Cultural Narratives and Clarity of Cultural Identity: Understanding the Well-Being of Inuit Youth

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Abstract
Inuit communities are addressing an array of social issues. There is a consensus that the negative impact of European colonization is the root cause of the challenges that are confronting Aboriginal people generally, and Inuit communities in particular. We challenge current theorizing by proposing that it is not the negative fallout associated with colonization directly that is most disruptive. Rather, it is the fact that colonization destroyed the clarity of Inuit identity. A guided Cultural Narrative Interview supported our proposal that a clear understanding of the history of one’s group can have a positive impact on collective well-being.

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History is the witness that testifies to the passing of time; it illumines reality, vitalizes memory, provides guidance in daily life. Cicero (106–43 BC)

When the entire history of a society is captured by a few simple labels, it points to a high degree of consensus about a group’s past, its present, and, possibly, its future. This level of agreement is precisely the case for current conceptions of relations between mainstream Canadian society and Inuit. The entire complex history of Inuit is reduced to a succession of agreed upon simple labels: “traditional culture,” “colonization” (forced assimilation), “empowerment,” and “decolonization.” These provocative labels evoke powerful images that also have profound value judgments associated with them. The group-based or cultural narrative they describe is a simple one: Inuit lived a traditional, nomadic lifestyle rooted in the harsh environment that they engaged and ultimately tamed. Powerful White Europeans (Qallunaat) “colonized” Inuit and dominated them through forced relocation and economic exploitation. The natural aftermath of colonization was the coerced assimilation of Inuit, symbolized by religious conversion and European-style education, including residential schools, linguicide, and the banning of spiritual ceremonies. The “empowerment” and “decolonization” processes that have now been set in motion are designed to rectify the devastating psychological and social consequences of colonization.

Both colonization and decolonization were recently recognized formally by the Canadian government, symbolized by the Prime Minister’s formal apology on June 11, 2008 to Inuit and Aboriginal people who were subjected to residential schools. In this apology, the vision of an orchestrated planned colonization process with devastating consequences on Inuit and Aboriginal populations was recognized. Moreover, in the same apology, the need to work towards decolonization was expressed (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation [CBC], 2008).

These shared labels, capturing the regrettable history between mainstream Canadians and Inuit, led to a consensual understanding of present-day conditions for Inuit. This consensual scenario describes the devastatingly negative effects of colonization and how it has profoundly affected the self-esteem of Inuit. The underlying theory is that this loss of self-esteem and accompanying feelings of helplessness led to the widespread social dysfunction plaguing Inuit communities.

The present research questions this simple analysis with its focus on colonization, as a profoundly negative change (valence) for Inuit that has led to widespread low levels of self-esteem. Surprisingly, and contrary to the view
captured in the agreed-upon labels, many Inuit do not judge colonization to be a universally negative process. They do not interpret colonization as a series of major negative social changes implemented by White people that destroyed Inuit culture. While there is a growing awareness of present-day social problems in their communities, many Inuit do not consider these problems to be caused mainly by the colonization process. In numerous conversations with students of all ages about Inuit history, White colonizers are often depicted as having very little to do with the negative outcomes of the colonization process. Moreover, in the minds of many Inuit, the positive consequences of colonization actually outweigh the negative ones.

Their positive regard towards colonizers shows that the best explanation for most of the social problems currently plaguing the Inuit communities is not the negative valence of colonization, but rather the devastating impact of this process on Inuit cultural identity. By destroying the traditional Inuit identity without effectively replacing it with a new one, the colonization process left the Inuit in the worst possible situation. The former norms associated with the traditional Inuit identity do not exist anymore, and have not been replaced by new norms, leaving the Inuit communities in a state of social dysfunction (Taylor and de la Sablonnière, 2007, 2011; see also de la Sablonnière et al., 2009b).

Equally surprising were findings from our empirical research in Inuit communities pointing to a relatively positive self-esteem. Many Inuit openly discuss issues that they are coping with, and their levels of self-esteem are as high as any group of mainstream Canadians. These findings are consistent with other research, pointing to the relatively high self-esteem expressed by some Inuit, and the role of resilient behaviours for generating a positive attitude among Aboriginal people (Andersson and Ledogar, 2008).

We propose that the widespread assumption that European colonization was a negative process affecting self-esteem directly may be misleading. Focusing on the negative consequences of colonization *per se* may not best explain the self-esteem and well-being issues confronting modern Inuit. It is not just those Inuit who judge colonization positively who have high self-esteem, and those who judge colonization negatively who have low self-esteem. A complete understanding of Inuit well-being and self-esteem requires a focus on the clarity with which Inuit themselves interpret the roles that White colonizers and Inuit played in shaping contemporary Inuit communities.

