

Impact of the French Fur Trade on the Lives of Native
Women in the Great Lakes Region during the
Seventeenth, Eighteenth, and Nineteenth Centuries

Deborah Snow


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First Reader: Dr. Bruce A. Rubenstein



Second Reader: Dr. Frederic Svoboda



Preface

The French fur trade and the introduction of capitalism had the strongest impact on Ojibwa women in four areas: marriage, family structure, health and spirituality. This thesis will examine changes in marriage and family structure in Chapter 2 and issues of health and spirituality in Chapter 3. Before focusing on these changes, the Ojibwa belief structure will be discussed in order to establish a basic understanding of the culture prior to the arrival of Europeans. The structure of the lives of women before the introduction of European capitalism and impact of European thought on the Ojibwa culture will be examined as well.

In referring to this society, the term “Ojibwa” will be used. Other terms that may be found in quotes from other sources may be “Chippewa” or “Anishnabe.” The term “traditional” will refer to elements of native culture that are relatively free of European influence, while the term “conventional” will apply to cultural elements that stem from the conventions of European culture.

I began my study of the cultural changes and dynamics of the fur trade and colonization by the French in the New World hoping to gain insight into the lives of European women who ventured into North America. I wondered what life was like for the first white women in this region. My attention was soon drawn to the native women of the Great Lakes. One of my instructors in the Master of Liberal Studies program at the University of Michigan at Flint, Wallace Genser, directed me to sources on native women in the fur trade era. Dr. Linda Carty, professor of Sociology at the University of Michigan at Flint, further cultivated my interest in women’s issues. As I read the works of scholars of the fur trade period: Richard White, Sylvia Van Kirk, Karen Anderson, and Jennifer S. H. Brown, to

name a few, I became intrigued by the questions related to the lives of native women at a time of great cultural change. What was life like for them? How did they manage to survive? What cultural structures were in place that enhanced or restricted their lives? What were their relationships to men, their children, and other women? What were the effects on their lives of the fur trade and colonization? What changes did women experience when the elements of capitalism were introduced into traditional native culture? How did they adapt and cope?

As I researched what I thought would be a simple story, I found myself confronted by a totally different way of thinking and of seeing the world. I struggled with native concepts that I had never really understood before and cannot claim to fully understand even now. The cultural concepts of “chief,” “time,” “power,” and “alliance,” were one thing in my thinking and something quite different in that of the Ojibwa. At several points, I wondered whether it was even possible for someone like myself, separated by time and culture from the people I was studying, to begin to understand that culture and the changes that have occurred in it. I realized that, just as I could not really understand the culture of the Ojibwa of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, neither could I understand the culture of the French of that time.

Historian Michael Dorris comments:

The requirements for recounting an emic native history are particularly demanding and, by standards of most traditional methodology, unorthodox. There do not exist the familiar and reassuring kinds of written documentation that one finds in European societies of equivalent chronological periods, and the forms of tribal record that are available--oral history, tales, mnemonic devices, and religious rituals--strike the average, university-trained academic as inexact, unreliable, and suspect. Culture-bound by their own approach to knowledge, they are apt to throw up their hands in despair and exclaim that *nothing* can be known of Indian history...One does not start

from point zero, but from minus ten.¹

Some goals, however, are so worthy that they are respectable even in failure. While researching the topic of the impact of the fur trade on Ojibwa women, I found that the traditional culture and dynamics of change within it are very complex. Although I do not feel that I have succeeded in bringing to light all the various ways in which native women faced, and dealt with, change, I do believe that I have gained at least some insight into the process of change that was inevitable when the French and Ojibwa cultures met. Information on women is difficult to find in sources treating the fur trade era, and in spite of the fact that information given by native women of the time appears to be nonexistent, or nearly so, perhaps it can be inferred from available sources some of the ways in which native women acquiesced in, accommodated, or resisted the influx of European culture.

I offer my thanks to Drs. Bruce Rubenstein and Frederic Svoboda, professors of History and English, respectively, at the University of Michigan-Flint, and archivist Frank Boles and the staff of Clarke Historical Library at Central Michigan University for their academic support and direction. I thank my son David for his help with technical aspects of the preparation of this work, and my son Aaron for his good advice. I am also grateful to Dr. Karen Norman, my best friend and mentor, for her moral support and constant encouragement, to my parents, Gerald and Doris Howell for their interest and support, to my colleague and friend Eileen DeBurton for inspiration and information pertinent to this work, and to my colleague and cohort Jim Coviak for his friendship and sense of humor in all things, including this.

Notes

1. Michael Dorris, "Indians on the Shelf" in Calvin Martin, ed., The American Indian and the Problem of History (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 103.

Introduction

Many historians, including contemporary scholars, describe the fur trade era, from 1615 to 1815, as a “golden age” of French-Indian relations and refer to the “symbiotic” nature of early European contact in the New World. Was this really a “golden age”? How did the introduction of European thought and cultural systems affect Native Americans, specifically women? How did these new systems affect the lives of Ojibwa women, in particular? How did they alter marriage and family structure? What impact did the introduction and subsequent entrenchment of the French capitalist system have on the health and spirituality of these women? In what ways did Ojibwa women acquiesce in, accommodate, or resist the introduction of capitalism?

Effects of the French, and, later, British and American systems of capitalism are often softened or ignored in historical accounts of the effects of capitalism on Native American culture. Like many historians, Edmund Jefferson Danziger, Jr. presents a picture that minimizes and rationalizes the devastating effects of the fur trade on the indigenous peoples of North America. Consider this passage from his 1992 book, The Chippewas of Lake Superior, in which historian Edmund Jefferson Danziger, Jr. states that he intends to relate the history of the Chippewas, especially the Lake Superior bands, which have been neglected by historians:

A peaceful exploitation of the fur trade had been the goal of France’s Indian policy. More than any other major European power in North America, she minimized the uprooting of Indian tribes and incursions on their cultures... Nevertheless, France had a notable impact on the red men of the upper Great Lakes. By about 1760, all the tribes had scrapped their woodland cultures for the superior tools, weapons, ornaments, and liquor introduced by the ingen-

ious French traders. The economy of New France caused mass tribal migrations, and involved Indian fur trappers in numerous intertribal border wars as well as in the Anglo-French struggle for the Ohio country.¹

Women's lives would be deeply affected by the results of European exploitation of human and natural resources in the New World. It is ironic that the author states that France's only goal in the fur trade had been a "peaceful exploitation" of the resources of Native North America, since he follows that statement with the results of that exploitation: destruction of the woodland culture, mass tribal migrations, economic upheaval, intertribal warfare, and the introduction of liquor and "superior" weapons by "ingenious" fur traders. In their quest for economic and political power, it was necessary for the French, through the fur trade, to annex the power of native women and to bring them under the control of European institutions. Along with the capitalist economy came liquor, weapons, disease, migration, and loss of land and traditional values which would cause the cultural upheaval that resulted in the loss of social, political and economic security. These losses had a great impact on marriage and family structure, as well as on women's health and spirituality. Although involvement of native women was critical to the fur trade, and in spite of the fact that women's lives were greatly changed by the presence of the trade, there is a marked lack of references to native women in most books on the fur trade of the Great Lakes region. Indeed, in most accounts of this era, women have been omitted. While portrayals of women do exist, they are generally the impressions of white men. Their own voices are hard to find, and accurate description of the lives of native women during this period is sparse.

It is interesting to note how quickly profound changes caused by the fur trade occurred. Danziger explains that these changes had taken place by about 1760, approximately one hundred

twenty years after the first contact between the Ojibwa and French Jesuits in 1641. Cultural anthropologist Karen Anderson, in her research on the fur trade and its effects on native women, particularly the Huron and Montaignais, also notes the speed with which the position of these women changed. She explains that “by the mid-1640s, not more than three decades after the French first arrived among them, many women had already been subdued, rendered docile and obedient. Now, instead, we read about how women were chained, beaten and even starved if they ran away, about how they were publicly chastised if they didn’t obey their husbands.”² Somehow, in a period of about thirty years, after living for thousands of years as free, autonomous and powerful beings, and as the equal partners of men, these women became subservient to, and dependent upon, men, and their voices were all but silenced.

The goal of capitalism is to exploit natural and human resources in order to profit economically. What were the effects of this exploitation on the culture of the Ojibwa and on Ojibwa women in particular? Was the period of the fur trade a “golden age” of European-Indian relations, or rather a critical step in the process of the introduction, ascendancy, and entrenchment of capitalism in North America? Is there a pattern of capitalist exploitation that becomes apparent as we examine the effects of that system and its attendant institutions on the personal lives of Native Americans, specifically Ojibwa women? We know that the process of colonization resulted in the loss of female power and position in society, but why and how did this happen?

In pre-capitalist societies, such as the Ojibwa culture as it existed during the millenia before the appearance of European culture in North America, women generally held positions of power and worked interdependently with each other and with men to sustain life in the culture. They had

autonomy in sexuality and in reproduction. They lived in the “public sphere” and were productive, powerful members of the culture throughout their lives. In her book Women: The Last Colony, sociologist Maria Mies explains that, as capitalism advances, women are increasingly relegated to the “private sphere,” as opposed to the “public sphere.” Their labor comes to be viewed as “non-productive,”³ and, in the process, women lose political and economic power along with sexual and reproductive autonomy.

Wherever and whenever colonization has taken place, a crucial element in the process has been the subjugation of women and the silencing of their voices. Although the fur trade in North America has been described by most historians as a period of mutually beneficial interdependence between Indians and whites, it must be recognized that as long as white patriarchal capitalism is in hegemony, historical accounts that are produced within that culture will be marked by the absence of women’s voices, and by efforts to protect the dominant culture in the telling of that culture’s history of exploitation, colonization and domination.

Today, women are searching for their history, not as it has been told by the culture-bound histories of 18th and 19th century “conquerors,” but as it was lived by real people, with human needs and desires. Women wish to look further back than the last 200-or 300-year period, during which women usually appear as unquestioning, docile and obedient subordinates of men, and into early history or even pre-history. They want to examine thousands and tens of thousands of years of history during which women acted as equal partners with men in surviving daily life and in building integrated, healthy societies.

Some of the problems with available historical accounts are the lack of research on women and

the impact of capitalism on their lives; the credibility of the accounts that are available; the disbelief in the importance of oral tradition in the history of the culture; the discounting of some of the motives and effects of the institutions of religion, government and education; the glossing over of the results of the introduction of alcohol, disease and weapons and the resultant growth of a new kind of violence; and the ignoring of the growth of issues of gender, class and race introduced and exacerbated by the capitalist system. This paper will attempt to bring to light some of the ways in which capitalism impacted the lives of Ojibwa women and to show how these women responded to vast changes in their culture.

The phenomenon of the fur trade appears to parallel the process of colonization in other parts of the world and in other times. When the capitalist forces of today's world move into what are termed "underdeveloped" areas of the globe, their representatives often state that they want to include women in economic development, along with men. What this often means is: "We want to 'recruit women as the cheapest, most docile and manipulable labor force for capitalist production.'" ⁴ Karen Anderson, in her research on the effect of European contact among the Huron and Montagnais, cites studies showing that prior to the introduction of capitalism, women held positions of independence and high status within their cultures and that as commodity production and exchange replaced the original economic system, "women's subjugation to male authority and their economic dependence on men"⁵ followed. Anderson cites parallel studies finding the same phenomenon among the Bari of Columbia, the Baule of the Ivory Coast, the Tonga of the South Pacific and the !Kung of Africa. Anderson found that traditional women were not seen as the literal equivalents of men, but as "female persons with their own rights, duties and responsibilities, which were complementary to and in no way secondary to those of men'...European

contact and the subsequent introduction of commodity production, of necessity, undermines this.”⁶ In specific reference to the introduction of the fur trade in the New World, Anderson mentions the increased workload for women, the more frequent killing and abduction of women, and the presence of Jesuits in Huronia, all of which further added to the undermining of traditional roles of women in society. Throughout history and throughout the world, women have lost their traditional place as autonomous, fully participating members of society as capitalist forces and the institutions that support them gain hold. The introduction of capitalism, through the French fur trade, to the New World in the seventeenth century was not an exception to the pattern of domination and subjugation, but, rather, a complex and striking example of it.

