

CHAPTER FIVE

In Canadian Society

AS YOU READ

As First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples assert their rights to land, self-determination, and self-government, they increasingly claim a place as an active, integral part of Canadian society. But what does it mean to be a part of Canadian society? What does it mean to be apart or excluded from Canadian society?

In the passage that opens this chapter, Jenine Dumont describes stereotypes that she has encountered as a Métis person. A stereotype is a rigid belief about certain groups of people.

Dumont published “I Didn’t Know I Was Different” in 1990 in *Writing the Circle: Native Women of Western Canada*. The author’s expressions and choice of words, such as *Indian*, have been respected in the essay that follows. Do you think her writing would have the same effect if the words *First Nations person* were used to replace *Indian*? How and why would the story be different? What does this tell you about the connection between language and stereotypes?

FOCUS QUESTIONS

As you read this chapter, consider these questions:

- ▲ What is mainstream Canadian society and how are Aboriginal peoples a part of it?
- ▲ What are stereotypes?
- ▲ What roles do language and the media play in perpetuating stereotypes?
- ▲ What is discrimination?
- ▲ How are Aboriginal peoples breaking down cultural barriers such as stereotypes and discrimination?

I Didn’t Know I Was Different

Excerpt from an essay by
Jenine Dumont

I WAS BORN IN 1944 TO GABRIEL DUMONT AND VICTORIA LAFROMBOISE AT DUCK LAKE, SASKATCHEWAN. MY FATHER WAS A GRANDNEPHEW OF THE FAMOUS OR INFAMOUS GABRIEL DUMONT of the Northwest Rebellion. To the Métis, Gabriel Dumont was always considered famous, but as a child I interpreted from history that the accepted adjective was infamous....

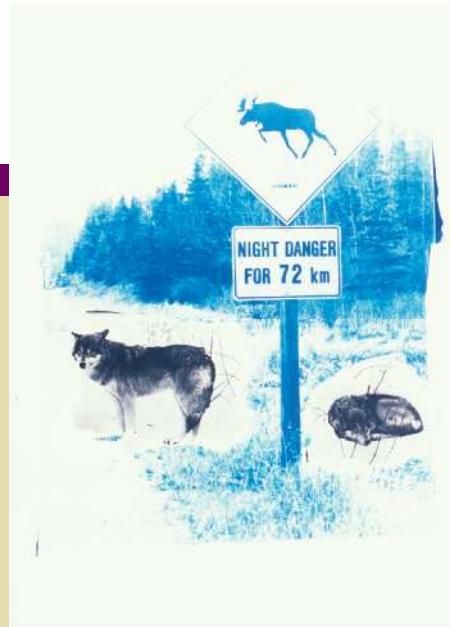
On April 9, 1950, Easter Sunday, my youngest sister was born. When my mom brought her home, I said “She looks like an Indian.” I didn’t know I was part Indian, and it was two years before I knew....

My brother was in grade seven, and they happened to be studying social studies one day when Duck Lake and the Rebellion was discussed. The teacher, who knew our family, asked my brother if that was where our father was from. His reply was “Yes, they’re all a bunch of Indians there.”

Nothing more was said, but a few days later or perhaps the next day the kids started teasing us, calling us Indians and half-breeds! This went on for some time. I couldn’t understand why the teacher did not stop them, although the teasing occurred at lunchtime and recess.... My brother skipped school a lot that year and eventually dropped out. He was fourteen years old.

That was when I realized I was part Indian. I believe that was also the first time my father talked to me about being proud of my heritage. Over the years, he would often say “Hold your head up high and be proud; it doesn’t matter what they say.”

I was particularly close to my father and believed him, so I did as I was told.



In 1997, Aboriginal artist Mary Anne Barkhouse created a series of images called *Wolves in the City*. Two of the series are shown here: *Parliament Building* and *Danger Moose*. Most of the images place wolves in an urban or other human environment. In her statements about the work, Barkhouse draws a connection between wolves, which are increasingly displaced from their natural surroundings, and Aboriginal peoples.

I walked that way so much that in high school people thought I was a snob; I really was shy and afraid of being hurt. I had some difficulty being proud of my Indian ancestry, as there were constant reminders that Indians were inferior. My own mother referred to Indians as *les sauvages* “the savages,” as if they were inferior. I remember thinking “Why are you saying that, we’re part Indian too!” I got a lot of mixed messages....

I think the prejudice I was exposed to as a child affects the way I interact with people as I am not an open person and do not make friends easily. When I compare myself to my sisters, who did not suffer the same prejudices I did, I find them to be much more open and congenial. I would like to think there is less prejudice in the world, but is there? I have a ten-year-old

son writing a story about an Indian chief who killed a white man’s wife and then this white man relentlessly hunts down the Indian. The story is supposed to take place 100 years ago. I guess the stereotypes are still there. Where else would this ten year old get his ideas?

REFLECTION

1. Jenine Dumont’s story is powerful partly because of her willingness to share painful personal experiences and partly because her language choices convey the power of stereotypes to infect even people who are stereotyped. Read over Dumont’s essay carefully to find examples of stereotypes. What makes them stereotypes? Who holds the stereotypes in her story? How are the stereotypes conveyed? What are the stereotypes’ effects?
2. How did stereotypes affect Jenine Dumont’s self-esteem and self-confidence?
3. In *Wolves in the City*, how does Mary Anne Barkhouse represent the position of Aboriginal peoples in Canadian society? How does Barkhouse’s perspective relate to Jenine Dumont’s? Give specific examples from the works to support your answer.

Alienation in Canadian Society

AS YOU READ

Jenine Dumont's writing shows her feelings of alienation from her peers, community, and even family members. An individual feels alienated when he or she feels isolated from a social group. What does it mean to feel alienated from Canadian society? What does it mean to feel a part of Canadian society? Pages 160–171 explore the cultural composition of Canadian society today and the kinds of cultural barriers that can prevent certain groups of people from being full participants.