A clearly defined Inuit identity, derived from a clear understanding of Inuit history, is what allows an Inuk to develop a strong personal identity and, by extension, positive self-esteem. This assertion is derived from Taylor
(1997; 2002), who argues that it is the clarity of a group’s cultural identity that is negatively affected by dramatic social changes such as colonization at the group level. The present research on clarity of cultural identity builds on previous research focusing on clarity of identity at the personal level (McAdams, 1997). Campbell (1990) has demonstrated in a number of experiments that the clarity of an individual’s personal identity is related to self-esteem. We propose here, that clarity of identity at the group level, that is a clearly defined Inuit identity, is also related to self-esteem.

Specifically, we argue that whether Inuit from Nunavik focus on historical events that might be considered negative (colonization) or positive (James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement) is not what is pivotal for Inuit well-being. What is pivotal is that Inuit need a clear, shared vision of their history, including a clear idea of what precisely caused events that affected Inuit; that is, they need a clear understanding of the events that define Inuit history and, by extension, a clear and well-defined cultural identity. This hypothesis is in line with previous research by Chandler and Lalonde (1998; 2004; 2008) on cultural continuity, which focused on Aboriginal communities that were able to act strongly to preserve their threatened culture and to regain control over their community by taking steps towards self-governing. Results demonstrated that these communities reported lower youth suicide rates than the ones that were unable to achieve these goals, showing the importance of a well-defined cultural identity.

To address our view of well-being and self-esteem, we asked Inuit to tell us, spontaneously and in their own words, the history of Inuit from Nunavik (Arctic Québec). Specifically, we used a well-established technique in the psychology of personal identity (McAdams, 1996; 2001), and adapted it for the present research. We labeled our technique the Cultural Narrative Interview, because it asks our Inuit participants to tell us the story of “Inuit from Nunavik.” This interview technique was originally developed by Bougie et al. (2011), and was tested with samples of Anglophones and Francophones. The Cultural Narrative Interview is derived from the Life Story Interview (McAdams, 1996; 2001), which evaluates the personal narrative of an individual. The Life Story Coherence Coding Criteria (Baerger and McAdams, 1999), originally developed to evaluate personal identity clarity by analyzing the content from a personal narrative, was modified by Bougie and her colleagues (2011) to reflect the context of collective identity clarity. To use the Cultural Narrative Interview, we first conducted preliminary interviews in the community of Kangiqsujuaq (Nunavik). We asked participants about the main events across the history of their cultural group.
Most participants considered that the history of Inuit began when their nomadic ancestors crossed the Bering strait. Participants also mentioned several “past” chapters, one “present” chapter, and one “future” chapter.

Based on these preliminary interviews, we established the structure of the Cultural Narrative Interviews around six chapters. Chapter 1 (First Inuit) represents the time when Inuit ancestors first came to Nunavik. Chapter 2 (Great-grandparents’ generation) is concerned with the time when the great-grandparents of the participants lived. Thus, the part of Inuits’ history between the first ancestors and the great-grandparents is not covered by distinct chapters because participants in the preliminary interviews had very little to say about this period. Chapter 3 (Grandparents’ generation) and Chapter 4 (Parents’ generation) concerns specific generations, leading to Chapter 5 (Own generation) which corresponds to the life of present-day Inuit. Chapter 6 (Inuits’ future) is about how participants envision the destiny of their group, considering both positive and negative events. We began the Cultural Narrative Interview by asking our Inuit students to tell us the story of their group, the “Inuit of Nunavik,” using these 6 chapters.

From the content of these cultural narratives, we first examined the extent to which our Inuit participants tended to tell a similar story about the history, present, and future of Inuit. We then analyzed the content of each chapter, which provided a general understanding of the key events that affected Inuit through the generations. To assess identity clarity, we focused the story-tellers’ ability to clearly identify the causes of historical events. At the same time, we performed a series of statistical tests aimed at verifying our general hypothesis, which states that Inuit who can pinpoint clear causes for decisive cultural events should have higher levels of personal and collective well-being. We also explored the extent to which our Inuit participants’ perceptions of historical events were positive or negative (valence), focusing on the valence that Inuit story-tellers assigned for each event in each chapter of their narrative. Thus, we were able to assess the extent to which their cultural narratives mirrored the current theory that it is the negative or positive nature of dramatic events which affects self-esteem and well-being.