The process of introducing capitalism to a culture often includes an introductory period, what one might term a “honeymoon period,” during which the labor force, often mostly female, is brought to believe that it is entering into a symbiotic relationship with the dominant culture within which mutual benefit will result. Cultural changes that occur during this period, however, set the stage for destruction of women’s authority, power and autonomy, and for disintegration of the culture itself. Relationships between men and women and between newcomers and indigenous people become asymmetrical and hierarchical under a system of domination and exploitation by the dominant group. Undergirded by institutions of government, economics, education and religion, the intruding culture brings aboriginal people into a state of submission and subservience. Although many portray the fur trade as a time of accommodation and mutual advantage between whites and natives, perhaps this view is a romanticized one which needs a closer inspection. We should examine more closely the roles that women played in this period of great cultural change and upheaval. We should look at the motives behind the work of

missionaries, government officials, traders, educators, and others. We should examine long-term effects of “peaceful exploitation.”

How did representatives of the French capitalist system come to appropriate Native American women and the results of their productivity? Anthropologists have established that in early history (which must include oral tradition as well as “documented” history in order to be valid), women were the predominant producers and, therefore, held great power. Why, then, were native women not able to prevent establishment of a hierarchical and exploitative relation between the two cultures? What forces were at play in interaction between these cultures? What processes were at work? What patterns can be seen in the introduction, ascendancy and entrenchment of capitalism among native populations, and, in particular, among Ojibwa women?

How did other native women of the Great Lakes region, the Ojibwa in particular, respond to vast changes brought about through the fur trade? How did they respond to introduction of the European capitalist system, tenets of Christianity, and policies and laws of the French, British and American governments? What were the effects of disease, alcohol, violence and poverty? This thesis will explore the results of the meeting of two cultures, the European and the indigenous American, and the effects, especially on women in the Great Lakes region, of the changes that resulted.

Notes

1. Edmund Jefferson Danziger, The Chippewas of Lake Superior (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1992), 39.
2. Karen Anderson, Chain Her By One Foot: the subjugation of women in seventeenth century New France (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 4.
3. Maria Mies, Women: The Last Colony (New Jersey: Led Books, Ltd., 1988), 69.
4. Frobel, Kreye and Hendricks cited in Maria Mies, Women: The Last Colony (New Jersey: Led Books, Ltd., 1988), 21.
5. Etienne and Leacock cited in Anderson, *ibid.*, 158.
6. Moore and Leacock cited in Anderson, *ibid.*

Chapter 1

The Ojibwa World View

In order to understand changes that took place within Ojibwa culture during the fur trade era, it is important to first attempt to understand the traditional world view of the native people. The term “world view” is used here as defined by Thomas W. Overholt and J. Baird Caldecott, scholars of Ojibwa oral tradition. The term is used in the sense of a “*personal, sensuous or imaginative metaphysic including emotional tone and color and moral values as well as formal and cognitive content.*”¹ The belief system of the Ojibwa was a coherent system which fit their experience and helped shape behaviors that served the society: “Cultures like those of the aboriginal American peoples, who had neither writing nor print, and whose members were not geographically distributed around the globe, possess a more integrated, coherent and consolidated cultural world view than Western society today.”² It was also more coherent and consolidated than that of French society of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but it was not recognized by French officials as a valid way of perceiving the world. Under French domination, there would be an attempt by religious and government authorities to invalidate the traditional view, including the roles of women within it.

Considered as non-valid by observers of the sixteenth century, Ojibwa oral tradition contains the basic tenets of Ojibwa thought. Elements of many aspects of Ojibwa life cross over and run through the tales that make up Ojibwa oral tradition. Some of the most important elements are respect for the earth and for all that dwells on it, strong kinship ties, importance of sharing, reliance on dreams and visions for guidance, passing on of culture through oral tradition, viewing nature as a provider of

basic needs, reciprocity among all beings, avoidance of strangers, spiritual practices of fasting and dreaming, reversibility of life and death, flow of power through and among beings, interdependence of men and women, and what might be called “magic” or “supernatural forces.” For women, these tenets formed the basis of a world view in which cooperation and interdependence were fundamental and which allowed for a stable, secure life in which women held great autonomy and functioned as powerful co-creators along with men. Spiritual concepts essential to Ojibwa thought and behavior were foreign to the early French arriving in the New World. In the European view, only that which was tangible or observable could be considered part of the “real world” and only religious principles of Christianity were considered valid.

In Ojibwa culture, the human need to belong, to share, and to feel strongly one’s place as a member of a community was fulfilled in many ways through communal, conjugal and family life. Shared rituals, such as those related to dreaming, fasting, hunting and healing provided personal, intimate experiences between and among members of the group. Traditional practices were beneficial to the health and well-being of the individual, the community, and the earth. Values of reciprocity, sharing and respect for the earth and everything on it created an environmental ethic within the culture that promoted individual and societal health.

The dichotomous thinking inherent in the European world view was in direct contrast to the Ojibwa belief system. French trader Nicholas Perrot reported that “it cannot be said that the savages possess any doctrine; and it is certain that they do not, so to speak, follow any religion.”³ Because the spiritual practices of the Ojibwa were not in alignment with Christianity, Europeans could only categorize them as “of the Devil.” What was not, in their view, “of God,” was “of the Devil.”

Traditional spiritual practices were seen as something to be extinguished. Marriage was the only accepted realm in which sexuality should be expressed. Sexual relations conducted outside a Christian marriage were deemed “prostitution” and children born of these liaisons were viewed as “illegitimate.” In the European view, valid history was based on literacy, so oral tradition was considered non-valid. The Ojibwa were considered to be a people without history, without religion, and without morals.

Personal autonomy was a hallmark of the Ojibwa and included the freedom to make decisions regarding one’s personal life, including sexuality and marriage. Women had virtually complete sexual liberty outside of marriage, the knowledge and the right to prevent or abort a pregnancy, and the freedom to leave a husband whenever they chose: “European conceptions of marriage, adultery, and prostitution just could not encompass the actual variety of sexual relations in the *pays d’en haut*.”⁴ Jesuits would do battle against the sexual autonomy of women as well as the practice of polygamy. Personal autonomy was to be replaced by a hierarchy in which white men would become supreme authorities in all matters economic, political, spiritual and personal.

Historian Calvin Martin observed that “American Indians...do not define themselves as a distinct and separate species from other creatures...they seek to (recall their) kinship with all the power and life of creation.”⁵ For Europeans, human beings were not “part of” nature, as in Ojibwa thought, but, rather, separate from and superior to it. The relationship of men to women paralleled the relationship of humans to “nature.” That is, women were not viewed as interdependent with men, but as separate from, and inferior to, them. The power of women was not something to be respected and revered as necessary to continuation of society, but, rather, like nature, something to be annexed and exploited to serve the economic system.

As in Ojibwa life, the mundane and the sacred are integrated and woven together into a whole system. Attempts to replace traditional values with those of Christianity and capitalism would cause great upheaval and fragmentation of traditional beliefs among native populations, but would not succeed entirely in negating the values, beliefs, and behaviors that had existed for thousands of years prior to the arrival of Europeans on North American soil. In many ways, the Ojibwa integrated elements of Christianity into their traditional spirituality, going so far as to ascribe the role of shaman or even manitou to missionaries. Although much has been lost or suppressed, particular cultural elements that are identifiable as Ojibwa have been preserved and remain intact. Despite the cultural devastation women experienced, they were instrumental in maintaining what remains of Ojibwa culture. Their voices continued, quietly, over three centuries of white domination.

There is an underlying assurance in Ojibwa culture that we are taken care of in the world, that the universe is a good place for human beings, and that all that creates and sustains life is a gift. Calvin Martin explains that “the Cree and Ojibwa knew it [nature] all intimately and with supreme confidence. The land, they believe, will take care of them. And it generally does, in part at least because of this deep knowledge.”⁶ In her book Grandmothers of the Light sociologist Paula Gunn Allen explains that “tribal people, pagans, do not center their lives on belongings, so economic considerations are not of primary concern for them. They believe that our physical needs are taken care of as a consequence of our meeting our spiritual obligations, and fulfilling these obligations depends on our harmony with the universe.”⁷ The introduction of capitalism would change this basic element of native life. Emphasis in daily living would change from that which was based on meeting physical, social and spiritual needs to one based on meeting the demands of the economy. Native peoples would find themselves caught up

in the struggle to survive in a world based on economic success and individual material wealth. This struggle often resulted in isolation of the individual, physical or psychological illness, and separation from the communal and coherent world that exists in Ojibwa tradition. The “good life,” once accessible to all who upheld traditional tribal values, became accessible only to those who were able to profit from the exploitation of human and natural resources. Race, gender and class became barriers that blocked access to resources. The new “good life,” based on material wealth would be unattainable for most native women.

Consider the beginning of the prologue to Night Flying Woman, a long narrative told in the tradition of the Ojibwa people by Ignatia Broker, member of the White Earth reservation in Minnesota: “When the forest weeps, the Anishinabe who listen will look back at the years. In each generation of Ojibway there will be a person who will hear the si-si-gwa-d, who will listen and remember and pass it on to the children.”⁸ This narrative illuminates the oral, customary, and material folklore woven throughout the tales. As in shorter tales, this narrative includes many elements that mark it as specifically Ojibwa. Listed here are some of the values, beliefs, and customary and material lore found in this tale:

- tenets of sharing
- respect for the earth and all that dwells on it
- strong kinship ties
- passing on of the culture through oral tradition
- guidance through dreams and visions
- giving thanks to and honoring elders
- crafts, such as willow, sweet grass and birch baskets
- politeness of elders toward young people
- grandparents' advising and providing for grandchildren
- gifts of nature, such as food, shelter, clothing
- mutual pleasure of humans and nature in each other's presence
- reciprocity

- avoidance of strangers
- ways of building lodges (materials, shape, process)
- traditional division of labor among men, women, children and elderly
- tradition of moving from summer place to winter place
- hunting practices
- rites of passage to manhood and womanhood
- fasting and dreaming
- food ways (gathering, hunting, preserving)
- clothing ways (tanning, sewing, quillwork)
- planting ways (digging stick)
- games, races, contests
- names and uses of plants
- identification of Medicine People and Dreamers
- cycles of the earth
- cycles and power of women
- marriage customs
- cycles of all life
- reversibility of life and death
- concept of animals as brothers
- death rituals

This tale, like many others, illustrates the emphasis on fulfilling physical, social and spiritual needs and understanding one's place within the social and natural environment. In the tradition of the Ojibwa, it is expected that in each generation a specific person will be identified who has the responsibility of continuing that tradition. This person will hear, remember, and pass on the stories, keeping traditions intact and preserving them for the next generation and the ones that will follow. For Europeans in the New World, it would be Jesuits and explorers who would write the "true history" of the time. Their written history would be accepted as the only valid record of the period. The era that began with the arrival of the white man would be considered the beginning of Native American "history." Although it contained elements necessary to a harmonious, healthy existence, oral tradition, the mythic collection of the existence of native peoples, would never be accepted as valid.

Contained in the oral tradition were clearly delineated roles for women. In "The First-Born

Son,"⁹ one of the themes is the division of labor and what that means for women in Ojibwa culture: bearing and raising children, advising and providing food for grandchildren, cooking, cleaning, taking responsibility for work related to maintaining the lodge, making and fixing garments, snaring small game, processing the food provided by men, and gathering firewood. Women were an active, essential part of society. Their roles in conception, childbirth, child-rearing, production of food and other products, decision-making, vision, and attaining and passing on knowledge and power were crucial in sustaining the culture. One of the effects of capitalism on the Ojibwa and other native cultures would be to relegate women to a role that was based on separateness from, and inferiority to, men.