Before you begin reading, think about a situation in which you have felt part of a group — a time when you had a strong sense of belonging and acceptance among the people around you, whether they were friends or family or both. Now think about a time when you felt excluded or shut out for some reason. Write about your experiences, paying attention to the emotions each experience generated in you. If either type of experience was a normal part of your everyday life, how would your self-esteem, energy, sense of optimism, and confidence be affected?

IN THE 2001 CENSUS, CANADIANS LISTED MORE THAN 200 CULTURAL GROUPS IN ANSWER TO A QUESTION ABOUT HOW THEY IDENTIFY THEIR CULTURAL ANCESTRY. A CENSUS IS AN OFFICIAL COUNT OF THE POPULATION. IT COLLECTS VARIOUS

- kinds of information, such as age, income, religion, education, and

Some people criticize multiculturalism as allowing only a surface cultural acceptance, such as traditional clothing, songs, and dances at special occasions. Here a dancer from the White Buffalo Dance society performs at Edmonton's Heritage Festival in 2001. In your opinion, does Canadian multiculturalism support meaningful cultural acceptance? What evidence do you have to support your answer?



cultural background. One of the conclusions Statistics Canada drew from the 2001 Census data was that Canada is becoming more culturally diverse, although the degree of diversity varies from place to place in the country.

Canada is a multicultural society. The term *multiculturalism* has many meanings, depending on its use and context. In Canada, multiculturalism is an official federal government policy. It was introduced in 1971 to recognize and promote the cultures of Canadians whose origins are not one of the two dominant cultures, British and French. Multiculturalism supports the idea of a **heterogeneous** society in which people freely practise their own cultures and speak their own languages.

Historically, most Canadian immigrants have come from European countries. At first, French and British immigrants were most common, but later immigrants came from many other European nations. In the last fifty years, however, the European proportion of new immigrants has dropped, while the Asian proportion has grown significantly. Today, the majority of new immigrants to Canada come from Asia.

Despite the official policy of multiculturalism, Euro-Canadian values and beliefs dominate the institutions, values, and priorities of Canadian politics, economics, and society. These Euro-Canadian values are believed to reflect those of the majority of the population. Within a Euro-Canadian worldview, the views of the majority take priority over those of minority groups.

MAINSTREAM SOCIETY

Mainstream describes the ideas, values, and ways of behaving that are accepted by the majority of a country's people. Many countries are **homogeneous**, which means the majority of the people belong to a single cultural group — the Japanese in Japan, for example. This shared culture means a shared worldview in most respects. People sharing a worldview generally have a bond of community and understanding, which in turn reinforces their worldview. For example, if everyone around you believes the world is round, your own belief that the world is round is reinforced to the point that you consider it to be the only belief possible. Of course, in all societies there are individuals who do not share the ideas of the majority. However, the rules and systems of a democratic society generally reflect the worldview of the majority.

Before the nineteenth century, First Nations and Inuit worldviews reflected the views of most people in North America. First Nations and Inuit cultures were diverse, but shared enough characteristics that various nations understood one another and generally co-existed peacefully. However, after Confederation in 1867, people of European ancestry increasingly dominated the cultural mix. Euro-Canadian worldviews became the views guiding Canadian government, economics, and society. These worldviews became mainstream.

ASSIMILATION

People who do not belong to a mainstream group sometimes adopt



mainstream values in order to fit in and be part of the dominant group. In other words, they assimilate into the mainstream. Assimilation can be a natural process that occurs as individuals and cultures adapt to change. For example, many First Nations had traditions of marrying people of different nations or clans to build alliances. When this happened, one individual would leave his or her family in order to join another group. In this case, the newcomer would generally adopt some or all of the ways of life of his or her in-laws. Sometimes the mainstream will change in order to make room for new ideas but, generally, smaller groups adapt to larger groups.

To better understand why assimilation happens, imagine a river flowing by — the main stream. Is it easier to swim in the direction the water is travelling, or to swim upstream? Obviously, it is easier to “go with the flow.” Yet, if you want to go upstream or directly across the river, travelling with the mainstream will not actually take you where you intend. Furthermore, if there are fences that prevent you from even getting into the water, you might end up stuck where you are.

Many immigrants to Canada wish to belong to the mainstream. They might learn English or French, attend hockey games, and generally try to fit in, becoming a part of the culture around them.

The citizenship affirmation ceremony, such as the one shown here, is a significant milestone in the lives of immigrants to Canada. Many people invite friends and family to celebrate their entry into Canadian citizenship. During their land-claims negotiations, Nisga'a leaders sometimes referred to “negotiating their way into Canada.” With a partner, contrast these two ways of becoming part of Canada.



Others resist the pull of mainstream society and try to maintain their cultural practices, even though these make them different.

First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples are in a special position because they are the only minority cultural groups in Canada that are not immigrants. First Nations and

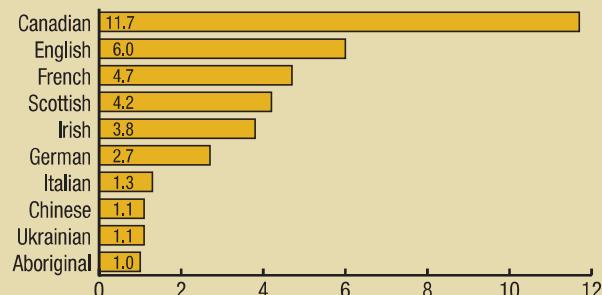
Inuit cultures were the dominant cultures in North America for centuries before any newcomers arrived, and the Métis Nation originated in this country. Despite many government policies that encouraged or tried to force Aboriginal peoples to assimilate into the mainstream, most did not.

THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT CENSUS INFORMATION

Statistics Canada conducts a census of the Canadian population every five years. The information is used by governments and businesses to understand the kind of people who live in Canada. This helps them make plans about the best products and services needed today and in the future.