**Method**

**Participants**

A sample of 17 Inuit youth participated in the present research. According to Marshall (1996), such a sample size is acceptable considering the qualitative
Participants were aged from 15–34 ($M=19.5$, $SD=5.0$). In all, 53% were male and 47% were female; 9 were living in Montréal (southern Québec) and pursuing a college education, whereas 8 were living in Nunavik (northern Arctic Québec) and attending high school. Participants from the southern group were contacted with the help of the Kativik School Board, and interviewed during a scheduled appointment with one of the researchers on our team. Half of the participants from the northern group had always lived in northern Québec, and the other half had also lived in southern Québec for a period not exceeding 6 years ($M=2.13$, $SD=2.48$). Participants from the northern group were interviewed in their northern community by the same researcher. The project was approved by the ethics committee of McGill University.

**PROCEDURE**

In line with previous research conducted with Inuit populations, we used a qualitative approach (e.g., Bird et al., 2009). Such an approach is especially appropriate when working with Inuit participants since they come from an oral culture,² and might be less accustomed to long formal questionnaires. In our study, we use interviews, where we first ask the participants to play the role of a story-teller, and then we complete the interview with a short questionnaire. In reporting the results of the interviews, we present meaningful original excerpts as well as a quantitative summary of the interviews that we coded (Mays and Pope, 1995).

Inuit students were all met individually by the interviewer, who was fluent in Inuktitut, English, and French. The interviewer, an Inuk himself, met with each participant at the place of his or her choice, usually the home of the participant or the Inuit meeting centre. Participants chose which language they preferred for the interviews and structured questionnaires. For Inuit from the southern group, seven participants chose to conduct the interview in English, and two in Inuktitut. For Inuit from the northern group, six participants chose English, one chose French, and one chose Inuktitut. The complete interview was audio-recorded with their approval, subsequently transcribed verbatim, and then translated into English, when necessary.

The general purpose of the research was explained to participants, who then signed a consent form, while being informed that their answers would remain anonymous and confidential. Participants were told that the re-

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² The Inuktituk syllabics were introduced to Inuit in the mid-1800s by missionaries, based on an orthography developed for the Cree by Reverend James Evans (Fabbi, 2003).
search would be conducted in two parts. First, there would be an interview, i.e., the Cultural Narrative Interview. For the southern group, immediately following the Cultural Narrative Interview, there were two additional measurements for each chapter: valence and Inuit pride. Second, once the Cultural Narrative Interview was completed, each participant was asked to complete a Psychological Well-being Questionnaire, which included two measures: personal esteem and collective esteem.

**Cultural Narrative Interview**

The interviewer began by giving explicit instructions to the participant. The participant was asked to spontaneously tell the story of “Inuit of Nunavik,” adopting the role of a story-teller. Participants were asked to divide their story into six main chapters, beginning with Chapter 1 on “how Inuit first came to Nunavik” (First Inuit), and ending with Chapter 6 on “the expected future for Inuit” (Inuit’s future).

To assess cultural identity clarity, we examined each chapter in each cultural narrative. We assessed if the participant clearly described an event that affected Inuit as a group and provided a clear statement of what caused that event. To be considered clear, the story-teller had to clearly and specifically pinpoint the cause of an event that affected Inuit. For example, the excerpt from a cultural narrative (a lot of Inuit died from epidemics, ... they try ... the ... epidemics from the ... white people ... some actually survived but a lot of ... a lot of ... them passed away ...), is clear, because it pinpoints a specific agent (i.e., White colonizers) causing the event (i.e., the epidemics). In contrast, an excerpt from another participant (I think in my great-grandparent’s time was when the shaman started to become extinct), is not as clear, because it does not pinpoint any specific cause of the event (i.e., the extinction of the shaman).

For this analysis, we limited the clear causes to two possibilities: White colonizers (the out-group) or Inuit themselves (the in-group), because they were the two main groups who played a role in Inuit history and the more inclusive levels of causal explanation, even if the White-group influence was generally perceived as more indirect.

Other attributions, for example, if a participant directly attributed the social problems of his or her community to alcohol, might seem like a clear cause, but it lacks any specification of the cause for the alcohol abuse (e.g., White colonizers introduced Inuit to alcohol). Thus, the mere mention of alcohol as a cause for social problems was not considered as clear for the
purposes of this study, because it does not help the Inuit participant clarify his vision of his group’s history, and of his collective identity as an Inuit.

Identity clarity for each cultural narrative chapter was determined by assessing the proportion of the events mentioned in each chapter that were associated with clear attributions. For this study, the proportion was calculated on an 11 point scale ranging from “0: no clear attribution” to “10: clear attribution.” For example, if a chapter mentioned 10 events, 3 of which were attributed to White colonizers, and 3 of which were attributed to Inuit, the identity clarity score would be 6/10. If 5 events were attributed to White colonizers, and 1 to Inuit, the identity clarity remained 6/10, because we were interested in the ability of participants to associate events with clear causes, whether the causal agent was the in-group or the out-group. The transcriptions of the tape-recorded stories were given to two university students, who were asked to code the identity clarity for each chapter in each narrative. Coder bias was minimized because they did not know the purpose of the research. As well, since there were two coders, we were able to assess the extent to which they agreed with each other. The interjudge reliability was considered acceptable, as it ranged from .84 to .98 (M=.93, SD=0.05) (pearson’s r) from Chapter 1 to Chapter 6.