In all of the tales are seen, over and over again, themes related to kinship, division of labor, power of dreams, abundance of nature, brotherhood of animals, transformation of people, animals or inanimate objects, reversibility of life and death, a hierarchy of power, and the importance of not misusing one's own power, all reflective of the metaphysical underpinnings of the Ojibwa world view. The Ojibwa hold a spiritual relationship with everything that exists in the physical and metaphysical world. A proper attitude and relationship with all elements of these worlds, which are considered one coherent world, are necessary for achievement of the "good life" ("pimadaziwin") by the individual and by the community. Oral tradition explains the makeup of the world and teaches proper behaviors and attitudes for attaining "pimadaziwin," which is implicitly assumed everywhere throughout [Ojibwa] narratives and is...expressly identified as a reason for noble and inspired action. It, accordingly, may be posited as the foundation of Ojibwa moral theory."¹⁰ The introduction of Christianity undermined this relationship. Traditional reasons for "noble and inspired action" based on personal choice and the human need to live in harmony with other humans and with the environment were invalidated. Kinship ties, of supreme importance in traditional life, gave way to economic and political ties. Educational and

spiritual functions, once the responsibility of the family and clan, would become centered in the institutions of the church and school where the influence of the family and of traditional values were to be negated or, at least, diminished.

Just as Europeans found elements of Ojibwa culture foreign and often misunderstood them, the Ojibwa also found some elements of European culture to be outside of their realm of experience and understanding: the concepts of “ownership” of land, “legitimacy” of children, working enough to produce a surplus and trading in order to turn a profit, “exclusive” truth in spiritual matters, inferiority of women, social class, and race. How did the Ojibwa cope with the vast differences between their own culture and that of the French, and, later, British and Americans? According to scholar Michael Dorris, the answer was pragmatism:

Native people have had to cope, for the last 40,000 or so years, just like everyone else. Their cultures have had to make internal sense, their medicines have had to work consistently and practically, their philosophical explanations have had to be reasonably satisfying and dependable...In other words, Native American societies rested upon intelligence. They developed and maintained usable, pragmatic views of the world.¹¹

Ojibwa and other native women would search for ways to take advantage of new economic and social changes introduced by the French, just as they had at other times in the history of the culture. Their culture, after all, was not a static one. Adaptations had been made before and were being made when the French arrived. Further adaptations were made under British and American domination. Among native women belonging to tribes that, like the Ojibwa, were not annihilated, responses to the harsh realities of capitalism varied. Women adapted and changed in order to meet the demands of the society in which they lived. Acquiescence, accommodation, and resistance are all evident in the reactions of women and of the tribes in general. As wives, friends, sisters, aunts, mothers,

grandmothers, community leaders, producers, healers, storytellers and teachers, women served both as agents of cultural change and as keepers of tradition and played a dominant role in the maintenance of a “core identity” for the Ojibwa people.

Maintaining cultural identity while surviving economically called for vast changes for women. Capitalism offered competition and coercion in place of cooperation, authoritative white male hierarchy in place of personal autonomy, and exploitation in place of interdependence. The sense of reassurance that one’s needs would be met through nature and within the culture was replaced by a sense of vulnerability and disillusionment with a government that made promises, then failed to keep many of those promises. A spiritual system that was based on one’s holding an integral place in the family, community, and nature would be replaced by a belief system in which converts would be taught to think of themselves as separate from those in their families and communities who had not accepted Christianity and as separate from “nature,” both in the sense of the environment and in the sense of natural human needs and desires.

Jesuits introduced a religious ideology and sense of “exclusive truth” that had no place for Ojibwa concepts of inclusion and belief in the harmony of all things. Instead, it offered one God, one superior race, one dominant sex, and one supreme authority in all matters, public and private. Any practice or perspective outside of the Christian faith was to be dealt with in “battle.” Under capitalism coupled with Christianity, native women would come not only to know incurable disease, spouse and child abuse, overt aggression, murder and suicide, but would also come to accept these as “God’s will.”

Notes

1. Thomas W. Overholt and J. Baird Callicott, Clothed in Fur and Other Tales: An Introduction to an Ojibwa World View (Washington, D. C.: University Press of America, 1982), 30.
2. Ibid., xii.
3. Emma Helen Blair, The Indians of the Upper Mississippi Valley and the Region of the Great Lakes (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 47.
4. Richard White, The Middle Ground: Indians, empires and republics in the Great Lakes region, 1650-1815 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 63.
5. Calvin Martin, The American Indian and the Problem of History (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 201.
6. Ibid., 147.
7. Paula Gunn Allen, Grandmothers of the Light (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), 84.
8. Ignatia Broker, Night Flying Woman (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1983), 1.
9. Overholt and Callicott, *ibid.*, 55-61.
10. Ibid., 153.
11. Michael Dorris in Martin, *ibid.*, 102.

Chapter 2

Marriage and Family Structure

This chapter presents a brief overview of the complex and changing family structure within the fur trade society of the Great Lakes region from the late 17th century to the early 19th century, and attempts to answer several questions: Why was marriage between French men and native or mixed-blood women so extensive? How did intermarriage help to facilitate and perpetuate the fur trade? How did the "blending" of Indian and European customs affect marriage and family structure? What effect did customs, policies, and laws related to the fur trade society have on women's lives? How did the rising dominance of the British and Americans have an impact on the society and the women within it?

One of the most important elements of the alliance was intermarriage. The French initially followed Indian marriage customs, which involved asking consent of the woman's parents, giving gifts to the woman's relations, and following rituals common to native tradition: "Usually, parents and close relations were responsible for arranging a match which was viewed more as a contract between two groups of kin than between two individuals."¹ Thus, during the early seventeenth century, marriage served to create the basis needed for trade between Native people and Europeans. In addition, traders were provided with expert assistance in carrying out the fur trade. There were many variations in the duration, structure, and affection in these marriages, and, although many of them seem to have been long-term committed relationships, marriage, for Native women, was no longer an alliance creating a self-sufficient unit which would serve to strengthen the culture, but rather an alliance which formed the

basis for potential profit by traders and native people engaged in trade. Like the practice of gift-giving, marriage was interpreted differently by Europeans and native people engaged in trade. These practices were “part of their kinship relations and, by extension, of their political alliances. Such relationships involved an obligation to trade that was socially and spiritually, rather than economically, motivated, and were more reciprocal and egalitarian than the hierarchical European conceptual relationship.”²

Social acceptance of metissage and marriage “a la facon du pays,” in the way of the country, was greatest in the 17th century when New France was first being established. Colonial policy encouraged intermarriage, childbearing, and even adoption of Indian children who would later become part of the workforce. Samuel de Champlain is reported to have said on at least two occasions, “Our young men will marry your daughters and we shall be one people.”³

As families were established through intermarriage, communities grew around the trading posts, which were created primarily to protect traders and to ensure the free flow of goods. At Michilimackinac, between 1698 and 1765, eighty-seven marriages were recorded, forty-eight percent of which were between traders and full-blood Indian or metis (mixed-blood) women. In addition to these, there were large numbers of marriages contracted outside of the church.⁴ These marriages were initiated by trading captains, fur traders or by women themselves. Thus, “at its best, the custom of fur-trade marriages embodied the intertwined social and economic dimensions of the fur trade and gave women added prestige and power within their families...[Later,] during the period of most intense fur-trade competition around the turn of the century, however, Indian women were sometimes abused by traders who formed liaisons of convenience, for reasons of trade only, and who abandoned them or gave them to another trader when they were posted elsewhere.”⁵

The charter for the Company of New France stated that those “savages” who would accept conversion would be legally French, having the right to live and acquire property in France. The requirement of religious conversion as the basis for legal citizenship sparked the missionary movement in the New World and caused changes in the structure of fur trade society, including marriage “a la facon du pays,” a common practice regarded by Jesuits as immoral. Church marriages, preceded by baptism of the Indian bride were encouraged by Jesuits, but native women resisted the French concept of monogamy, whether with French or Indian husbands. Jesuit priest Paul LeJeune reported the reaction of women “when he preached monogamy: ‘since they [the women] are more numerous than men, if a man can only marry one of them, the others will have to suffer.’” In addition to the resistance to remaining unmarried, “Amerindians could not conceive how persons could tie themselves indissolubly to one marriage partner.”⁶

Despite resistance on the part of many, women began to accept a new kind of relationship with their husbands. They vowed to marry for life; they accepted their husbands as their superiors; and they accepted the coercive nature of the institution of marriage. Women who, after a Christian marriage, decided to leave their husbands were now, according to one policy of a local French government, to be beaten and put in jail. In his *Relation* of 1640, LeJeune reported that the newly elected captains of a Christian village asked Jesuits whether, upon capturing a woman who had fled from her husband, “it would not be well to chain her by one foot; and if it would be enough to make her pass four days and four nights without eating, as a penance for her fault.”⁷

Eventually, the belief system of Jesuits became more widely accepted. Under this new order, Indian women married according to the conventions of Christianity. They married only Christian

men, Indian or white, who were approved of by Jesuits: “They no longer divorced when they felt they had good reason, nor did they have sexual relations with whomever they pleased. They ceased to oppose their husbands’ will, or even stand up to men, when they thought they had reason, without the fear of facing humiliating and often painful consequences.”⁸

Native women were relied upon as an integral, but unofficial, part of the labor force. With the skills they possessed, they were viewed as more valuable in the fur trade than European women.⁹ These women not only performed services like obtaining, preparing, and preserving food; tanning hides; making moccasins, snowshoes, and leather garments; washing; chopping firewood; mending and setting nets; snaring small game; aiding in the manufacture and manning of canoes; and providing companionship for their husbands, but they also familiarized French men with the customs and language of their tribes, served as interpreters and diplomatic agents, conducted business alongside their partners, and bore and raised children.

The desire to develop a workforce in New France without depleting the population of France itself was so great that Jean Talon, Intendant (colonial administrative official of New France) from 1665-1668 and 1670-1672, suggested policing mothers to stop the traditional practice of nursing children from two to three years, a custom which prevented close intervals between births, in order to effect a higher level of fecundity among Indian wives of traders. Cree women married to French men did have more children (eight to twelve on the average) than women in traditional settings (four on the average), and they gave birth to successive children at shorter intervals than the usual three years in the native culture.¹⁰

Offspring of native women were also seen as valuable resources for the purposes of trade.

Count Frontenac, Governor of New France 1672-1682 and 1689-1698, in an address to Native Americans at Lake Ontario in 1673, encouraged Indian parents to send their children to Quebec for a European education: “To initiate, then, a thing which I believe to be very advantageous for the two nations, I invite you to give me four of your little girls and two of your little boys, whom I will have instructed with all possible care, in the French language and literature, which are of such great value.”¹¹ Frontenac assured parents that they would be able to visit their children, and that, if the parents so desired, he would return the children to their families, or, in the case of girls, marry them to French men. During the 1670s some Huron parents did give their children to Jesuit priests, who offered gifts to the families in return. Many of these children ran away or sickened and died. Knowledge of the results of seminary life for their children increased resistance on the part of the parents who were also dismayed at the French custom of inflicting physical punishment on children, a practice that was unknown in native Huron culture.

Early attempts to bring native children into the European educational system were not successful: “The Ursulines, for all their labors, never succeeded in having an Amerindian girl enter their order during the 17th century.”¹² Later, among Ojibwa women married to fur traders, the practices of contributing to the trade through their own talents and through sending children, especially sons, for education in Montreal or Quebec were common. These young men often then married Indian or metis women and continued in the trade. Daughters often continued in the fur trade as well, marrying traders and combining their knowledge of both cultures to help perpetuate trade.

One of these women was Anastasia Nipissing, an Ojibwa woman who married Jean-Baptiste Cadotte in 1756. They lived in Sault Ste. Marie and established a family there. Through her,

Cadotte exerted great influence with Indians. Their sons, Michael Cadotte and Jean-Baptiste Cadotte, the younger, followed the fur trade, as did their father. They were educated in Montreal and acted as Indian interpreters. Michael married the daughter of White Crane, chief of the tribe at LaPointe. Jean-Baptiste, the younger, married Sange Manqua, also an Indian woman.¹³

Sally Ainse, born around 1728, was the daughter of a half-breed father. She married Andrew Montour, an English-language interpreter for the British crown, in 1745. Sally served as a fur trader, negotiator for peace, and liaison between the British and Indians. A few years after their marriage, for reasons that are unclear, her husband left her with her relatives on the Mohawk River.¹⁴

Susan Johnston (Osh aw gus coday way qua), born around 1780, was another example of a women who, to the extent that she could, kept her own identity as an Ojibwa while remaining married to a fur trader and establishing a family. She raised their eight children as members of both cultures (or, more exactly, as members of the fur trade culture) and remained active in the trade after her husband's death.¹⁵

As the only females available, women like these became, for a time, "women in between" two groups of men, Native Americans and Europeans. They were the "women in between" two vastly different and changing cultures. What did they gain in return? How did they view their situation? Historian Sylvia Van Kirk, in her work Many Tender Ties noted: "These women had a vested interest in promoting cordial relations with the whites."¹⁶ Some of the advantages were: use of European goods such as metal kettles, cotton and wool; comfort and sustenance at the post; advantages of monogamy (although some French men practiced polygamy in New France); and domestic autonomy within the household.¹⁷ Again, however, it is not known how Indian women themselves felt about

these conveniences, although there is evidence to explain some women's refusal or distress at the prospect of leaving their families to live as the wives of traders.