The accuracy of the census depends upon the individuals who respond. For example, the cultural backgrounds reported in the census are how people identify themselves. This means people may report that they are from one culture, even though their background may include several. They may also report more than one culture, if that is how they identify themselves.

TOP TEN CANADIAN CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS (in millions of people)



What is the significance of census information for Aboriginal peoples?

WHAT TO DO

- Visit the Statistics Canada Web site at www.statcan.ca and locate information related to Aboriginal peoples from the latest census. Also review sections of the Web site related to education and *The Daily*, which presents summaries of significant information. Of particular interest to you will be the 2001 Aboriginal Peoples Survey.
- Write a one-page report on a portion of the census data that you believe has significance for Aboriginal peoples and their place in Canadian society. Present at least some of your information using a graph or chart. Keep your summary clear and concise.
- Look at the information carefully to find any details about the specific portion of the Aboriginal population surveyed. For example, some information might be gathered only from First Nations people living on reserves or from all Aboriginal peoples living in urban areas. Why is considering these details an important step in using census data to draw conclusions?

Thinking About Your Project

As a class, discuss circumstances that might prevent people from taking part in the census, such as living in isolated or remote locations, not being able to read, not having a telephone, and so on.

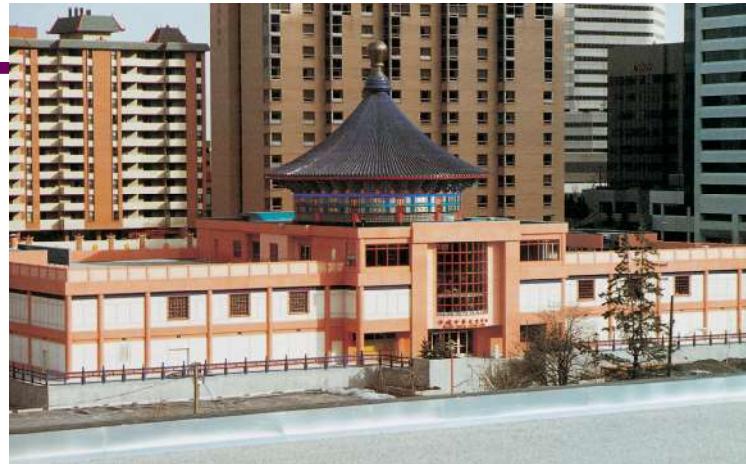
CULTURAL BARRIERS

Today, Aboriginal peoples have more control over the degree to which they adopt mainstream cultural ideals. Many wish to adopt some or even many elements of mainstream society. Others prefer a more traditional way of life. At stake for individuals is the freedom to choose. Aboriginal peoples have the right to be fully contributing members of Canadian society, while retaining their cultural identity as Aboriginal people. It is the right to participate, but remain different.

However, cultural barriers, such as those described by Jenine Dumont on pages 158–159, prevent many Aboriginal people from playing a strong role in Canadian society. Some Aboriginal people (and members of other groups) feel a sense of alienation from the rest of Canadian society.

Throughout history, many groups have been the subject of stereotypes. A **stereotype** is a rigid, oversimplified, often exaggerated belief that is applied to groups of people. People do not necessarily have to belong to a minority group to suffer the consequences of stereotypes. Women around the world continue to fight stereotypes in order to gain equal political, economic, and social opportunities in their countries.

Stereotypes overlook cultural differences between groups, as well as individual differences among people. For example, the idea that First Nations people once wore feathered headdresses and rode horses across the prairie is a stereotype that has been applied to all



Aboriginal peoples, even though this form of dress and habitat was not part of most Aboriginal peoples' cultures.

Stereotypes emerge for a variety of reasons. At their simplest level, they are generalizations that help explain other people's behaviour, especially people who are perceived to be different in some way.

It can be difficult to really get to know an individual from another culture if stereotypes stand in the way. The stereotype forms a lens through which the other person appears odd and unfamiliar. Even getting to know an individual from a stereotyped group may not dispel stereotypes, since the individual might be seen as an exception.

Some stereotypes are not necessarily negative, such as the stereotype that women are naturally nurturing. A nurturing tendency is not a negative quality, but even this stereotype can be a problem, because it does not allow for individual differences. Some women are highly nurturing and others are less so. Stereotypes, whether they are positive or negative, are harmful to individuals, groups, and society. They do not allow individuals the freedom to express their unique gifts.

Most Canadian immigrants live in cities, and many seek out other people with the same cultural background. Newcomers feel more comfortable living in areas where they can speak familiar languages and practise familiar customs. Calgary's Chinese community built this Chinese Cultural Centre to serve as a gathering place.



Discrimination

Stereotypes reinforce prejudiced attitudes. **Prejudice** is a preconceived idea about an individual or group. Most prejudiced ideas are unfavourable, and may lead to discrimination. **Discrimination** occurs when people treat others unequally because they perceive one group of people as inferior to another. Discrimination creates barriers that prevent groups of people from full participation in a society's activities and rewards. Prejudice can exist without discrimination. For example, a person might hold racist ideas but not act upon them. When people judge others *and* treat them unfairly, they engage in discrimination.

Stereotypes often generalize unfavourably about a group's culture, practices, or values. This helps form a cultural bias in which one culture is favoured over another. Stereotypes and cultural biases are often used to provide justification for discrimination.



How did the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms affect blatant discrimination? Why is subtle discrimination more difficult to change?

Discrimination can operate at different levels and in different ways. It can be overt or covert, conscious or unconscious, institutional, subtle or blatant, and verbal or non-verbal.

Overt discrimination takes the form of obvious behaviour or verbal acts. An example of overt discrimination would be if a person were refused entry into a business because of his or her cultural background.

Covert discrimination is more hidden and, therefore, more easily denied or discounted. An example of covert discrimination might be a woman not getting a job because of her gender. She might never know why she did not get the job.

People sometimes create overt or covert pressures that discourage members of a particular group from living in a certain neighborhood or prevent them from gaining employment, education, or social services.