We focused on critical events because previous research suggests that group members are generally able to identify key events of their collective history, and that this identification has an important impact on their well-being (Bougie et al., 2011). Preliminary analyses on complementary Personal Narratives Interview of participants in the North group (N=8) also demonstrated that Inuit participants generally identified key events in their personal life, and used them to organize and establish chapters of their own personal history. Despite our belief that Inuit participants have a lower ability to clearly identify key events of their history (because they lack cultural identity clarity), we believe that these key events still play a key role in determining their well-being.

We focused on the clarity of “causes” for events, because knowing the cause of an event is the way people come to understand their world. Graham and Weiner (1996), summarizing the work of attribution theorists such as Heider (1958), Kelley (1967; 1971), and Weiner (1985; 1986), described individuals as “naïve scientists, trying (sometimes biasedly) to understand the causal structure of the world” (Graham and Weiner, 1996, p. 72). The tendency of individuals to make causal inferences with respect to life events has been verified in five studies by Wong and Weiner (1981). Recent research sug-
gests that clear attributions reduce the threats associated with dramatic social change and protect well-being (Pinard Saint-Pierre and de la Sablonnière, 2011). Therefore, we propose that Inuit participants with a clear understanding of the causal structure of their collective history will construct a clear vision of the evolution of their group across time, thereby clarifying their collective identity. Thus, Inuit students with a clear understanding of events are in a position to develop a healthy identity and positive self-esteem.

**Valence (southern group only)**
Immediately following the Cultural Narrative Interview, participants were asked to evaluate the events they mentioned in each chapter in terms of how negative or positive (valence) the events they described were. The interviewer, having written down each event mentioned by the participant during the interview, asked her or him to rate each event on an 11 point scale, ranging from “0: very negative event” to “10: very positive event.” The average valence rating was then calculated for each participant. Past research has highlighted the importance of considering the impact of the valence of social change when evaluating psychological well-being (de la Sablonnière and Tougas, 2008; de la Sablonnière et al., 2009c). Because our measurement of identity clarity, based on attributions of events, may be influenced by the valence of these events, it was deemed important to control the possible impact of the positive or negative perception of these events by participants.

**Inuit pride (southern group only)**
The Inuit pride score was assessed by asking the Inuit students, immediately following the interview, how proud they were of Inuit at each generational point. For example, for Chapter 5, the question read: “How proud are you as an Inuk of this generation?” This measure was included in the present study based on previous research which closely associated national pride with psychological well-being (de la Sablonnière et al., 2009a).

The participants answered on an 11 point scale, ranging from “0: not very proud” to “10: very proud.” The Inuit pride score for Chapter 6 of the Cultural Narrative Interview (i.e., Inuit’s future) was assessed by using the scores obtained from two items. These items were: “My future looks good” and “I feel hopeful about the future” (interitem correlation was .69).

**Psychological well-being questionnaire**
Following the Cultural Narrative Interview, the Inuit students were asked to answer a Psychological Well-being Questionnaire. Two indicators were used
in the questionnaire to ensure the stability of our results. These indicators were personal and collective esteem. Participants rated each well-being indicator on a scale from “0: low well-being” to “10: high well-being.” Because our participants were unaccustomed to answering formal questionnaires, only a few items per indicator were assessed. Since Cronbach’s alpha is quite sensitive to the number of items in a scale (Black, 1999; Kaplan and Saccuzzo, 2001), interitem correlation was used (see also Briggs and Cheek, 1986). Values were acceptable for both personal (.51) and collective esteem (.39).

The initial version of the questionnaire was prepared in English. The questionnaire was then translated into Inuktitut, the mother tongue of Inuit from Nunavik. The translation was performed using a back-to-back procedure (Brislin, 1970). The back-to-back procedure for the Inuktitut questionnaire involved a first translation of the English questionnaire into Inuktitut by a professional translator. Next, a second professional translated the Inuktitut version back into English. The accuracy of the translated Inuktitut questionnaire was verified by two researchers from Nunavik and southern Québec. Their analysis resulted in changes to both the English and Inuktitut versions of the questionnaire to maximize the chances that the meaning of each item in the two versions was identical. The same back-to-back procedure was used to translate the English version of the questionnaire into French.