In studying effects of the fur trade and European culture on native women, "it remains to try to determine how they themselves viewed the intrusion of the white man and his technology."¹⁸ Although such "benefits" as autonomy within the household and monogamy were considered the norm in Europe, for native women who were accustomed to the cooperation and support available in the extended family and traditional community, as well as the benefits of being one of two or more wives, these "advantages" may not have been viewed as such. In the nuclear family, a woman was often isolated and may have found herself responsible for more than she would have in the traditional community where women often shared responsibilities with other women. Older, post-menopausal women, for example, often helped to gather food for families, producing more in some cases than younger women. Older women also provided help with childcare and provided emotional support for younger women. Grandmothers often helped relieve the burden of motherhood for their daughters by helping to provide food and emotional support for the children. This kind of support was often lacking for women who entered the fur trade as the wife of a European.

The children produced through these marriages became known as "metis" (mixed blood) or "bois brule" (burnt wood). In the native culture, children were considered the responsibility mainly of their mothers, who had complete charge of them. This practice continued in many fur trade families. It was common for some children, especially daughters, to be brought up by the mother's people and absorbed into Indian culture. Many children were raised at trading posts and took their place in fur trade society. Sons were often sent away for a formal education, which would advance them as they

took positions within the fur trade. "European fathers often exercised patriarchal authority" and sent "very young children, particularly sons, to Britain or Canada so that they might receive a 'civilized' education."¹⁹ Girls, however, were discouraged from this type of education, since it would estrange them from the fur trade way of life for women.²⁰ By 1749, the London Committee of Hudson's Bay Company had developed a policy designed to discourage a British education for girls. It refused "to allow any 'Female Children' to return to their native land after receiving their education in Great Britain."²¹ Some sons, and, occasionally, daughters, were sent to schools in Upper and Lower Canada.

Initially, the upbringing of mixed-blood girls "was strongly influenced by the mothers who passed on to their daughters the native skills which had proved so valuable in the fur trade."²² Their mothers spoke freely with them about sexual matters, including the traditional value of a woman's autonomy over her own body, making it difficult to inculcate the European ideal of chastity.²³ European insistence on monogamy created hardship for many women. Among the Huron, wives provided the agricultural products needed for the household of the chief. These women "played a substantial part in village affairs, particularly while their husbands were away on trading missions or at war...When a woman lost her husband, it was up to the nearest male relative to take care of her and be seen as 'holding her not as a slave, but as a wife.'"²⁴ The native culture had adapted to the problems caused by women outnumbering men by allowing polygamy. According to anthropologist Irving Hallowell, this practice continued until the 1880s when the percentage of polygynous Ojibwa men ranged from five percent to twenty-four percent.²⁵ Jesuits, although they seemed to understand the reasons for this practice, strongly discouraged it. Women, in the early days of the fur trade, did not

generally accept these teachings regarding marriage, but as trade progressed and Christianity became more widespread, more and more women came to accept the Jesuits' regulations regarding marriage.

The early 19th century practice of importing schoolmasters for girls had placed daughters in a "vulnerable position by making them increasingly dependent upon white male protectors and the comforts of the fur-trade post."²⁶ By this time, the Indian or metis woman's status was changing. She was beginning to be viewed as subservient rather than as valuable. Marriage had come to resemble the European model; that is, it was a commitment for life. It began with a formal ceremony and placed the woman in a position of subservience. Serial monogamy and polygamy still existed, but to a lesser degree. Marriage "a la facon du pays" lost its social acceptance and its legal basis. For mixed-blood girls, marriage was different than it had been for their mothers. They were "basically locked into a marital structure, adapted from European society to serve patriarchal needs. The mixed-blood woman was increasingly deprived of the autonomy which the Indian woman had enjoyed with regard to marriage and divorce."²⁷

Dominance of the British in the fur trade seems to have had an impact on Indian women's involvement in the fur trade economy: "At the height of the trade rivalry in the first two decades of the 19th century, it does appear that the Indian woman's view of the white man was considerably tarnished: some Indian women showed an 'extraordinary predilection for their own people and could not be prevailed upon to live with the traders.'"²⁸ The role of the marriage alliance held less importance during this time, and the North West Company, in 1806, resolved that no more employees should take Indian wives. This was partly because of the increasing conflict with Indian men resulting from their perception of the way their women had been treated by the traders. In addition, company officials were

concerned with the costs involved in providing for metis families at the posts, and the increasing popularity of metis, rather than Indian, women as wives.²⁹

The prevalence of alcohol and use of women as a commodity intensified corruption of Indian morals, resulting in widespread violence, prostitution, venereal disease, and neglect of children.³⁰ Even Indian leaders like Tenskwatawa came to reject the role of women as intermediaries. He denounced intermarriage in no uncertain terms: "All Indian women who were living with White Men were to be brought home to their friends and relatives, and their children to be left with their Fathers, so that nations might become genuine Indian." Women, in many ways the most influential creators of the middle ground, were, in effect, to withdraw from it."³¹

Arrival of British men and their social values had particular potential for harm as customary fur trade marriage was challenged, as many native-born women were placed in new, uncertain, and ambiguous social positions, and as these women faced unfavorable comparisons with their "fairer sisterhood" and developed new anxieties about the legitimacy of their marriages and children.³² In 1759, the British conquered the French militarily and gained political control of all of French North America. Within a few years, they also gained control of the economy, and soon "Canadians were at a great disadvantage and were unable to compete successfully with the newcomers."³³ By the end of the 18th century, British officers, who had also intermarried with Indian women and produced metis children, wanted to impress upon their daughters "the Ideas and Habits of Civilized Life," and separate them from their Indian heritage. They wanted to ensure that these daughters would remain within fur-trade society, so they promoted marriage to incoming traders or metis sons of fellow traders. These women were viewed as being acclimatized to life in the West and familiar with both Indian and European ways

and were considered more valuable as wives than full-blood Indian women.³⁴

In the late 18th century, Americans entered the picture, with their insatiable appetite for land and their policy of "protecting" Indians. This "imperial benevolence...made it possible to reconcile saving the Indians with stripping them of their lands."³⁵ Americans tried to encourage Indians to become yeoman farmers and to lead a more sedentary lifestyle. Although the French had tried to ban the sale of alcohol to Indians, Americans grew corn, made it into liquor and sold it to them.³⁶ The French had brought European goods to Indian territory but did not compete for game or fish. They had acquired these from the Algonquians, and "when they did hunt or fish, the French exploited quite specific resources with Indian permission."³⁷ In addition, they did not farm extensively outside of Illinois country, and so did not threaten neighboring Indians. Americans, on the other hand, in order to develop the West, needed everything--fish, game, and land. They also needed to bring native populations under the control of their policies and laws. Native women who maintained a traditional lifestyle or who held to the lifestyle of the fur trade were seen as impediments to American "progress."

Not only did Americans want Indians to give up their lands, but they wanted them to adopt an agricultural lifestyle. Violence and theft, exacerbated by the prevalence of liquor, bred ill will and distrust between Indians and white Americans. The French and Indians shared a common fear of Americans, but this fear could not hold the two groups together. In 1789, Major John Hamtramck, commander of the federal garrison at Vincennes, Indiana, reported that Indians would no longer distinguish between the French and the British.³⁸ "They were all 'white men' bent on destroying the Indian people, he stated. "On the one hand, the metis were seen as...an important minority group rapidly adapting to European ways, who played a major role in the economic development of the

region, [but] to the Americans, they had accepted the wrong culture, that of the creole French.

Moreover, their close ties with the remaining Indian communities made them doubly undesirable.”³⁹

Indian women lost the status they had enjoyed in the early part of the fur trade. Where they had once played an integral role in society, they were now marginalized.

"The real crisis and dissolution of this world came when Indians ceased to have the power to force whites onto the middle ground," historian Richard White contended. White men were able to dictate the terms of accommodation, the middle ground eroded, and "the American Republic succeeded in doing what the French and English empires could not do."⁴⁰ With the decline of the fur trade, prevalence of alcohol, and rising dominance of the British and the Americans, the world created on and around the "middle ground" could not be sustained. Indians and whites came again to see each other in terms of their separateness and otherness. Race, age, gender and class became issues that pushed women further into the margins of society.

Over the course of the fur trade, new and powerful ideological systems had been developed, and new family, state, and patriarchal religious systems had been established. Realization of this development among the Ojibwa was threefold. The European family model became the model for Indian women and their children, isolating women within the nuclear family and removing the structure of strong kinship relations and the support they had provided. As the state's agents, fur traders and government officials enforced policies that supported European capitalism. Jesuit missionaries imposed their religious tenets on the population. In many ways, women became property to be managed, regardless of the effects on their physical, emotional, or spiritual health. Indian women, who had not known coercion before, now experienced economic and physical coercion, with the attendant problems

of mental and physical health, especially as the British took over the trade. The relationship of women to men changed from one of social, political and economic interdependence to one of sheer economic dependence, within which social and political needs were often ignored. The family became the place where the labor force was reproduced, European values were reinforced, and the husband's coercive relationship (a reflection of the coercive nature of the state over the entire population) was maintained by threats or acts of violence, or the removal of financial support. In cases where husbands were absent or lacked power, some women were able to maintain their independence while many others became directly dependent on the state.

Notes

1. Sylvia Van Kirk, Many Tender Ties (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), 24.
2. Laura Peers, The Ojibwa of Western Canada (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1994), 34.
3. Olive P. Dickason, "From 'One Nation' in the Northwest to 'New Nation' in the Northwest: A look at the emergence of the metis," in Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer S.H. Brown, The New Peoples (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 30.
4. Jacqueline Peterson, "Many roads to Red River: Metis genesis in the Great Lakes region, 1680-1815," in Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer S. H. Brown, editors, The New Peoples Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 45.
5. Peers, *ibid.*, 35-36.
6. Olive P. Dickason, The Myth of the Savage and the Beginnings of French Colonialism in the Americas (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1984), 266.
7. Ruben G. Thwaites, The Jesuit Relations, cited in Karen Anderson, Chain Her By One Foot: the subjugation of women in seventeenth century New France (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 220.
8. Anderson, *ibid.*, 218.
9. Van Kirk, *ibid.*, 52-53.
10. Van Kirk, *ibid.*, 86.
11. Pierre Margry, Decouvertes et etablissements des Francais dans l'ouest et dans le sud de l'Amerique Septentrionale, vol.I (Paris: D. Jouast, 1876-1886), 266, translation D. Snow.
12. Dickason, The Myth of the Savage, *ibid.*, 261.
13. The Sault Ste. Marie Collection, microfilm roll 27, Clarke Historical Library, Mt. Pleasant, Michigan.
14. Fred C. Hamil, "Sally Ainse, Fur Trader," (Detroit: The Algonquian Club, Historical Bulletin No. 3, January, 1939).

15. Charles C. Cleland, Rites of Conquest: The History and Culture of Michigan's Native Americans (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1992), 188-189.
16. Van Kirk, *ibid.*, 83.
17. *Ibid.*.
18. *Ibid.*, 73.
19. *Ibid.*, 88.
20. *Ibid.*, 96-97.
21. *Ibid.*, 99.
22. *Ibid.*, 95.
23. *Ibid.*, 103.
24. Dickason, *ibid.*, 266.
25. Alfred Irving Hallowell, Culture and Experience (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1955), 300.
26. Van Kirk, *ibid.*, 106.
27. *Ibid.*, 121.
28. The Nelson Papers cited in Van Kirk, *ibid.*, 92.
29. *Ibid.*, 93.
30. *Ibid.*, 26.
31. Richard White, The Middle Ground: Indians, empires and republics in the Great Lakes region, 1650-1815 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 508.
32. Jennifer S. H. Brown, Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Families in Indian Country (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1980), 149.
33. W. J. Eccles, France in America (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 213.

