institutions—themselves. Knowledge is left by ancestors and rooted in patterns of meaning that emerge from different creation stories. Acquisition of indigenous knowledge is ongoing, a coming toward knowing, characterized by being first transformational in nature and second by bearing the responsibility to extend the knowledge through translation of its meaning for others [23].

This meaningful knowledge feeds all else that is derived and understood in indigenous worldview because the structure, processes, and patterns of creation are repeated in all aspects of life in the universe. Indigenous intelligence then constitutes the transformation of holistic knowledge into something that carries relational meaning and is useful in responsible and beneficiary ways. Indigenous communities assert a self-determined right to be the keepers of their knowledge, which contractually can be respected in understanding of its coming-toward-knowing character, and as a part of their cultural identity.

### **5.7 Communication theory of identity as a social-scientific approach**

According to the communication theory of identity, communication has a prominent role in forming strong cultural identity. Communication is exercised in four localized layers of group membership: the personal level (where individuals define themselves), the enacted level (where individuals communicate their personal definition through messages), the relational level (where individuals make the personal definition mutual through social interaction), and the communal level



(where the personal identity definition is extended so it can be shared by others as a collective also and which in turn can influence individual identity at the personal level as an incessant feedback loop). Cultural identity is formed and maintained through a network of these layered enactments.

As we build and shape cultural identity through lifelong, active participation in watching, learning, and doing in continuous cycles in social and reflective ways, communication itself evolves. Both verbal and nonverbal forms of communication enable us to not only express ourselves but also to continuously negotiate learned patterns that convey our values and beliefs, attitudes and intentions, thoughts and feelings, and behaviors and expectations.

In applying this communication theory of identity as it resides within a social-scientific approach, social behavior is part of an individual group member's identity. Symbolic meaning is enabled through active involvement in social interaction whereby cultural identity is shaped. Individual group members have the right to and can choose the relevant layer in which communication is to occur at different times in forming cultural identity [31].

In individualistic cultures such as the Greek and European, "I" (self) stands firmly in opposition to "We" (others) and has evolved into modernist and post-modernist perspectives. At best, the interplay between I and We is a snapshot in time and a glimpse of the static status of self-adapting to different occasions in daily life [32]. While cultural identity is rooted in the individual according to this theory, it is also possible that the multilayered, fluid qualities of individuals make it impossible to think about a true self given that identity dynamically changes over time and in space.

In collectivistic cultures such as the African, Asian, and indigenous, the emphasis is on individuals trying to infuse themselves into the collective level and thereby minimizing their impact on the community. This manifests in the ways in which Asian civilizations root the self in tradition through discipline, restraint, and harmony. It is demonstrated by how Africans traditionally focus on the end result of the I-We connection by striving to balance it and emphasizing *ubuntu* (meaning all humanity is connected through virtues of goodness and referring to the notion of "I am because we are"). It can be seen in how indigenous peoples inclusively anchor all to spirit and creation and that the incorporation of plant, animal, mineral medicines, spiritual ceremonies and therapies, manual techniques, exercises, and native language is culturally practiced in vehicular pursuit of wellness.

Native wellness is expressed as holistic and encompassing all aspects of life. In it, an inextricable link exists between four directional quadrants, tied to generational knowledge and teachings about culture [21]. All beings—human and other-than-human—share this holistic structure through a living past and living future, with the current generation the living connection in between. While each quadrant is recognizable in human beings, animals, plants, earth and its elements, and planets and cosmos, it only has meaning in relationship to the circular whole.

1. The *spirit* (from the spiritual quadrant) gives vision and hope in kindness and caring and is central to vitality, mobility, purpose, and quality of life, as well as the overcoming of challenges, loss, and despair.
2. The *heart* (from the emotional quadrant) is nurtured by consciously living in personal, reciprocal relation to all human and other-than-human beings, as well as environmental forces (wind, thunder, water, fire, and unseen) in creation, whereby a sense of belonging is felt and hardship can be withstood.

3. The intuitive and rational *mind* (from the mental quadrant) consciously gives reason for being and becoming, giving meaning to life and experiential learning, and communicating about all aspects of it.
4. The *body* (from the physical quadrant) purposefully actualizes intentions and desires through behavior as related to spirit and culture; when strong and whole, it can overcome physical weaknesses and damage.