1. **Personal esteem.** Personal esteem is the degree of positivity of one’s personal identity. The level of personal esteem of participants was assessed by two items from Rosenberg’s (1965) Self-Esteem Scale (SES). These items were: “I don’t have much to be proud of” (reverse-coded), and “I have a positive attitude about myself.”

2. **Collective esteem.** Collective esteem refers to the extent to which a person judges his or her own group positively or negatively. Collective esteem was assessed for participants in both Inuit student groups by using five items from Luhtanen and Crocker’s (1992) Collective Self-Esteem Scale (CSES). These items included statements such as: “In general, I am happy to be Inuit,” and “Inuit are considered by others to be good.” The negative items were reverse-coded, such that a high score corresponded to positive collective self-esteem.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Our main goal was to explore the association between clarity of cultural identity and well-being, while considering the possible impact of valence.
Our analysis was conducted in two main parts. In Part 1, we examined the content of the cultural narratives provided by our young Inuit, specifically reporting the general content for each of the chapters. This allowed us to appreciate the major events and the extent to which our Inuit participants offered a clear causal analysis for these events. In Part 1 we also report the results for Inuit pride.

We also compared the northern and southern groups of Inuit students to assess whether possible observed differences in identity clarity between groups had an impact on well-being. Participants from the southern group, because they have succeeded at school and are attending college, may report higher levels of well-being and more identity clarity. As well, contact with Qallunaat in the South may have made their own Inuit identity more salient, and helped them to clarify it. It is equally possible, however, that extensive contact with Qallunaat produced confusion in identity, because these young Inuit had to adjust to a new culture and way of life. Similarly, contact with other values and life in the South could have created confusion about cultural identity, lowering their cultural identity clarity.

We compared the Northern and Southern student Inuit groups in terms of psychological well-being, assessed by the personal and collective esteem scales, in order to evaluate whether a possible lack of clarity for one of the groups would lead to lower well-being.

In Part 2, we performed correlational analyses to explore the relationship between identity clarity and psychological well-being. As well, we examined the role of event valence (positive or negative) since it is intuitively the obvious relationship to explain well-being.

**PART 1. CULTURAL NARRATIVE CONTENT**

*Chapters 1 and 2: First Inuit and Great-grandparents’ generation*

Results showed that Chapter 1 (First Inuit) was described by most participants as a beginning chapter in which Inuit settled in Nunavik and started to establish their traditional way of life. Chapter 2 (Great-grandparents’ generation) was described as first contact with White colonizers, with whom Inuit conducted some trade, gained access to new materials, and met the missionaries who introduced them to Christianity.

These two chapters were similar in the sense that the actions of both groups and the events resulting from these actions remained relatively distinct, certain events being attributed to Inuit, as shown by the following excerpt: “Inuit people all over the Arctic originating from Asia and cross
the Bering strait and settle in the Arctic region of Canada and other various Arctic regions in the circumpolar,” while others were attributed to White colonizers following first contact, as in the excerpt: “I guess that’s when Inuit who lived there were discovered by the whalers.”

In these two chapters, the collective identity was the clearest of the entire narrative for participants from both groups (Table 1), because they were able to clearly and specifically relate social changes to either Inuit or White colonizer groups. The fact that participants from the southern group also showed the most Inuit pride for these two chapters suggests that identity clarity may support psychological well-being. We may postulate that the same association between clarity and well-being would have emerged for participants from the northern group if we had measured their level of Inuit pride by chapter.

### Table 1. Overall and Chapter Means and Standard Deviations for Independent and Dependent Variables (N = 17) (Results by Chapter) (all Results are Reported on an 11 Point Scale from 0–10)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Identity Clarity</th>
<th>Inuit Pride</th>
<th>Valence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Northern (N=8)</td>
<td>Southern (N=9)</td>
<td>Southern (N=9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. First Inuit (Chapter 1)</td>
<td>9.29</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>9.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Great-grandparents (Chapter 2)</td>
<td>7.88</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>8.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Grandparents (Chapter 3)</td>
<td>5.91</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>5.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall (Chapters 1, 2, and 3)</td>
<td>7.69</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>7.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Parents (Chapter 4)</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>3.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Own generation (Chapter 5)</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>3.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Inuit’s future (Chapter 6)</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>5.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall (Chapters 4, 5, and 6)</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>4.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall (entire narrative)</td>
<td>5.25</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>6.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chapter 3: Grandparents’ generation**

Results showed that Chapter 3 (Grandparents’ generation) appeared to be a transitional chapter. In this chapter, the traditional Inuit way of life changed fundamentally. For example, during their grandparents’ generation, Inuit became fully converted to Christianity, switched from a nomadic to a sedentary life-style, and left their igloos for “match-box” houses.