34. Van Kirk, *ibid.*, 95.
35. White, *ibid.*, 470.
36. *Ibid.*, 423.
37. *Ibid.*, 341.
38. *Ibid.*, 431.
39. R. David Edmunds, "Unacquainted with the laws of the civilized world: American attitudes toward the metis communities in the Old Northwest," in Peterson and Brown, *ibid.*, 78.
40. White, *ibid.*, xv.

Chapter 3

Health and Spirituality

Many writers of Native American history note the Ojibwa "preoccupation with health." This preoccupation is understandable since good health is the primary requirement for a stable, secure, and comfortable life in a hunter-gatherer society. For the Ojibwa, health was, and is, the first priority for without it the culture could not survive. How was health maintained in traditional Ojibwa culture? How was it related to spirituality? How did the fur trade and capitalism affect the health and spirituality of Native Americans in the Great Lakes region? How did changes caused by the introduction of European capitalism, Christianity and disease affect the lives of women, in particular? Are there similarities among other Native tribes?

Prior to the arrival of Europeans, Ojibwa "family survival...depended on the good health and long life of its members." The land provided sustenance. Game, fish, waterfowl, rice, and maple syrup and other foods were abundant, but "Nature's abundance was useless to a Chippewa too sick to harvest it."¹ In a hunter-gatherer society like that of the Ojibwa prior to contact with whites, each individual's contribution was essential to the culture. A sick mother, sister, aunt, or grandmother could not fulfill her roles within her family or clan in childbearing, child care, gathering and preparation or preservation of food, or healing. A man who was not healthy could not contribute to the hunt or to house-building. Since society relied on individuals to perform these and many other tasks for the well-being of the entire culture, health was of primary importance, and was interwoven into other aspects of culture, including spirituality. Native Americans saw themselves as part of an integrated system of

nature which provided everything that society needed. Clothing was fashioned from tanned hides and skins, nettle fiber, and moose or deer sinew. The Ojibwa home was a dome-shaped wigwam which could be constructed in less than a day, using ironwood saplings to form the frame and strips of birch bark to cover the structure. Warmth was provided by deer- or bear hide sleeping blankets and by the fire burning in the open fireplace in the center of the wigwam.

Women and men divided the labor needed to sustain the culture, but the concept of dominance of one gender over the other did not exist. Men and women were interdependent in their work. The first Europeans in the New World noted that women did a considerable share of the labor. However, “toil in the European sense was noticeably absent, and individuals were not worn down with excessive labor...Only later was it realized that the women’s lot often went hand in hand with considerable power and influence.”² The Ojibwa had developed a remarkably functional way of life that was perfectly suited to life in the Great Lakes region and that had experienced little change in over 2,000 years.³ This way of life was structured in a way that formed a whole, and in which everything had a significant and purposeful place. In spite of the “introduction of items of European technology,...depopulation caused by European diseases, and major population movements, Indians maintained their vital links with the environment.”⁴ Historian Christopher Vescey observed:

Indian spirituality [is] undogmatic, experiential, integrated into a whole way of life, including environmental and kinship relations, with goals not only to worship suprahuman powers but also to protect, repair, and improve the life of the individual and the tribe. In short, Indian materiality, sociality, and religiosity all have structures with a long, interconnected history. ⁵

This belief system allowed the Ojibwa to make sense out of their lives in relation to the world.

The world was an integral system in which the needs of all beings, human and non-human could be met:

For northern hunting people, knowledge and power are one. To be in possession of knowledge is more important than to be in possession of an artifact... They live by knowing how to integrate their own activities with those of the sentient beings around them...Hunting people are able to create a way of life by applying knowledge to local resources.⁶

Native Americans met Christianity with openness, allowing inclusion of Christian principles into their own belief system. Within the Ojibwa moral code there existed no concept of exclusive truth:

“There was nothing in the principles of native religion to limit access to spiritual power to a single cult, and borrowing from the religious repertoire of other tribes was a common practice.”⁷ Western Christianity, however, held strictly to the concept of exclusive truth. Its spiritual truth was considered the only acceptable body of truth and any other belief system was seen not only as unacceptable, but was considered to be “of the Devil.” The way to true life lay not in the living of a fully human life as in the Ojibwa ideal of “pimadaziwin,” but rather in the denial of many human attributes and desires.

The central goal of life, which the Ojibwa designate by the term “pimadaziwin,” is to have “life in the fullest sense, life in the sense of longevity, health and freedom from misfortune.” For this, they “depended on the aid of other-than-human persons.” In Ojibwa thought, it was assumed that needs of the individual would be met through blessings or gifts of others, who might be kin (often grandparents), animals, dream visitors, other spirits, or manitou; however, “the gift was not ‘free,’ and certain elements of [their] narratives reveal themselves to be principles of behavior to which humans, by virtue of their status as receivers of blessings, must conform.”⁸ The Ojibwa hold a spiritual relationship with everything that exists in the physical and metaphysical world. A proper attitude and relationship with all

the elements of these worlds, which are considered one coherent world, are necessary for achievement of the "good life" by the individual and by the community. Oral tradition explains the makeup of the world and teaches proper behaviors and attitudes for attaining "pimadaziwin," which is "implicitly assumed everywhere throughout the narratives and is...expressly identified as a reason for noble and inspired action. It, accordingly, may be posited as the foundation of Ojibwa moral theory."⁹

The greatest fundamental difference between this moral code and that of the Ojibwa can be seen in this excerpt from The Jesuit Relations:

The greatest opposition that we meet...consists in the fact that their remedies for diseases; their greatest amusements when in good health; their fishing, their hunting, and their trading; the successes of their crop, of their wars, and of their councils,--almost all abound in diabolical ceremonies...to be a Christian one must deprive himself not only of pastimes which elsewhere are wholly innocent, and of the dearest pleasures of life, but even of the most necessary things, and, in a word, to die to the world at the very moment that one wishes to assume the life of a Christian.¹⁰

Later, when Jesuits realized that Indian religious beliefs went much deeper than they had supposed, their militant aspect came to the fore. "They met objections with a directness incompatible with Indian conceptions of courtesy, seeking to catch out questioners in contradictions and openly ridiculing traditional religious practices...They quickly recognized shamans as their most formidable opponents, vacillating between denouncing them as servants of Satan and attempting to convict them of simple chicanery."¹¹ Men and women healers and shamans would lose their efficacy and status among their people during the ascendancy of the missionary movement, and the traditional tenet of knowledge of oneself and one's place within the natural world would be replaced with the Christian idea of man's separateness from, and superiority to, "nature."

At the time of the appearance of Europeans in the Great Lakes region, the traditional basis for knowledge held the culture together and allowed for a healthy, independent life for women. The impact of Europeans would be to suppress this knowledge and replace it with the "knowledge" of a system in which dichotomous thinking (human/non-human, male/female, dominant/subordinate, white/Indian, civilized/savage) would be used to attempt to erase and replace traditional life ways of the Ojibwa. The effect on women was a new sense of being female. A woman was now seen as part of the "local resources," herself. She became something to be appropriated, to be managed, in order to support the needs of the new culture. Her goal as an individual was no longer to have a role in the improvement of her own life and the lives of those in her clan, except as those goals contributed to the ascendancy of European capitalism.

How effective were the traditional Ojibwa in maintaining the health of the members of the society? According to Charles Cleland, a noted scholar of Ojibwa history, although "there was an unending struggle to satisfy elementary wants--particularly the need for food," the result of the system of "Chippewa economics was tribal self-sufficiency."¹² At the base of this system was knowledge of and connection with Nature, rooted in the deep past and developed over thousands of years. There is "a growing body of archeological and paleopathological evidence that pre-contact Amerindians were generally healthy and that there was a marked decline in aboriginal population in the decades following initial contact."¹³

Evidence suggests that the Ojibwa enjoyed generally good health into old age. Ojibwa writer Gerald Vizenor quotes Peter Jones who writes of the traditional Ojibwa view of aging:

There is a saying among our people, that our forefathers were so exempt from sickness, that, like the cedar which has withstood the storms of many ages, and shows the first signs of decay by the dying of the top branches, so the aged Indian, sinking under the weight of many winters, betokens, by his gray hairs and furrowed cheeks that life is declining.¹⁴

Knowledge of nature and the place of man and woman within it were essential to survival. This knowledge was perpetuated through cultural practices such as storytelling. In fact, historian Christopher Vecsey indicated that, "in the main, they have relied on their storytelling for self-knowledge... Their stories indicate that examining life's possibilities and problems accomplishes nothing if it takes place apart from the life-sustaining web of human, environmental, and spiritual relations."¹⁵ Women were instrumental in the application and instruction of principles of health care. Noted historian W. Vernon Kinietyz quotes Raudot in a letter from Quebec of 1709 in which the writer explains that the "women occupy themselves also with medicine and at night tell to the youth of the household stories of their war, of their spirit or rather their devil, in short, they invent a thousand fables according to their wild imagination."¹⁶

For women, storytelling was complemented by the close relationship between mothers and daughters. Women freely and openly passed on to succeeding generations their knowledge of feminine life roles, health, sexuality, and childbearing. Ojibwa women, like women in other pre-capitalist societies, knew how to use products appropriated from nature to create contraceptives and abortifacients. Partly because of this knowledge, women in traditional Ojibwa culture generally held autonomy in sexuality and childbearing. Mothers spoke freely to their daughters about matters of health, including sexuality and the traditional value of a woman's autonomy over her own body. This closeness

and openness between mother and daughter helped to contribute to the continuance of women's strong position in society and to the good spiritual, emotional and physical health of women and girls. One can deduce from early records that Native women enjoyed good health. According to the memoirs of Raudot, "the savage women are never sick at confinement; when they have just given birth they go to wash their child in the water and do not discontinue doing the housework as usual."¹⁷

Women held important roles in the healing arts. Danziger refers to a Wenebojo tale in which the power of the female to maintain the efficacy of medicine is emphasized: "The medicine I have given you will not last forever, but I will give my daughter to you. Do not approach her until you get home, then one of you may take her for his wife. She is to be the means of keeping up the power of medicine among men."¹⁸ Men in the tale are instructed to marry her, otherwise they will lose the power of the medicine. In traditional culture, women played an important role in maintaining the power of medicine. Traditional practices were essential to the health of individuals and to the self-sufficiency of the tribe.

It appears that tribal self-sufficiency was not only a spiritual and health-related hallmark of the Ojibwa, but an economic one as well. Self-sufficiency and self-direction were related to societal, family and personal autonomy within the Ojibwa culture. For women, sexual and reproductive autonomy were the norm, as it was in other pre-capitalist cultures. "Female control of reproduction is cross-culturally and historically the dominant social arrangement...yet in modern Western societies, reproduction is controlled by men."¹⁹ For Ojibwa women, control of reproduction by men began with the French, who were intent on developing a workforce in New France without sending French men and women, for fear of depleting the population of France itself.

As male dominance increased, women lost much of their autonomy in matters related to health

and spirituality. Theorists such as Maria Mies look at the different ways in which men and women appropriate nature to meet their needs. Mies insists that the production of children and of nourishment for these children be viewed as "truly human, that is, conscious, social activity."²⁰ Women in early societies had sexual autonomy over their own bodies. They were able to consciously regulate the number of children they bore and the intervals between births. They were able to appropriate nature, that is, to use the products provided in nature to create products used to prevent pregnancy and induce abortion, thereby maintaining personal control over reproduction.

Since women had the primary responsibility for sustenance, their role as the predominant gatherers of food was established early in human history. This, according to Mies, was probably the first division of labor. Women gathered food; men hunted. The act of gathering was a collective activity among women who, it is believed, eventually began the practice of cultivation. Women, then, were the first agriculturalists, and it was women who developed the first tools for agriculture--the digging stick and the hoe. Cultivation made possible creation of surplus food, such as corn and squash, and development of jars and baskets made possible preservation of the surplus. Women, then, had power over the creation and preservation of new life, not only through their own bodies (childbirth), but also through external nature (cultivation).