A person may discriminate against another consciously or unconsciously. For example, someone may consciously choose not to hire an individual because they believe a negative stereotype. However, a person might only hire people from their own cultural group simply because they feel more comfortable with them. In many cases, this may be unconscious discrimination.

Discrimination can also be institutional. A government or business that does not provide easy wheelchair access makes it more difficult for part of the population to receive its services. Similarly, a government department that requires people to fill in a lengthy form filled with legal language may discriminate against people with lower reading levels.

Degrees of discrimination can also be measured. Blatant discrimination is generally conscious and deliberate. Such discrimination is against Canadian law, so it is less frequent. Subtle discrimination, like covert discrimination, can be much more difficult to detect. For example, if a For Rent sign on an apartment declares that no minority groups can apply, it would be considered blatant, overt discrimination. It would be against the law, and the landlord could be taken to court.

However, if the sign just says For Rent and the landlord never rents the place to any minority groups, there would not necessarily be proof that discrimination against minority groups was taking place. The landlord might have any number of reasons for not renting to specific people. His or her reasons may or may not have anything to do with the minority or other group the rental applicant is part of.

Verbal and non-verbal communication can promote or dispel discrimination. Verbal discrimination, such as a racist joke or slur, is clear. Non-verbal communication is behaviour that does not rely on written or spoken words. Non-verbal communication can undermine even the strongest verbal message. For example, an individual might smile and say that he or she respects a minority group, but non-verbal cues such as rolled eyes, a sigh, or stare can betray another attitude altogether.

In the worst cases, discrimination is used to exploit or manipulate a political, economic, or social situation at the expense of another group.

THE COLUMBUS CONTROVERSY

In 1992, 500 years after Christopher Columbus reached the Americas, many countries wanted to celebrate his “discovery of the New World.” Aboriginal groups from North, Central, and South America were nearly unanimous in their condemnation of the idea. Many asked why the beginning of their cultural domination by Europeans should be celebrated.

In addition, they declared that Columbus’s arrival to the lands that their ancestors had called home for centuries was not a “discovery.”

Although some people argue that these are “just words,” these particular words create cultural barriers that exclude the perspective of an entire group of people.

When used with sensitivity, language promotes openness and trust among individuals and groups. It can affirm the belief that everyone should be treated fairly and equitably. Such language is sometimes called inclusive. Inclusive language helps ensure that everyone feels important and included in a wider community.

Today, many people make a conscious effort to avoid language that may offend or exclude other people on the basis of their gender, sexual identity, class, cultural background, appearance, age, or ability.



On November 23, 2003, Lee Curotte, of Kahnawake, installed a banner reading Columbus Invaded America on a statue of an Massasoit, an Aboriginal leader who helped the first pilgrims who arrived to the United States. Curotte was part of an annual protest in Plymouth, Massachusetts, each Thanksgiving to talk about the status of indigenous peoples in the Americas.

REFLECTION

As a class, discuss examples of inclusive language. Research the controversy over Columbus further. Write a paragraph exploring how the phrase *discovery of the New World* perpetuates stereotypes.



PROFILE

WILLIE LITTLECHILD

Ermineskin First Nation



Willie Littlechild

When speaking about racism, special status, and land claims, lawyer J. Wilton “Willie” Littlechild mentions a little Cree word that means a lot.

“*Skungun*. It means that at treaty-time, we agree to share everything — in this case we’re talking about surface rights to

land — but you reserve a small portion to use for yourself, for ceremonies and traditional pursuits, for example,” explains Littlechild, who practises law in Hobbema, Alberta.

“When politicians and leaders say ‘we should all be equal’ it sounds very good. But what they’re saying is that indigenous peoples should not have any unique or special rights at all. Yet indigenous peoples, generally, have a special, spiritual relationship to Mother Earth.

“When Elders and traditional people hear politicians talking about doing away with reserves and making us all equal, you can see pain in their faces. We need the land for our ceremonies and sanctuary. It is a part of us. We have a spiritual connection that doesn’t seem to be taken into consideration by the dominant society, which looks at land as so much real estate and in terms of what it can yield for profit.”

Littlechild, the first Treaty Indian from Alberta to graduate from law school in 1976, has been active in the international forum for over twenty years, representing the concerns of indigenous peoples in such organizations as the United Nations, the International Labour Organization, and the Organization of American States. Closer to home, he served as the Member of Parliament for the constituency of Wetaskiwin from 1988 to 1993. He has also served on many committees and worked on international forums that promote global recognition of indigenous peoples and their

rights. He is especially proud of his key role in helping establish the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, of which he has been selected as Rapporteur. This position means he is responsible for all reports of recommendations and decisions by the forum directly to the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

Before being called to the bar, Littlechild studied physical education. During his years as an active competitor in hockey, baseball, and swimming, he participated in more than thirty-five provincial, regional, national, and international championships, winning ten Athlete of the Year awards before his retirement from active competition.

Littlechild was often the only Aboriginal athlete on teams playing out of province and off-reserve. Because of this, he was sometimes a target for racial slurs. “In the late 60s, through my involvement in sports, I was introduced to an awareness that there were things more important in life, such as law, racism, and discrimination,” Littlechild recalls.

Since then, his international legal involvement has helped to open the doors for racial tolerance. His prescription to end racism is simply “understanding.”

According to Littlechild, “It’s about exploring the similarities we all have, rather than the differences.”

REFLECTION

1. How did Littlechild’s involvement in athletics prepare him for a life of leadership in the international community?
2. Littlechild makes a distinction between being equal and being the same. How does this distinction apply to Aboriginal rights in Canada? Why might some people not always understand or agree with this perspective?

THE POWER OF EDUCATION

One way to stop discrimination is to make it against the law. This is effective in stopping obvious forms of discrimination. Changing more subtle forms of discrimination is more difficult, because it relies upon changing attitudes. Teaching people to have empathy and compassion — the ability to imaginatively step into another person's perspective and consider how they might experience the world — is one way education can help prevent discrimination.