More importantly, the link established in the minds of our Inuit participants between the social changes affecting Inuit and the agent of change — either Inuit or White colonizers — began to blur. Consequently, and despite the fact that, in Chapter 3, most events were still described as the direct
consequence of either Inuit or White colonizers, it became more difficult for participants to clearly identify these links, and to attribute events to a clear cause, either Inuit or White colonizers. Thus, identity clarity of Inuit from both groups became less clear (Table 1). This is transitional, because it introduces some elements associated with participant’s perceptions of current conditions for Inuit.

The fact that participants from the southern group were less proud of their group for this chapter than they were for the two preceding chapters also suggests that identity clarity may support psychological well-being; participants were less proud of a generation for which their collective identity was less clear. Again, we might postulate that the same association between clarity and well-being would have emerged for participants from the northern group if we had measured their level of Inuit pride by chapter.

In order to confirm that the differences in terms of clarity between northern and southern groups were not significant for the first three chapters, because participants from both groups were able to easily identify the direct links between social changes and clear causes, a t-test was conducted comparing the northern and southern groups (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2001). Results showed no difference in cultural identity clarity between the northern and southern groups when considering the identity clarity score for the first three chapters ($M_{Northern} = 7.69$ and $M_{Southern} = 7.94$, $t(15)=0.30, p=n.s.$). Identity clarity of Inuit from both northern and southern groups was clear.

**Chapters 4 and 5: Parents’ generation and Own generation.**

Chapter 4 (Parents’ generation) and Chapter 5 (Own generation) clearly distinguished themselves from the first three chapters. In both Chapter 4 and 5, Inuit participants failed to relate most of the events to the actions of either Inuit or White colonizers, or indeed any other clear cause. In Chapter 4, despite some effort by Inuit to regain control of their collective life, most of the events mentioned were consequences of the changes occurring during the colonial period, but these were not attributed directly to White colonizers.

In Chapter 5 (Own generation), which was mainly centred on social problems, such as alcoholism, loss of culture, unemployment, and reliance on welfare, participants made very few if any references to White colonizers or even the colonization process itself. For instance, even with alcoholism, a shared preoccupation among Inuit, participants were able to identify alcohol as causing social problems in the communities, but most of them were not
predisposed to attribute the introduction of alcohol as a consequence of, for example, the colonization process implemented by White colonizers. Thus, there were no clearly defined links between alcohol and its introduction by the Qallunaat, nor was any clear cause referred to for the issue of alcohol.

The two chapters were similar in that the actions of most of the events were not clearly attributed either to Inuit or White colonizers. The following excerpt is typical: “My parents’ generation? Hum ... the alcoholism just escalated ... and ... a lot of people started going more on welfare, and there were a lot less jobs.”

Although participants were not inclined to relate most of the events mentioned in these chapters to a clear cause, there was one notable exception. Most participants were able to relate one defining event, the negotiation of the James Bay and Northern Quebec (JBNQ) Agreement, to a clear cause, i.e., their own group, as illustrated by this excerpt:

I think of the treaty of ... which was the signed ... the agreement of ... the hydroelectric ... and they got money in exchange ... the negotiators were ... and that’s when major organizations were born, like Makivik, and were the major organizations representing Inuit today, still today ... and out of that, the school board came in....

Even if we postulate that this clear event may have increased identity clarity, the fact that most of the other events mentioned in Chapters 4 and 5 were not as well related to any clear cause may explain why it remains low.

In these two chapters, the collective identity reached the lowest level of clarity for the narratives of all participants (Table 1). In terms of collective identity, participants were unable to clearly attribute the key events in their narratives to either Inuit or White colonizers. The fact that participants from the southern group also showed their lowest levels of Inuit pride for these two chapters suggests that it may, indeed, be a lack of identity clarity that is affecting psychological well-being.

It is also important to note that participants from the northern group expressed levels of identity clarity that were even lower than those of participants from the southern group. These results suggest that, in a situation where it is more difficult to relate to clear causes, participants from the northern group were even less able to find these clear causes, and experienced a lack of clarity that was more dramatic. We postulate that this lack of clarity would have led to even less pride if we had measured the level of Inuit pride by chapter for participants from the northern group.
Chapter 6: Inuit’s future

The results of Chapter 6 (Inuit’s future) may be interpreted as a second transitional chapter. This transition seems to reflect an anticipated decolonization period. Aspects of the decolonization theme first surfaced in Chapter 4 (Parents’ generation) with the negotiation of the James Bay and Northern Quebec (JBNQ) Agreement, or with events such as the Prime Minister’s formal apology of June 11, 2008. However, decolonization is the dominant theme in chapter 6. This decolonization takes the form of discourses where the Inuit take the control of their future. Participants believe that, in the near future, Inuit will take control of their land, government, and natural resources.