Sixteenth century men viewed their relationship with women as they did their relationship with nature, that is, as one of dominance and appropriation. This was the view of male/female relationships that the French carried with them to the New World. This was part of the belief system that was superimposed on, and, later, integrated into the economic and social systems of the Ojibwa and other native peoples. Indeed, Anderson notes that in less than thirty years from initial contact, Huron and

Montaignais women had gone from being “as free as ‘wild animals’ to administering French-style justice” to other women who resisted or challenged the system imposed on them.²¹

Survival of the clan or band depended on the ability of women, collectively and interdependently with men, to provide for their basic needs. Despite this knowledge, the notion persists, even today among serious scholars, that men were the first tool makers, predominant providers of sustenance, inventors of human social relations, and protectors of women and children,²² and, in the case of the fur trade in the New World, that European males introduced the “superior” tools, weapons and economy that helped to “civilize” the native population. Because of the importance of women and their production, it was necessary to annex their power and the products of their labor in order to gain an economic foothold in the New World and to break the traditional system of interdependence between women and men in order to create a system in which capitalism could thrive: that is, a system within which women were forced into submission and made dependent upon white men.

In his book, We Have the Right to Exist, the *ahnishinahbaeojibway* author Wub-e-ke niew explains the inter-connectedness of traditional Ojibwa culture:

Our elders, both male and female, have always been deeply respected in the *Ahnishinahbaeojibway* community. This is very different from European culture, in which age and gender polarization makes families more amenable to state control, and creates discontinuity in oral history. Our family relationships are harmoniously balanced, there is no authoritarian head of the family, and so there is no need for role reversal. The foundation of our egalitarian family interrelationships includes mutual respect and a language which is both male and female...Our elders were wise and loving teachers who knew our history and geneology, and who knew about medicines and other herbs. They had a clear and useful understanding of community dynamics and practical psychology.²³

In European culture, men were viewed not as being interdependent with women, as in traditional Ojibwa culture, but rather as superior to them. Their role was to take control of the spheres of labor that had traditionally belonged to a great extent, if not completely, to women, such as reproduction, food production, social norms and mores, and the economy of goods. Prior to intensification of European domination, traditional Ojibwa culture had contained the elements necessary to the physical and spiritual health of all of its members, regardless of gender, status or age. Social class and race were not issues in traditional society, but they would become issues of great importance under capitalism. Capitalism and its related ideas and practices would shatter the belief system and health-related practices of the Ojibwa. With capitalism came a world view that identified people as either "savage" or "human." What was "savage" was available for exploitation through the process of "civilizing." Those who were considered "human" were those of the dominant class or race or those who had already been domesticated and controlled by the dominant society. This formed the basis for the oppression of Native American culture during the fur trade.²⁴ Europeans introduced basic elements of exploitation which have parallels in other places and in other times, and always with the same results: 1) that women come to be seen as subordinate to, and dominated by, men; 2) that traditional values give way to ideologies that support and reproduce capitalism; and 3) that race, gender and class form the bases for exploitation and oppression.

In addition to capitalism and its attendant ideologies, Europeans also brought with them diseases that undermined not only the physical health of the indigenous peoples, but also their entire belief system. These never-before-seen diseases could not be addressed through the traditional culture. The extent of destruction of Native peoples of North America because of disease is unclear, as is the

number of indigenous peoples living on the continent before the arrival of Europeans. Conventional historians have accepted the estimate of about one million native people in this region in the year 1500 and census data of 1890 indicate about 250,000 remaining Native Americans. Widely accepted sources place the rate of extinction at sixty percent to seventy-five percent. Historian M. Annette Jaimes, however, indicates that “more recent and honest studies have established that there were somewhere between nine and eighteen million [and] the actual rate of extermination pertaining to Native North America during the period of conquest as having been ninety-eight to ninety-nine per cent overall.”²⁵ In addition,

these diseases did not merely spread among American Indians, kill them and then disappear. On the contrary, they came, spread, and killed again and again and again. It has recently been established that there may have been as many as 93 serious epidemics and pandemics of Old World pathogens among North American Indians from the early sixteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century.²⁶

Historian Laura Peers notes the impact, beyond extremely high mortality rates, of epidemics on native populations. Fear and despair, an increase in suicide, further deaths by secondary infection or lack of adequate care, reduction of the labor force, and disruption of social relationships were other results of sicknesses that ravaged villages.

Shamans were powerless in the face of these new illnesses. Being an adaptive people, and having no concept of “exclusive truth,” the Ojibwa looked for help from the Jesuits, “going so far as to transfer the traditional shamanistic role to the missionary.”²⁷ Some were able to incorporate the idea of the Jesuit as “manitou” into the existing belief system and sometimes turned to the missionary as a

potential spiritual healer. Missionaries' acceptance of this role was essential to the establishment of the role of Christianity in the negation of traditional Ojibwa culture and the intensification of capitalism in the New World. Along with fur traders, Jesuit missionaries had a far greater influence on the native population than did the French military. "Blackrobes," in their efforts to Christianize Indians, did not introduce them to any Frenchmen "except for themselves...whom they regarded as the eventual supreme authorities on the upper Great Lakes."²⁸ Although the government did not officially support the efforts of missionaries, the Jesuits' position and influence were strengthened by governmental presence in the New World. According to historian John Grant, "although governments never sought to compel conversion, the existence of the authority of the state helped to give visibility and weight to the missionaries' presence. It is doubtful whether the missionaries could have established themselves without European protection; in any case, they did not do so until a measure of it was available."²⁹

This combination of forces--the fur trader who changed the nature of the Ojibwa economic and kinship structure, the government with its power in military strength and policy-making, and the Jesuit who introduced a new worldview, in many ways incompatible with traditional ways of thinking, believing and acting--had a profound impact on the culture in which native women existed. As Calvin Martin observed: "Christianity, no doubt in league with European-imported disease, had rendered the mythic world in which they had formerly thrived more or less inarticulate."³⁰

In addition to the cultural upheaval wrought by agents of French fur trade, the appearance and spread of European diseases, such as smallpox, measles, influenza, plague, diphtheria, typhus, cholera, scarlet fever, and typhoid throughout North America led to further disintegration of the culture and further demands on surviving women. These epidemics have traditionally been viewed as a "natural

disaster" which was outside the sphere of control of Europeans. Devastation caused among all Indian tribes is regarded as "inadvertent," and Europeans are generally held blameless. How blameless they really were is not clear, however. In one well-known case, British Governor General of North America Jeffrey Amherst suggested during Pontiac's uprising in 1763 that smallpox be introduced to some tribes through the distribution of blankets that had been used by victims of the disease. In a letter to a subordinate willing to attempt this experimental "biological warfare," Amherst wrote: "You will do well to [infect] the Indians by means of blankets as well as to try every other method that can serve to extirpate this exorable race."³¹ We know of this instance because the plan was laid out in writing. Although the plan was not carried out in this case, because Pontiac lifted his siege of Fort Detroit, there is evidence to indicate that this was not the only suggestion of use of pathogens in an effort to eliminate Native Americans. What effect this type of warfare had on the Ojibwa is not clear, although some researchers believe that there is evidence that the use of pathogens against the Iroquois led to infections of other tribes, including the Ojibwa, with whom the Iroquois had contact.³²

Whether introduced purposely or inadvertently, diseases presented a challenge to the Ojibwa who, prior to the introduction of European disease, had found relief and remedy for illnesses within the environment and culture, but had no means to deal with the death and impairment inflicted by these new sicknesses. As scholar Richard White sagely noted:

...these new diseases did more than kill. They polluted the channels of everyday life. Rubella harmed the fetuses of pregnant women and marked the children for life. In the wake of epidemics, blind or scarred survivors or mourning relatives could become suicides, taking their lives in what the English trader James Adair called 'sullen madness.' Venereal diseases turned love and pleasure into pestilence; they also took their toll on the generation to follow. Syphilis caused miscarriages and infected infants

at birth. Tuberculosis made what had once been secure if dark longhouses and earthlodges into pest-houses where the tuberculosis bacilli thrived. It made what had been the tasks of daily life--for example, the chewing of fibers to make baskets--into sources of contamination.³³

In response to the loss of the effectiveness of traditional health and spiritual practices, the Midewiwin Society was established in the late seventeenth century as a way to protect and preserve tribal folk history and knowledge of medicines for healing the sick. Importance of self-knowledge and individual responsibility in one's personal conduct were still integral elements of health and spirituality. Storytelling, songs, drums, ritual, and plant pharmacology were preserved as part of the institution. Creation of the Mide society was a manifestation of the continuing importance of health and spirituality among the Ojibwa: "In a world of disaster, Indian peoples forged opportunities. In a world of rotting corpses, they created new peoples and new tribes and confederacies."³⁴ The Midewiwin Society was an example of a new institution designed to respond to a threat to the culture.

Elements of European society were evident in the structure of the Midewiwin. Members were mostly male. The society was highly institutionalized and consisted of a limited, hierarchical membership ranked in four degrees.³⁵ By the 1880s the United States government, in its attempts to repress Indian customs and practices, and through its policy of making those receiving land allotment wards of the state, tried to restrict the use of traditional medical practices: "Indians receiving government services were required to cut their long hair, and agents did their best to discourage ceremonies and dances, including (in the Great Lakes) the curing rituals of the *Midewiwin*."³⁶ Little by little, women were withdrawing from their traditional roles as healers and preservers of knowledge and history. This withdrawal paralleled their withdrawal from economic and political power as well.

The Ojibwa, over the course of the millenia of their existence in North America, had developed several ways to respond to health problems within the culture, including the sweatlodge where members found relief from physical or mental fatigue, or from medical problems such as asthma, rheumatism, or pneumonia. Health and spirituality were interconnected. Charms were used by the Ojibwa to restore health, and shamans (both male and female) attended to the sick, using words, music, and plant-based pharmacology. Options in treating health concerns were varied and all were found within the culture. Vecsey speaks of Indian existence as one which "transcends our contact with them, stretching as it does into deep prehistory, into the glacial past." He speaks of "their careful observation and pragmatic use of local minerals, plants, and animals, and their creative development of numerous plant forms for human benefit, set in an explicit and frequently observed ideology of respect for non-human beings." ³⁷ Because of the interconnection of health and spirituality in Ojibwa culture, the cultural changes introduced by Europeans affected both.

Although the French government did not officially support attempts to convert native souls, they provided a system within which Jesuits could attempt to do so. Government representatives in the New World lent support, whether intentional or not, to missionaries who introduced an important element in the dichotomy of European thought: the separation of the spiritual from the physical. That which was physical was, according to Jesuits, to be negated. The "flesh" was to be denied in order for the "spirit" to thrive. For a woman, this meant that control over her own body belonged not to her, but to God, or rather to God's earthly representative in the nuclear family--that is, her husband. In the absence of a husband, representatives of the church itself encouraged women to deny their physical and sexual needs.

Women who made public display of this type of denial were exalted. Women who were married in the church, left their families, and followed European ideals of womanhood were established as examples for other women. One extreme example of the influence of the church on native women is that of Kateri Tekakwitha, who “established a remarkable reputation for sanctity.” The daughter of a Mohawk father and Algonquian mother, she had been orphaned as a child because of a smallpox epidemic that left her disfigured and with poor eyesight. After her conversion to Christianity by Jesuits working in the lower St. Lawrence valley around 1670, “she showed such zeal and such determination to remain single...that... she not only excelled in the usual exercises of piety but punished herself in all the ways her ingenuity could devise, flagellating herself with willow rods, sleeping on a bed of thorns, and even holding brands between her toes when told that fire was the ultimate test of willingness to suffer...Kateri’s “sanctity has inspired about fifty biographies in some ten languages ...and the recently bestowed ‘blessed’ points toward future canonization” in the Catholic church.”³⁸

Another, more typical, example of a woman who was honored for leaving traditional Ojibwa culture to live within the fur trade was Ozhawguscodaywaquay (Green Meadow Woman) whose English name was Susan Johnston. Born around 1780 to a family of influential Ojibwa, she married Irish fur trader John Johnston and moved from her home at Chequamegon Bay to Sault Ste. Marie where she maintained a household in which the two cultures existed together. She continued many traditional practices, such as fishing, gathering, making maple sugar, dressing in traditional costume and speaking Ojibwa. She raised eight children, all of whom became “competent and educated members of two different societies, while maintaining her own strong identity as an Ojibwa woman.”³⁹ Further study is needed to determine the extent to which women like these acquiesced in,

accommodated, and resisted cultural changes.