Education can also help dispel stereotypes. Once people are aware that certain patterns of thinking are stereotypes, the stereotypes lose their power. However, making people aware of the stereotypes that surround them can be difficult. Stereotypes can be taught and reinforced in subtle ways that are rarely questioned. Pages 167–170 examine some of the tools of stereotypes and ways that they may be used to dispel stereotypes instead of reinforcing them.

LANGUAGE

Language is a set of written or verbal symbols that people use in an agreed-upon way to communicate with each other. It is also a powerful tool that can be used to promote or dispel stereotypes. Words are not in themselves bad or negative. They can become negative because of how they are used.

Because language is composed of symbols, a word is not just a word. Some words can have a meaning that encompasses a long history. If particular words, such as *Indian*, are used consistently in a way that

offends or excludes, the word takes on meanings of offense and exclusion.

Stereotypical language often appears in the form of a label. For example, if a person shows up late to a movie, another member of the audience might think "Late people are so inconsiderate." All people who are late have been labelled inconsiderate, regardless of individual circumstances. If the person who is late happens to be a member of a visible minority, the label might be applied to all people of this minority group.

One consequence of such labels is that they can remove people's humanity. Other people are viewed as no more than an adjective, such as lazy, heathen, or inconsiderate.

MASS MEDIA

Mass media generally appeals to the masses — the mainstream. The mass media is one of the main sources of information for Canadians. People turn to the media to be informed and entertained. Such media often reinforce commonly held attitudes rather than challenge them. However, used carefully, media such as newspapers, television, and film also have the ability to dispel stereotypes.

Two years ago I was in Spain. We were performing theatre and telling stories. People kept putting their hand up to me and saying "HOW!" No, I'm serious, and I was kinda' getting mad about it. Then my agent told me they weren't being rude to me. It's just all that they knew about Native people... just from what they read in magazines and saw in the movies. It wasn't an insult. So then I felt better.

— Stan Isadore, Driftpile First Nation



Stan Isadore



Some Aboriginal people became successful actors in the early film and television industry, despite discrimination. One was Jay Silverheels, from the Six Nations Reserve in Ontario. He played the role of Tonto in the television series *The Lone Ranger*. However, not even Silverheels could escape the stereotypes surrounding his character. Later in life, Silverheels spoke publicly about improving the portrayal of Aboriginal peoples in film and television.

Many Canadians do not know much about Aboriginal peoples except what they learn in mainstream media. As a result, many stereotypes persist in spite of other gains Aboriginal peoples have made in recent decades.

Film

The Hollywood movie industry helped create and popularize stereotypes about Aboriginal peoples. Early Western movies used many stereotypical images of First Nations. Sometimes actors from mainstream cultures played First Nations characters—the actors wore makeup and played stereotypes, characters not even resembling real people.

Most films portrayed Aboriginal peoples in ways that were historically inaccurate. The movie industry took advantage of stereotypes to heighten the drama of films and to create suspense for their audiences. Portrayals often put First Nations people in the role of “bad guys” working against the good. These portrayals shaped the mainstream public’s image of Aboriginal peoples for generations.

These images sometimes even influenced Aboriginal people’s ideas about themselves. Aboriginal people who grew up watching such films sometimes internalized the stereotypes, replacing real knowledge about their own culture.

A new stereotype that is often seen in films presents Aboriginal

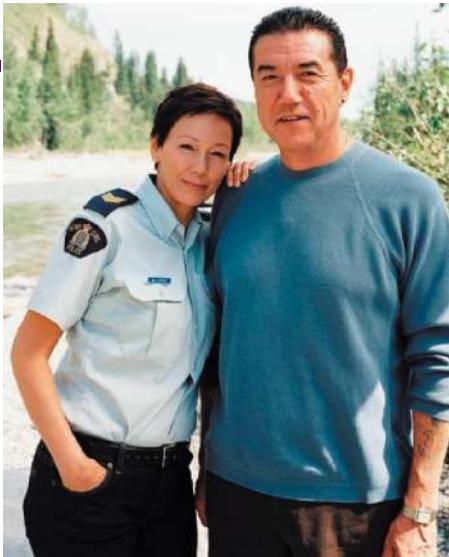


people as guardians of the environment. Although this is not a negative role to play in society, it is damaging because it presents a picture of Aboriginal peoples that does not take a normal range of individual differences into account.

Television

While few minority cultural groups receive as much news media attention as Aboriginal peoples, this coverage comes at a price. News coverage is more likely to perpetuate stereotypes than dispel them. Aboriginal peoples are often portrayed as having or creating problems that cost money or provoke violence. Few mainstream stories incorporate cultural insights from an Aboriginal perspective.

Pervasive stereotypes in the mainstream have prompted more media programs from Aboriginal people’s perspectives, such as the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation (IBC) and the Aboriginal People’s Television Network (APTN). The IBC, created in 1981, broadcasts programs produced by Inuit people and programs from other media outlets, sometimes dubbed in Inuktitut.



The APTN was formed in 1999. Much of the APTN's programming is produced by and developed for Aboriginal peoples. Some programs are in Aboriginal languages.

Aboriginal people also own newspapers, local and regional radio stations, and television production outlets. All are in a position to assert Aboriginal peoples' cultural values and perspectives. These media outlets facilitate communication among Aboriginal groups and help Aboriginal people build or reinforce a positive cultural identity.

A few mainstream media outlets have also made efforts in this direction. In the 1980s and 1990s, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation made an effort to improve the portrayal of Aboriginal people in television dramas. Shows such as the *Beachcombers* and *North of 60* used Aboriginal actors to portray Aboriginal people. These characters had believable lives and occupations. The shows drew large audiences among Aboriginal people and mainstream audiences. For many mainstream audiences, these programs provide the only information

North of 60 stars Tina Keeper and Tom Jackson have become familiar faces in homes across Canada. Many people applauded North of 60 for putting Aboriginal people on prime time television. If possible, watch a few episodes and write a review that captures your own ideas about the show and its effects on stereotypes.

outside of stereotypes that they have about Aboriginal people.