Hence, when indigenous people talk about their connection to mother earth and land as an example, this expression needs to be understood in a holistic sense: the land provides shelter and food but also a place of belonging and active learning with hope for the future. People were not only shaped by the land, but they were also created from the land. Land gives a sense of place and is historical; hence natives are inseparable from the land. Talk about land is a diasporic comment on cultural identity, which currently manifests in dispirited native wellness.

### 5.8 Identity management theory as a social-scientific approach

Identity management, as a social-scientific approach, is the final theory proposed in this chapter, which postulates that cultural identity is about competence in relations that are exercised via direct contact to the mutual satisfaction of the individuals concerned and whereby self-esteem, self-image, and self-efficacy are confirmed and individual autonomy is established. The social relations follow three steps marked by (i) strong relationship development trials for forming the sharing of identity along cultural lines, (ii) enmeshment and symbolic convergence based on shared commonality, and (iii) renegotiation of earlier enmeshments to clarify the relationship and to establish a truly interdependent and personal relationship [33].

In indigenous culture, identity is managed through the concept of wholeness. This concept signifies that all things work together interdependently through an interconnected web of parts that have meaning only in relation with the whole. Human beings are only one connective part in wholeness, along with other creatures. The circular wholeness of life is all-embracing, an entirety that incorporates time while also being timeless, which makes it complete [23]. In a Western deficit sense, wholeness is a state of being undamaged or unbroken, i.e., by not being in ill health [34]. This view can be expanded with a Western constructionist perspective where wholeness is considered a state of being complete, sound, and harmonious, synonymous with unison.

## 6. In conclusion: making the most of intramural diaspora

In using Western theoretical approaches to help make sense of the cultural identity of indigenous peoples as a diasporic group in Canada, a national vision is shared to change the way in which we think about each other. Fundamentally this involves having universal knowledge of the different dimensions of ourselves involving the spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical in connection with and interdependency of each other and to let a cross-cultural identity unfold and grow in the relational space that exists around us. It appears that *wellness*, in a whole and holistic sense, offers a valuable and worthy conduit in order to achieve cross-cultural identity.

Under the leadership of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who has become a standard bearer for internationalism in a time of major changes and

turbulence, this country celebrated its 150th anniversary after British French settlers confederated to form the Dominion of Canada in 1867. Since the 1970s previous assimilation efforts are recognized as failures, compelling Canadians to act on a decolonization agenda by seeking changes in our relationships through healing wounds caused by unequal power and low self-esteem, through consultation and dialog, and through negotiation and regaining of greater control over own affairs.

Deep-rooted inequity marked by unbalanced power relations still persists in Canada. Successful negotiations by indigenous governments occur selectively and in narrow contexts. However, in recent years some land claim agreements were reached in exchange for extracting resources from which locals may share revenue and receive other benefits. This is a good start, while the need to diversify opportunities for local economic development among indigenous peoples remains dire.

While Canadian inhabitants are proud of many accomplishments in reflection on 150 years, we tread lightly on how we wear our identity. Responses to what sets Canadians apart are comfortably rife with nostalgic symbols representing:

- Sport (ice hockey, curling, lumberjacking, and lacrosse)
- Environmental activities (portaging (carrying of a canoe between navigable waters) and moose hunting)
- Rich demonstrations of heritage (inukshuks (a structure of rough stones stacked in the form of a human figure), dream catchers (small hoops containing mesh and decorated with feathers and beads), moccasins (leather shoes with decorative beading and fur), and Pow Wows (a feasting ceremony with singing and dancing))
- Distinctive beverages (maple syrup, beaver tails (hand-stretched, deep-fried wheat-dough sweet indulgence) and Tim Hortons coffee with Timbits (mini-donuts))
- Several musicians and artists whose works are internationally acknowledged and enjoyed

Of course, these unique cultural characteristics are shifting in popularity over time too. In the same breath, Canadians take pride in diversity and stay politely away from defining ourselves on human equity grounds, but we will acknowledge scars from the recent past and point to the sharing of common values, aspirations, and dreams as we embody the spiritual, mental, physical, and emotional parts of self and culture. In preparing ourselves for being ready for the foreseeable future while other countries address their own identity crises and capitalize on their diasporas, it is imperative that Canadians, in unison, will need to be assertive in carving out a deeply distinctive voice.

## **Conflict of interest**

There is no conflict of interest to be declared with respect to the scientific work submitted.

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