Indebtedness further reduced the status of Indian families. British fur trade officials attempted to cut back on the giving of "gifts," a custom carried out by the French who understood, to some extent, the idea of reciprocity in the Native culture. British companies tried "to make gifts into loans, and they tried to use credit to reduce hunters to a form of debt peonage, but they did not succeed before 1812."⁴⁰ Their eventual success led to the impoverishment of families and had an impact on their health, both physical and psychological. American traders, led by John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company, continued a system of debt, often selling liquor on credit. By 1815, "the Chippewas must have been uneasy about the new American 'father,' since the bands had been taught by the British to fear and distrust the settlers from the south. And for good reason. A nationalistic, imperialistic United States was determined to extend its authority over the Northwest."⁴¹ This expansion, at a time when many Indian families had few or no financial resources, resulted in restriction to reserved lands allowed the Ojibwa by the government and increasing dependency on the state for subsistence, housing and health care.

In the process of colonization, a systematic, racially-based emasculation of male roles seems to coincide with an increasing dependence of women upon conventional European religious ideology and upon the state. As their men and children disappeared or were disfranchised through European introduction of disease, distribution of alcohol, and encouragement of intraracial violence and murder, women's lives were severely disrupted. They had to find ways within the new culture to deal with problems rising from the loss of their men. Cleland notes that "at many times during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the joy of village life was diminished by worry over husbands, fathers, and

brothers who were engaged in distant warfare.” He deduces that the absence of men created hardship for women left to support families without the help of males: “The absence of men must also have forced greater reliance on foods produced by women.”⁴² One can also deduce that, without the help of men, women lost emotional and economic support that their men may have offered, a loss in status within the community, and an increased workload.

Jesuits, wittingly or not, upheld the “policy” of death and emasculation of indigenous men and women’s acceptance of this type of cultural devastation. Not only were women taught to accept male domination in the Jesuit style, but also to accept the loss of their husbands and sons as God’s will:

In all areas of life, women were exhorted to pattern their emotions into a submissive, patient understanding of, and compliance with, their lot in life...the Jesuits were especially concerned with monitoring both the feelings women had and the way in which they expressed them. This concern is particularly evident in their reports on Christianized women’s responses to news of the capture and torture of their male relatives.⁴³

The Jesuits’ portrayal of women’s responses shows consistently a reflection of the Jesuits’ view of Christian love and submission to God’s will. In one instance, a Jesuit Superior contrasts the traditional response: one of “doleful lamentations, cries and groans...[a] sad ceremony enacted not for one day merely, or two, but throughout the entire year,” with the response of Christianized native women: “with tears in their eyes, indeed, and sobbing bitterly, but with such entire resignation to God’s decrees that they themselves were astonished there at.”⁴⁴

Many native women were forced to turn to the European capitalist system, as it existed in the

New World, for survival. As capitalism intensified, they eventually became dependent on the state, which took the place of the men who had at one time been powerful co-creators in their world. The state, however, refused aid to those who were “in conflict with state powers.”⁴⁵ Indians who freely hunted or fished, who allowed relatives to care for their children, or who maintained polygamous marriages, all of which were in conflict with state laws, risked losing any aid that had been promised by the United States government. By the “turn of the [twentieth] century, Indians were desperately poor and the vast majority lived under conditions of deplorable poverty.”⁴⁶

Alcohol had a particularly devastating effect on Indian women and men. Because men and women were interdependent in traditional Ojibwa society, we cannot separate the effects on men from the effects on women. Whether today's problems with alcohol among Native Americans are related to the introduction of liquor by the French during the period of the fur trade is a matter of controversy.

Some scholars believe:

there is no compelling reason to believe that today's high suicide rates and high alcoholism addiction rates of Canada's status and non-status Amerindians are the results of social, economic, and psychological conditions that were already present in colonial times. On the contrary, the situations prevailing in the urban ghettos, the reserves, and the northern ancestral hunting territories of native peoples today are vastly different from the relations that existed between independent, self-sufficient, and dynamic tribes and bands and the largely dependent French traders, garrison troops and missionaries in the eighteenth century.⁴⁷

It is clear that alcohol was a force that had a negative impact on Native American men and women, that it was present as a negative force as early as the French fur trade period, that it continued to be used by the British and the Americans to undermine the power of native peoples, and that it

persists today in native cultures throughout the United States and Canada. By the 1770s the "ravages of this rising tide of rum [were such that] the Indians could only interpret the scale of its importation as a plot to destroy them. Liquor impoverished them, caused them to murder each other and whites, and shattered the social organization of their villages."⁴⁸

As one of the forces that most severely affected native culture, the prevalence of alcohol is included in nearly every account of Indian life in the New World. Anthropologist George Quimby includes text "from the journal of a fur trader among the Indians of the north shore of Lake Superior in 1778... 'with the rum we gave them they continued in a state of inebriety 3 days and nights, during which frolic they killed 4 of their own party.' In another instance, 'I traded for their skins and furs and gave them some rum, with which they had a frolic which lasted for 3 days and nights; on this occasion 5 men were killed and one woman dreadfully burned.'" Quimby explains that these examples are not unusual and that "this in no small measure contributed to their cultural breakdown."⁴⁹

Historian Cornelius Jaenen, in his treatment of the effects of alcohol on the health of Native Americans, includes references to early accounts: "duCreux described cirrhosis of the liver [and]...Belmont, in his treatise on the brandy trade, wrote that excessive drinking turned the liver black."⁵⁰ Not only did alcohol have a negative impact on individual health, but it also had a cultural impact as a force behind a new kind of violence. Drunkenness became an excuse for violent behavior, and most of this violence "was turned upon the Amerindian community itself."⁵¹ Jaenen also includes commentary from the period on this phenomenon: "'We were not long, I say, in seeing drunken men killing each other; husbands burning their wives; wives dishonouring their husbands; fathers putting their children to boil in cauldrons.'"⁵²

Accounts of violence against women and children increased in proportion to the intensification of European capitalism, the increase in the consumption of alcohol among native populations, and the attempt by Jesuits to place blame on women for social ills. Among Great Lakes tribes, “Huron and Montaignais women were given the ambiguous role of being both essential to society, but potentially the cause of all its problems.”⁵³ With the new system and the supporting ideologies found within Christianity, “women became legitimate objects of aggression.”⁵⁴ In a culture that had known little or no overt aggression, a new kind of violence would enter, further affecting the well-being of all of its members.

Jesuit concern regarding the use of alcohol by women was related, not to the effects of liquor on the mental or physical health of these women, but to the effect on their behavior and the level of their “purity” in Christian terms. Quimby includes an observation by Jesuit priest Denys commenting on the use of alcohol among native women:

The women and girls also drink much but by stealth, and they go and hide themselves in the woods for that purpose. The sailors know well the rendez-vous. It is those who furnish the brandy, and they bring them into so favourable a condition that they can do with them everything they will. They...have no longer their former purity, neither women nor girls, at least those who drink.⁵⁵

Disease continued to plague Native Americans. At the turn of the twentieth century, "hereditary syphilis killed nearly one-fifth of all Chippewa children before they were six months old... The BIA battled these conditions as well as Indian alcoholism (a legacy of the fur trade era) with inadequate facilities and understaffed and underpaid health care personnel."⁵⁶ At this time, an increasing number of

Indians sought treatment from white doctors, and traditional spirituality-based health care was being abandoned. Tuberculosis took its toll on the Native population. Wub-e-ke-niew quotes a paper delivered by Dr. Martha M. Waldron at the 1890 Lake Mohonk Conference:

The full-blood Indians [*sic*] have less endurance than the half or mixed-bloods; and when attacked by tuberculosis or any form of scrofula, they perish more quickly... The more thoroughly the contagious nature of tuberculosis is established, the more terrible the present condition of the Indian appears. It is stated on good authority that tuberculous cattle are constantly sold to and consumed by the Indians [*sic*]. Their only hope is in a common knowledge of every-day affairs, which shall protect them from their enemy, the unscrupulous white man.⁵⁷

By the 1890's the Ojibwa had been allotted reserved lands and had modified their housing. One-room log or frame cabins were viewed as "progressive" by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Once reservation Indians contracted tuberculosis, their fatality rate exceeded that of neighboring whites. Agency physicians attributed the difference largely to the crowded and poorly ventilated Indian cabins." In one case, a doctor visited "an elderly couple dying of tuberculosis. They were huddled in the same room with sixteen others."⁵⁸ Tuberculosis became more and more of a health threat as more and more Indians received government allotments with which to build cabins.

Intrusion of the European moral system, along with disease, alcoholism, violence, death, and poverty, contributed to the decline of the Ojibwa culture. There are as many tragic tales as there are people. For women as well as men, there exist stories of those who readily agreed to become part of the European fur trade economy and who "disappeared" into white culture. There were also those who became victims of the new order, of those who triumphed in it, and of those who simply survived it. Core values of the Ojibwa culture managed to survive in spite of the negative effects of the fur trade

and the legacy it left behind, and women were instrumental in preserving, amid great adversity, the elements that kept traditional Ojibwa culture alive throughout the fur trade era.

Notes

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45. Cleland, *ibid.*, 261.
46. Ibid., 258.
47. Jaenen in Martin, *ibid.*, 63.
48. White, *ibid.*, 343.
49. George Quimby, Indian Life in the Upper Great Lakes, 11,00 BC to 1800 AD (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 154.
50. Cornelius Jaenen, Friend and Foe: Aspects of French-Amerindian Cultural Contact in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries (Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Historical Sites Branch: McClelland and Stewart, Unlimited, 1976), 111.

51. Anderson, *ibid.*, 115.
52. Jaenen, *ibid.*, 111.
53. Anderson, *ibid.*, 221.
54. *Ibid.*, 226.
55. Quimby, *ibid.*, 112.
56. Cleland, *ibid.*, 213.
57. Wub-e-ke-niew, *ibid.*, 111.
58. Cleland, *ibid.*, 105.

Chapter 4

Reservation Life

Although some see the impact of reservation life as the final step in the total acculturation of Native Americans, historian and sociologist Laura Peers views the process of cultural change among the Ojibwa as something more complex than a tale of contact, change, and total assimilation. She characterizes the process of cultural adaptation among the Ojibwa of Western Canada as “‘augmentation’, or ‘layering’: the creation of an outer layer of behaviours learned from their Cree and Metis relatives, and the retention of a larger and more crucial core of values and behaviours that the Ojibwa brought with them when they entered the West.” Peers notes that this “structure was developed differently by Ojibwa in the various adaptations they chose in the West, but it resulted in every case in a very resilient and adaptable people.”¹ This is true, not only of the Ojibwa who entered the West, but also of those who remained in the Great Lakes area. In studies of the Great Lakes Ojibwa it can be seen that a core identity of the Ojibwa culture remained intact in spite of efforts to negate it.

The reservation system can be seen as a representation of the most intensive and extensive effort by the government of the United States to bring the Ojibwa and other native tribes into mainstream white society. It can also be viewed as a determined effort to undermine the core values of native culture. By 1835 settlers were so numerous in parts of the Great Lakes area that conflict was brewing between them and native inhabitants. Many settlers and government administrators felt that the solution to the problem should be to simply “remove” Native Americans from land needed for

American expansion. For Indians, the issue of primary importance was to retain the right to remain on their own land. During the debate over removal versus reservation for Native Americans, Michigan Superintendent of Indian Affairs Henry Rowe Schoolcraft supported the option of removal. His successor, Robert Stuart, formerly of the American Fur Company, was more sympathetic to Indian desires to remain on land permanently accorded them within the state. Other politicians and citizens began to agree that removal of Indians was beginning to make less and less sense and that the establishment of reserved lands presented a more reasonable option.