Art and Literature

Many early written and artistic accounts of Aboriginal peoples were from a European perspective. These works often perpetuate historical inaccuracies to this day.

In the late twentieth century, Aboriginal people began to regain control of the words and images that represent them to mainstream society. Today, many Aboriginal people have been acclaimed nationally and internationally for their creative pursuits in art and literature. Noted artists from Alberta alone include Dale Auger, Alex Janvier, Jane Ash Poitras, and Joane Cardinal Schubert. There is a growing recognition that Aboriginal people provide a unique perspective and make important contributions to North American life. These contributions often challenge stereotypes and mainstream misconceptions.

Marketing Media

In recent years, many Aboriginal people have objected to the use of their cultural symbols for inappropriate and insensitive purposes. One pervasive example is the use of Aboriginal cultures for various marketing and advertising purposes.

For example, many professional sports teams — the Atlanta Braves and their famous tomahawk chop; the Cleveland Indians with their

smiling mascot, Chief Wahoo; and the Edmonton Eskimos — use images that reinforce stereotypes or disfavoured language.

It is true that the names and symbols of other cultural groups are also used in similar ways: the New York Yankees, Notre Dame Fighting Irish, and Vancouver Canucks. However, many of these groups have not borne the legacy of stereotyping

that Aboriginal people have. This distinction makes a significant difference.

The widespread use of Aboriginal paraphernalia such as tomahawks, feathers, face paint, and drums mock and trivialize their true cultural, historical, and spiritual significance. Teams can adopt marketable names and images without referring to Aboriginal cultures or stereotypes.

HUMOUR AND STEREOTYPES



Don Burnstick
© National Film Board of Canada

Stereotypes have an inherent “us versus them” mentality. Jokes are especially powerful in reinforcing this. By laughing at another person or group, the laughers share a bond that is enhanced by excluding the target of the joke. Imagine the experience of being in a room of people laughing at you. How did you feel? Now imagine being one of the group who is laughing at someone else. How is this experience different?

Have you ever felt uncomfortable in a group when someone told a joke that reinforced a stereotype? Did you speak up or did you remain silent? It can be difficult to voice an opinion that counters a group’s belief system.

Like many other tools that build and reinforce stereotypes, humour can also remove the power from stereotypes. For example, many Aboriginal comedians regularly use stereotypes in their work. Don Burnstick, from the Alexander First Nation, tells “redskin” jokes regularly as part of his routines.

In the National Film Board video *Redskins, Tricksters, and Puppy Stew*, he recalls his first redskin joke: “If you know how to filet bolgna, you might be a redskin.” Since that first joke, he’s told dozens of others and uses them as a regular part of his routine. He says “the word *redskin* was, and probably still is, racist, but what I did is I jumped into that racism and twisted it and made it funny.”

REFLECTION

Why are Burnstick’s jokes different from jokes that reinforce stereotypes? Could a non-Aboriginal person tell the same jokes with the same effect? Watch the video *Redskins, Tricksters, and Puppy Stew* to see Don Burnstick and other examples of Aboriginal humour. How can humour dispel stereotypes?

ABORIGINAL IDENTITY TODAY

Aboriginal people live in the contemporary world. Although many Aboriginal people wish to preserve elements of their ancestral heritage, most are not suggesting that they give up the conveniences and pleasures of contemporary life. Even while they might practise traditional activities such as hunting and fishing, and do so in a way that honours their culture's spiritual traditions, they might also want access to modern health care and to enjoy books, television, and movies as other Canadians do.

Carl Brave Rock, a young actor and playwright from the Kainai First Nation, has a personal perspective on this issue. His words express a longing for a cultural identity that is free from old stereotypes. What do you think of his idea that young Aboriginal people today long for a new stereotype? Do you agree or disagree? Why?

Your Project

With a small group, prepare a creative presentation highlighting your own ideas about Aboriginal identity and stereotypes. The medium you choose is up to you. Consider a dramatic presentation, poster, PowerPoint™ presentation, song, video, Web site, or any other method you think will best express your ideas.

"We're not much different from other people. We all speak English; we all wear the same clothes now; we like driving cars; we like having pretty houses. That's where we get our little identity crisis. What the hell makes an Indian today — if we don't smoke pipes, or if we don't have long braids? ... Never lived in a teepee. I don't even own a teepee....The question that now plagues [our people's youth] is, who are we? ... It's a subconscious identity crisis, perhaps a longing for a new stereotype rather than the big-nosed, long-haired, mean ol' Indian stereotype known before....

— Carl Brave Rock, in *Elder, Student, Teacher: A Kainai Métissage* by Dwayne Donald



In The First Tourist, by Inuit artist Kananginak Pootoogook, the tourist gestures to the hunter to "Stop right there!" The resulting snapshot will freeze the hunter in time. What comment do you think the artist is making about mainstream culture's interest in Aboriginal cultures?

LOOKING BACK

Before moving on to the next section, discuss the following questions with a partner: What is mainstream society? How is multiculturalism a part of mainstream society? What kinds of cultural barriers prevent people from playing a positive role in mainstream society? What roles do the media play in reinforcing stereotypes? How can education fight stereotypes? In the next section, you will look at people who, through example, break stereotypes about Aboriginal people every day.



Breaking Cultural Barriers

AS YOU READ

Despite obstacles such as stereotypes and discrimination, many Aboriginal people have played, and continue to play, positive roles in mainstream Canadian society, as well as in their own communities. These people break down cultural barriers. Their example helps educate non-Aboriginal Canadians about false stereotypes and the diverse contributions Aboriginal peoples can make to society. Their example also serves as a role model for other Aboriginal people. As you read this section, think about how each accomplished Aboriginal person helps build a positive place for all Aboriginal people in Canada.