Most Inuit students in Chapter 6 expressed the hope that Inuit would retake control of their collective destiny by developing their own autonomous government, reinforcing Inuktut and traditional culture, and regaining full control of their natural resources to develop their economy and create employment. In this chapter, participants were able to isolate the actions of Inuit from those of White colonizers, and thus to clearly attribute these decolonizing events to the actions of Inuit. We illustrate these with excerpts from various participants, who offered a coherent vision of future events, or social changes. Various Inuit reported, for instance: “I think we will get our own government,” “And we could put all of our workers into developing our resources,” “I guess it’s up to us now to ... to do something to ... to keep our ... and keep, you know, keep its traditions as much as we can, for future generations,” and “I want us to make good choices.”

On the other hand, Inuit expressed worry about the future handling of social and economic problems plaguing their communities. In this chapter, participants had difficulty relating these negative events to a specific cause, be it the continuing consequences of the colonization process, or, indeed, their own group’s doing: “there’s a lot of problems in the North, hum ... well there’s a lot of problems everywhere but there’s a lot in the North, they ... hum ... the alcoholism is more, you know,” and “we have lost our culture.”

The collective identity was clearer than in the preceding chapters for both northern and southern groups, but did not reach the level of the two first chapters (Table 1). Once again, Inuit participants from the northern group expressed less clarity than participants from the southern group. The fact that Inuit from the southern group are prouder of this generation suggests that this gain in identity clarity may have a positive impact on psychological well-being.

To confirm that participants in the northern group showed a lower level of cultural identity clarity in the last three chapters, a supplementary t-test
was conducted comparing the northern and southern groups regarding the mean identity clarity score for Chapters 4–6. Results showed a difference in terms of cultural identity clarity between the northern and southern groups ($M_{\text{Northern}}=2.77$ and $M_{\text{Southern}}=4.42$, $t(15)=2.06$, $p=.057$, eta square=.221).

We postulate that this difference in clarity during the pivotal last three chapters was the reason for a lower level of psychological well-being for Inuit youth from the northern group. To further test this explanation, two more t-test analyses, one for each measurement of well-being (personal and collective esteem), were performed with a Bonferroni correction (the group’s location was used as the independent variable). A significant difference emerged in personal esteem. The northern group, with a less clear cultural identity, had relatively low self-esteem ($M=6.75$) compared to the southern group, with a relatively clear cultural identity ($M=8.56$, $t(15)=2.89$, $p=.011$, eta square=.403). Although no significant difference was found in collective esteem between the northern ($M=7.00$) and southern group ($M=8.00$, $t(15)=1.40$, $p=.181$, eta square=.134), probably due to the small number of participants, the large effect size suggests an important difference between groups regarding collective esteem, as well.

Our results suggest that identity clarity plays a pivotal role in building collective esteem and self-esteem among Inuit youth and in attaining psychological well-being, especially when considering events that happened in three important generations which were not directly connected to, but were clearly residual effects arising from, the colonization process.

Despite the fact that Inuit from the northern group found it more difficult to identify the links between social changes affecting Inuit history and their specific causes, they were able to achieve as much identity clarity as participants from the southern group for the colonial period. These links, because they are direct, were easier to identify even for the northern group. The tendency toward lower identification of links in comparison to the southern group was evident in the last three chapters, no doubt because the links were subtle and indirect. Thus, the northern group expressed less identity clarity than Inuit from the southern group. This lack of clarity on the part of the northern group was associated with reduced feelings of pride in their Inuit identity, and of themselves personally. The end result was a lower level of psychological well-being compared to their southern counterparts.
PART 2.  IDENTITY CLARITY, PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AND EVENT VALENCE

Our analyses thus far have suggested a link between clarity of cultural identity and psychological well-being. Before confidently arriving at this conclusion, however, we need to address the possibility that other competing explanations may be equally important. For example, our southern group of Inuit have experienced more academic success than our northern group and perhaps it is this academic success that led the southern group to evidence such high levels of cultural identity clarity. Another possibility, and one that has strong intuitive appeal, is that the valence of participants’ narratives is what is related to well-being. Participants who interpreted the history of Inuit as a series of positive events may be the ones with higher levels of psychological well-being, whereas those with a more negatively valenced narrative may evidence lower levels of well-being. In order to test these competing interpretations we performed a series of correlations involving identity clarity, narrative valence, and Inuit pride.

We observed a strong association between cultural identity clarity and Inuit pride ($r = .91; p < .05$), supporting the view that identity clarity may have a major impact on psychological well-being (see Table 2 for results). These correlational results initially confirmed our earlier results concerning the link between identity clarity and psychological well-being (i.e., Inuit pride). Specifically, when we considered the scores for each chapter, it seemed that, when identity clarity was high, well-being was also high (see Chapter 1: First Inuit and Chapter 2: Great-grandparents’ generation). In contrast, when identity clarity was low, well-being was also low (see Chapter 3: Grandparents’

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<tr>
<td>1. Identity clarity</td>
<td>.79*</td>
<td>.91*</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Valence</td>
<td></td>
<td>.86*</td>
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<td>3. Inuit pride</td>
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Table 2. Correlations among Variables and Summary of Descriptive Statistics (N = 9) (Southern Group)

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<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>6.17</td>
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<tr>
<td>SD</td>
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<td>Kurtosis</td>
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Notes. * $p < .10$, * $p < .05$
As for Chapter 6: Inuit’s future, results showed that the scores for both identity clarity and well-being were between the highest and the lowest chapters.

When observing the correlations, we noted a strong association between valence and Inuit pride ($r = .86; p < .05$), suggesting that when valence is positive, well-being will be high. This result supports the traditional view that valence is, indeed, related to well-being. Thus, positive and negative valence joins clarity as an important factor in understanding the well-being of Inuit.

Although a high correlation between valence and pride emerged, the strength of this association is muted. Most important is the fact that Inuit participants expressed very little evaluative judgment regarding the nature of the social changes presented in their narratives. Except for events associated with social problems resulting from alcohol, participants were relatively neutral when referring to major events arising from European colonization.

This lack of evaluative judgment was reflected in the fact that valence reached almost the same point, around 5.80, for three different chapters of the cultural narratives (Chapters 2, 4, and 6), each associated with various levels of Inuit pride. This score was near the neutral point of the scale, 5, corresponding to a social change that is neither positive nor negative. Participants also never scored more than one point higher than the neutral point, except in Chapter 1 ($M = 7.74$). The fact that Inuit expressed neutral judgments about very negative and disruptive events, such as residential schools, either by judging them neutral, or by compensating for their negative aspects, such as separation from family, with positive ones, like access to education, may be related to their lack of identity clarity for certain periods. Their tendency not to relate certain events to their cause, i.e., White colonizers, may then be related to their inability to make truly positive or negative evaluations of events. Considering these facts, the lack of identity clarity may be the more fundamental process with valence playing a lesser but important role in determining psychological well-being.

**Conclusion**

The present study supports an alternative view to the traditional understanding of the colonization process. Our results challenge the traditional view that colonization is perceived negatively by all Inuit and that its negative consequences produce low self-esteem. Many of our Inuit youth reported high levels of well-being and positive self-esteem. Moreover, our
results indicate that self-esteem and well-being differed among Inuit. For example, well-being and esteem were quite different for our northern and southern groups of Inuit youth. In addition, well-being and esteem varied according to historical period as captured in the cultural narratives.

The most important finding was, in addition to the positive valence group experiences, the pivotal role that Inuit identity clarity seems to play for the well-being and esteem of our participants. Clarity of Inuit cultural identity may well provide individuals with clearly defined goals and strategies for achieving these goals. Pursuing a set of clearly defined goals leads to healthy personal and collective well-being.

The reasons for a lack of identity clarity may be diverse, and need further investigation. Our results show that having a clear understanding of the history of one’s group can have an important impact on collective well-being, independent of the positive or negative valence of events.

Inuit young people may well benefit from interventions designed not to boost their self-esteem directly, but rather to help them clarify their identity as Inuit. Thus, school administrators might seize any opportunity to reinforce the collective mission of the school, and every teacher can devote time to helping their students arrive at a common set of short-, medium-, and long-term goals. Reinforcing and clarifying collective goals may well lead to greater motivation, self-esteem and psychological well-being.

REFERENCES


**Roxane de la Sablonnière** is an associate professor in Psychology at Université de Montréal. Her research focuses on the challenges people confront when they face dramatic social change, such as Aboriginal people in Canada, and different groups in Mongolia, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, and South Africa. Her theorizing involves reconceptualizing relative deprivation theory and understanding the processes associated with the integration of new cultural identities into the self-concept.

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**Jason Annahatak** obtained a masters degree in Education from Columbia University in 2009. Part of the data presented in this article was collected during his undergraduate studies in Psychology at McGill University, under the supervision of Dr. Taylor. While pursuing graduate studies, Jason traveled in Asia and Europe. Selected by the National Aboriginal Role Model Program, he presented conferences about school commitment in Aboriginal communities, and especially in Inuit communities of his native Nunavik (northern Québec). Believing that education is the key for a better future for Aboriginal youth, Jason use his own example to explain to students that it is by working through their first failure that they would achieve success.