IN THE PREVIOUS SECTION, YOU LEARNED ABOUT THE CULTURAL COMPOSITION OF MAINSTREAM CANADIAN SOCIETY AND THE KINDS OF CULTURAL BARRIERS, SUCH AS STEREOTYPES AND DISCRIMINATION, THAT PREVENT ALL PARTS

- ✖ of this society from being full participants. You also learned how education can dispel stereotypes. A powerful form of education is seeing examples of individuals who do not fit stereotyped ideas about their group. Every person who does not conform to a stereotype knocks a chip in it.



Over time, with education and awareness, stereotypes can be widely recognized as the rigid and harmful ways of thinking that they are.

NATIONAL ABORIGINAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

It would be impossible to include all Aboriginal people worthy of note in one book. There are too many both past and present. Most never receive any formal recognition at all, which does not take away from their contributions. However, formal recognition of excellence can play a significant part in removing cultural barriers.

The National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation, created in 1985 by Mohawk conductor and composer John Kim Bell, established the annual National Aboriginal Achievement Awards. First given out in 1993, the awards celebrate accomplished individuals in the Aboriginal community, and promote role models for Aboriginal youth. The awards represent the highest honour the national Aboriginal community can bestow upon its achievers, those individuals who have accomplished their goals through self-discipline, drive, and determination.

Past award winners include people such as Pearl Calahasen, the first Métis woman elected to the

The National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation is best known for its awards. However, the foundation is also a major supporter of education for Aboriginal people, providing approximately \$2 million a year in scholarship money for Aboriginal young people. How do its awards reinforce the foundation's educational goals?

Alberta Legislature; Dr. Frank Calder, whose court case resulted in significant gains for all Aboriginal land claims; Métis author Maria Campbell; Kainai business leader Roy Fox; and actor Tina Keeper, who is well known for her work on *North of 60*.

First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people who have reached a significant level of achievement in their occupations can be nominated for an award. The career categories for nomination include professional

work in community development, education, health services, law and justice, medicine, science and technology, and social services. The awards also recognize work in agriculture, arts and culture, business and commerce, fisheries, heritage and spirituality, media and communications, sports, and youth. A national jury of Aboriginal people selects twelve career achievement award winners, one youth achievement, and one lifetime achievement award recipient each year.

Issues for Investigation

NOMINATING SOMEONE FOR A NATIONAL ABORIGINAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Anyone can nominate an individual for a National Aboriginal Achievement Award (NAAA). In this activity, your class will research worthy individuals, reach a consensus as to which one to nominate, and then go through the process of nominating an individual for an NAAA.

How difficult is it to choose the NAAA winners?

WHAT TO DO

1. Research past winners of National Aboriginal Achievement Awards to get a feel for the qualities and accomplishments necessary to win an award. The foundation has an excellent Web site with concise profiles of past winners at www.naaf.ca.
2. Find the steps required to nominate an individual and review them carefully.
3. Find names of potential candidates for awards using your own knowledge, asking family, teachers, and friends for suggestions, reading Aboriginal newspapers, or even by calling local organizations for suggestions.
4. Once you have a number of potential candidates, narrow down your choices until you have just one person to suggest to the class. Prepare a summary of this person's qualifications and accomplishments.
5. As each person in your class presents his or her candidate, listen carefully so that you will be able to pick the one you think will be the best nominee.
6. Determine a method for deciding upon your class candidate. You might decide to use a system of voting or consensus decision making.
7. Work with your teacher to determine all the tasks that must be done in order to complete the nomination process. Sort out tasks as evenly as possible among small groups or individuals.
8. Work with your classmates to prepare and send in your nomination. Be sure it is as polished as possible. You might also wish to send a letter to the nominee to let them know about your nomination.

MAINSTREAM ADOPTION OF ABORIGINAL WAYS

Achievements by Aboriginal people in politics, economics, arts and culture, and many other fields over the last few decades have made a difference in the place of Aboriginal peoples and their cultures in Canada. Parts of Canadian society are becoming more culturally sensitive in their approach to Aboriginal peoples.

In addition, Canadian society is slowly changing to accommodate more Aboriginal beliefs and values. For example, several mainstream government processes concerning Aboriginal peoples are becoming more reflective of Aboriginal cultures. In different regions of the country, tripartite agreements — usually among the federal government, a provincial government, and an Aboriginal government — now apply to self-government, treaties, health and social services, child welfare, policing, youth services, and more.

Alberta singer Laura Vinson has never denied her Métis heritage, but, like many other Aboriginal peoples, has difficult memories of the way she and her people have sometimes been treated. Her newest work reaches deeply into those experiences, speaking to audiences of all backgrounds.



This type of agreement reflects Aboriginal cultures' traditional approaches to decision making, where all parties involved have an equal voice and work together towards a common goal. In reaching such agreements, non-Aboriginal participants learn processes that might be used in other situations. In this way, all Canadians benefit.

Other cultural influences on the mainstream include environmental activism. According to Dunne-za Elder Dominique Habitant, the greatest contribution Aboriginal peoples have to offer mainstream society is that of helping reconcile humankind's place on Earth. Aboriginal peoples can teach mainstream society a lot about respect.

"Respect for yourself, all things, and others besides yourself is what we always ask for," says Habitant. "In decisions, you must take into consideration how you are affecting other organisms around you, and those to come, for seven generations ahead in time. You must always try to be in balance when you walk the Earth." Aboriginal peoples' oral traditions could play a strong role in educating Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people about living in harmony with the environment.

Though the words *balance* and *respect* have become almost cliché in reference to Aboriginal cultures, they convey a universal truth. Unless humankind considers the consequences of its actions, it stands to wipe itself out and take many species with it. Old and young traditionalists, such as educator and artist Dale Auger, a Sakaw Cree, and Laura

Vinson, a Métis singer, call people from all cultures to find their connection with Earth. They and others like them believe that only this connection will teach people to be more planet-friendly and tolerant of others.

Nowhere is this traditional holistic attitude of respect put to better use than in the provincial judicial system, which is benefiting from the Aboriginal concept of restorative justice. Restorative justice is a traditional Aboriginal method of conflict resolution. It places an emphasis on restoring harmony and making amends rather than punishing offenders.

According to provincial circuit court judge John Reilly, as quoted in the *Calgary Sun*,

Canadians of European origin and Canadians of Aboriginal origin have a fundamentally different world view. The Aboriginal culture was [traditionally] very community based — [living on the land] required absolute co-operation amongst the people in the community. Instead of seeing an individual as freely, willingly choosing to do wrong and altering or deterring that choice through punishment, [traditional cultures] saw an offending behaviour as a tear in the relationship that binds people together. The objective, then, was to mend the tear, restoring the community to its pre-offence cohesiveness.

The approach was not meant to be soft on crime, but rather to take into consideration the needs of the victim and the community — with active remorse and reparation on the part of the offender.

Restorative justice initiatives are especially effective with young offenders. Youth justice committees are being used in many Alberta communities, and not all of them are Aboriginal. For example, a program called Calgary Community Conferencing helps reduce crime and violent conflict in the city's elementary, junior, and senior high schools. The resolution process involves giving everyone involved a chance to speak about their needs, with the offender eventually suggesting resolutions for the problem.

In schools and in wider society, law enforcers are finding restorative justice to be effective, and adoption of this traditional Aboriginal practice is growing.

LOOKING BACK

How has the position of Aboriginal peoples in mainstream Canadian society changed since the 1970s? In your opinion, has this position improved, gotten worse, or stayed the same? Write an essay on this topic that provides examples to support your points from areas such as politics, economics, statistics, and the media. You may want to refer back to previous chapters for ideas.



Jordin Tootoo is the first Inuk athlete to play in the National Hockey League. On October 9, 2003, he played his first shift for the Nashville Predators. He won a National Aboriginal Achievement Award in 2002.

Chapter Five Review

- Check Your Understanding
1. Define *multiculturalism* in your own words.
 2. Is your community highly multicultural or are certain groups noticeably larger than others? Explain how you reach this conclusion and factors that contribute to your community's character.
 3. Define *assimilation* in your own words.
 4. How do stereotypes form?
 5. What harm can stereotypes do?
 6. How does language contribute to stereotypes?
 7. What roles do the mass media play in reinforcing stereotypes?
 8. Without using stereotypes, write a description of Aboriginal peoples.
 9. Define *discrimination* in your own words.
 10. How does discrimination differ from prejudice and stereotypes?
 11. What are different levels and types of discrimination?
 12. What is institutional discrimination?

Métis architect Douglas Cardinal's dramatically curved designs are apparent in buildings around the world, including Alberta's Grande Prairie Regional College and the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Gatineau, Quebec. He has won an international reputation for excellence in design and won a National Aboriginal Achievement Award in 1995.



13. What are examples of mainstream society's adoption of Aboriginal cultural values? What is the significance of these examples for Aboriginal peoples in Canada?

14. Name at least ten Aboriginal people who you believe have made significant contributions to their communities and mainstream society. Describe briefly the reasons for each of your choices.

Reading and Writing

15. Using the Statistics Canada Web site, create a profile of your own community. Present your data using words, graphs, and charts in a PowerPoint™ or overhead presentation.
16. National Aboriginal Achievement Award winners vary from Douglas Cardinal, a world-renowned architect, to Joe and Josephine Crowshoe, ceremonial Elders from the Piikani First Nation. The numerous categories for awards celebrate achievement in almost every walk of life. Find a local First Nations, Métis, or Inuit person who you think is a good role model for youth. Use the profiles on the National Aboriginal Achievement Awards Web site as a model to write a profile of the person. You may need to request an interview with the individual to get the information you need. Create a class Web site of your role model profiles.
17. Express your own experiences with stereotypes or discrimination in a poem, short story, or essay.

Joe and Josephine Crowshoe were instrumental in preserving their Piikani oral tradition, ceremonies, and language. They were widely recognized as cultural authorities by those inside and outside the Aboriginal community. Josephine, a Holy Woman, was the Keeper of the Natoas (Sundance) Bundle and Joe was the Holder of the Blackfoot Short Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundle. They both won National Aboriginal Achievement Awards in 1998.

Viewing and Representing

18. Create a poster educating people about subtle forms of discrimination.
19. Describe the weekly programming of the Aboriginal People's Television Network. In what ways does it reflect Aboriginal cultures? How does it deal with Aboriginal issues? What role do Aboriginal languages play in its programs? Review a program you think does a good job of presenting Aboriginal people without stereotypes.



Speaking and Listening

20. Research early accounts of First Nations or Inuit cultures written by explorers, settlers, or missionaries in Canada. Find examples of how they viewed Aboriginal peoples. How did their worldview shape their ideas and judgements? Prepare an oral story as if from the perspective of a First Nations or Inuit person meeting Europeans for the first time. How might their worldview impact their impression of the Europeans?
21. In small groups, discuss any experiences you have had with stereotypes or discrimination. How did they make you feel? What did you do in the situation or following the situation? How might individuals handle such experiences with positive outcomes?
22. Hold an anti-discrimination day at your school. Plan creative ways to inform other students about the damage done by discrimination and ways to prevent it.

The television series renegadepress.com is a dramatic program on the Aboriginal People's Television Network about a group of multicultural inner-city teenagers that operate an online newspaper. The paper deals with issues that affect them and their friends, such as contraception, bullying, anorexia, and solvent abuse. The series breaks down many cultural boundaries and stereotypes as it deals with difficult issues.

Going Further

23. Brainstorm alternative names and symbols for sports teams that currently use Aboriginal stereotypes or cultural objects inappropriately.
24. Watch a Western film, preferably from the 1950s, 1960s, or 1970s. Re-write a scene in the script to overturn any stereotypical portrayals of Aboriginal people.

LOOKING BACK

Review the Focus Questions on page 158 with a partner and then answer each on your own in your notes. Do you reinforce any stereotypes in your own thinking or behaviour? Think critically and write as honestly as you can about how you see groups of people that are different from you.