Cleland describes reports of Indian agents and missionaries from the time:

[They are] filled with glowing statistics touting the use of American dress, acres of land cleared, bushels of potatoes grown, days of school attended, and number of pagans converted. The Ottawa and Ojibwa had changed just enough to convince the government they were walking the white man's road. In fact, they continued to maintain their traditional systems of exchange, kinship, language, religion, and customs while giving the illusion of 'progress' Beneath this veneer of civilization, they remained fundamentally true to their own cultural traditions.²

Based on these reports, the United States government decided to continue its efforts to "civilize" the native population in Michigan. The Treaty of Washington was signed in 1836, allowing for reservation of lands for exclusive use of Native Americans. According to Danziger:

Until the 1930's the federal government's primary goal for the reservation Chippewas was 'civilization' (or acculturation), meaning eradication of the most apparent features of Chippewa traditional culture and their replacement by such white cultural traits as the work ethic in reference to cultivating the soil. Once this was accomplished, 'assimilation' (or social integration) and economic self-sufficiency would logically follow.³

The economic goal of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) was to create successful, self-sufficient Ojibwa farms. It was hoped that through the reservation system Indians would be protected from “undesirable influences and effectively exposed to education, Christianity, the domestic arts, and agriculture.”⁴ The underlying philosophy was based on the ideas of Luke Lea, Commissioner of the Indian Department of the Department of the Interior, and George Maypenny, who succeeded him in 1853. The ideas of these leaders and many other political progressives “conformed in many ways to the desire of Indians to remain permanently within their traditional territories and to acquire access to education for their children.” Under this policy, some Indians inhabited bounded reservation land while others (because of a time limit placed on the selection and purchase of land, after which the land was offered for sale to the general public), lived on farms that were separated from each other by land owned and occupied by white settlers.⁵

With the vision of Indian families managing successful family farms, sending their children to school, and enjoying a standard of living like that of their white neighbors, the United States began its experiment in reservation life for the native population. Thousands of families left their traditional hunter-gatherer lifestyle to begin life on land allotted them through agreement with the American government. There were problems inherent in the reservation policy, however. The treaty of 1836 limited the use of reservation land to only five years, so most Indians were unwilling to invest the resources necessary for improving land over which the United States would regain ownership. Much of the reserved land was unsuitable for farming. Resistance among Indians to the concept of “ownership” of land and to a sedentary agricultural lifestyle remained strong. In spite of these problems, Americans retained the hope that the reservation system would provide the answer to the “Indian question”:

When Native Americans were assimilated into the white world, they would cease to be a financial and psychological burden to the United States. Such had been the dream of Washington policy makers since the era of Thomas Jefferson. Though there was a certain logic to it, the dream almost always foundered on the rocky realities of frontier economics: reservations unsuited for agriculture, white seizure of Indian farm land (by means of treaty cessions, sale, leasing, or outright fraud), and nation-wide depressions which destroyed family farm profits. The story of the Lake Superior bands was no exception to this historical truism.⁶

The reservation system created vast changes in Ojibwa culture. For the first time in their history with whites, Indians no longer chose the cultural changes they wished to adopt. Instead, these changes were imposed upon them. Vast changes were brought about in housing, subsistence patterns, education, medical practices, child rearing, and family structure. For many, it was a question of acquiescence or annihilation. Danziger draws two conclusions from his study of the impact of the reservation system on Lake Superior Ojibwa: "Two generalizations are strongly supported by the evidence...Chippewa culture was rapidly disintegrating; the first forty-five years of reservation life made them a people of two worlds. Secondly, they had become, in the process, the wards of Washington."⁷

In the mid-nineteenth century, the BIA began systematically recording indications of assimilation to determine the rate of Chippewa "civilization." Statistics regarding land ownership, family income, housing, subsistence, transportation, health, and education were kept in order to determine the extent to which the government was succeeding in its efforts to acculturate the native population. Like earlier reports from missionaries and Indian agents, these records did not include information on basic social customs such as courtship, marriage, family structure, child rearing, oral tradition, spiritual practices, healing arts, artistic expression, and other facets of life which undergirded their distinct society.⁸ These

records, therefore, give an inaccurate and overstated description of the extent of the influence of white culture on Ojibwa life.

Schools provided the means for deep and lasting impact of white values and for the suppression of native values and lifestyle. According to the treaty of 1836, money was to be set aside for the education of Indian youth. This money was at first paid directly to missionary societies that ran schools. It was the goal of the government to acculturate Native Americans through the mission schools whose focus was instruction in “morality” and “character development,” in accordance with white men’s views:

The goal of the government was to assimilate Indians into white society, but to accomplish this the “heathens” had to be painstakingly tutored in the values of a culture based on a belief in one God, the inherent good of manual labor, and obedience, and personal accumulation of material wealth, all of which were alien to the Indians’ way of life. The task was formidable, but missionary societies accepted it with zeal.⁹

Truancy, distance of family homes from schools, resistance to white men’s ways and seasonal movement of families were problems inherent in the church-run schools. In 1855, this system was dismantled and a day-school system was established. Many Ojibwa children attended one of the forty-eight such schools in the United States, thirty of which were in Michigan. The dark, one-room clapboarded log school houses accommodated rows of up to fifty students at wooden tables and benches, but “lack of funds” kept the Indian Bureau from furnishing the materials and supplies necessary for high-quality education.¹⁰ It was in this setting that native children were expected to “learn.” Incentives such as transportation, food, games, holiday parties, books and school supplies were offered in an attempt to reduce absenteeism.¹¹ Although these schools were successful enough to

attract the children of non-Indian parents as well as those of Indian parents,¹² they were deemed “unsuccessful” because of the continuing strong influence of native families, the use of the home dialect at school, and agents’ complaints of absenteeism, despite the fact that average attendance at Indian schools (forty-five percent) was slightly higher than that at public schools (forty-four percent).¹³ It was determined that the boarding school system was the answer to the “problems” of the day school.

In 1887, the government returned to the boarding school system and, thus, ushered in a program of ethnocide that had a profound impact on Indian culture. In twenty-five years, the boarding schools accomplished what armed force, starvation, disease, loss of land, and Christianity could not--a major and irreversible disruption of Indian culture. It also effectively prepared Indian young people, not for assimilation into middle-class America, but as laborers in American fields and factories.¹⁴

Although Indian parents saw the need for an education for their children in order for them to survive in the white man’s world of treaties, laws, and contracts, they had mixed feelings about enrolling their children in boarding schools. The schools offered shelter and food, as well as a chance to succeed athletically and academically, but the children were isolated from their families and community. Indian parents sought an education for their children as a means of remaining self-sufficient, and as a way to “supplement, not supplant, their culture,”¹⁵ but they were not interested in simply providing their children to be molded to fit the needs of the white economic system.

Boarding schools were run in a paramilitary style and staff members included physical punishment, a technique abhorred by the Chippewa, in their efforts to “discipline” students. Cleland and others note the irony that, while it destroyed “the vitality of their respective cultures, the Mount

Pleasant [Michigan] experience [of the boarding school] also strengthened their identity as Indians.”¹⁶

Native American historian Peter Nabokov comments further on this irony:

Quite aside from the terror any child feels at being torn from family and familiar surroundings, these children suffered personal humiliation when their long hair was hacked off and their bodies physically abused; and certainly there was irreparable harm done when their Indian heritage and languages were suppressed. Yet in shared suffering was sometimes the discovery of common strength, and it was here that they began the friendships that later linked them in multi-tribal networks based on intermarriage and pan-Indian religious movements.¹⁷

In spite of the difficulties children and their families faced, they coped and adapted. Out of their efforts to adapt they acquired skills for survival, as individuals and as a people, with a unique culture.

Rose Mary (Shingobe) Barstow relates an incident from her experience in an Ojibwa boarding school:

I went back to the school in the fall...We read a history book about ‘the savages.’ The pictures were in color. There was one of a group of warriors attacking white people--a woman held a baby in her arms. I saw hatchets, blood dripping, feathers flying. I showed the picture to the Sister. She said, ‘Rose Mary, don’t you know you’re Indian?’ I said, ‘No, I’m not.’ She said, ‘Yes, you are.’ I said, ‘No!’ And I ran behind a clump of juniper trees and cried and cried.¹⁸

One can imagine the questions that this young girl began to ask after an experience such as this. What answers might she have found in searching for the truth about her identity? How might Rose Mary’s mother have answered those questions? What impact did this incident and others like it have for Rose Mary and other young Ojibwa women? These are legitimate and significant questions that statistics and conventional histories regarding Ojibwa families cannot answer. What other incidents do

we know of that give us insight to the lives of women in Ojibwa culture during this period? How did those women respond?

For girls, the boarding school program was focused on teaching “better” ways of cooking, cleaning, making and repairing clothing, and caring for a home. “Character development” included learning to be responsible, reliable, and hard-working and to accept Christian principles of moral behavior. Native language and traditional ways of dressing the hair and body were discouraged, and students were coerced into compliance through use of corporal punishment. This “strict discipline was foreign to Indian children whose home training had been based upon respect and example, rather than parental authority or physical force.”¹⁹

For women with boarding school educations, working as domestic laborers, collecting and selling berries door to door, and making and selling handicrafts were critical to economic survival, but few women were able to earn enough to gain economic independence. Caught between the old culture and the new, families were trapped in a situation within which there were few choices. “When regular classroom attendance for all youngsters was enforced, families could not wander at will. New jobs, permanent homes, and children in school tied them to the reservation and drove another wedge between them and the old woodland ways.”²⁰

Indian students returning from boarding schools faced additional difficulties. They had been exposed, through the schools, to the white “work ethic,” but “physical labor, in the white man’s sense of the term, was considered by most Indians as something to be avoided unless necessitated by dire economic straits.”²¹ In a culture in which women’s work consisted of bearing and raising children, gathering and preservation of food, skilled production of goods such as clothing and baskets, and daily

maintenance of the home, the white work ethic seemed repulsive. Emphasis in the boarding schools on manual labor for profit was incompatible with the Ojibwa concept of “work.” Even with training and skills, native women and men found it difficult and often impossible to build and sustain an independent life in white society. They faced many obstacles in entering the workforce, including “intense hostility and racial prejudice from the competing white majority...[They] were forced even farther to the margins of the American economy.”²²

Many questions remain regarding the ways in which women were affected by, and responded to, changes imposed on them by the ascending white culture. Peers refers to “a model proposed by Jennifer S. H. Brown, who, in reflecting on data garnered by anthropologist A. Irving Hallowell in the 1930's from Ojibwa at Berens River, on the east side of Lake Winnipeg, suggests that Ojibwa men and women might well be regarded as two intersecting but distinct subcultures.” Brown’s model allows for “differing male and female perspectives on women’s roles and power and [serves as] a reminder that the changes involved in the emergence and development of the Ojibwa may have been more challenging and less rewarding for Ojibwa women even than for Ojibwa men.”²³

One case involved Charlotte Kawbawgam who, in 1841, claimed her deceased father’s share in the Jackson Iron Company. The case went to the Michigan Supreme Court three times and was finally settled in 1889. The company held that because she was the daughter of the second wife of her father, who had not formally divorced his first wife, Charlotte was not a legitimate heir to her father’s estate. The Supreme Court ruled that because Indian tribes (at the time of her claim) were not governed by the laws of the state of Michigan, and because in traditional Indian practice all children of polygamous marriages “held equal standing,” Charlotte had the right to her inheritance. Although she

was “never able to collect a monetary award from the...corporation...[she] forced recognition by state courts of the legitimacy of customary marriage and the full legal rights of the offspring of such marriages.”²⁴

Historian Bruce Rubenstein cites Lucy Penaseway as an example of a native woman whose right to property was threatened. When this Ottawa widow and her children returned from picking and selling blueberries in Traverse City, they found that a land speculator, William Thompson, had laid claim to her property. Thompson had bribed a land office clerk to pronounce the property “abandoned” and advertise it for sale. Because Penaseway was absent and filed no formal objection, Thompson bought the property and destroyed evidence of all the improvements that had been made in compliance with the homestead law. After stripping the land of timber, he abandoned the property. Although the Indian agent contested the case for over three years, the federal government did nothing to intervene on behalf of Penaseway. This case serves as one of thousands of examples of fraud executed against native landowners in Michigan.²⁵

In general, “Indians did not know how to acquire the protection of the law and could not afford attorney fees if they did.” This lack of knowledge about the legal system and lack of available cash made Native Americans targets for land fraud. Loss of land through loan sharking, tax schemes and other methods of abuse further jeopardized the situation of native people. By “the mid-1870's, the entire Indian Bureau was riddled with corruption.”²⁶ Native women were probably at greater risk because of their reduced financial status and their lack of education. Land loss through government corruption and financial destitution was particularly devastating for widows, the elderly, and disabled Indians who were “desperate for cash” and who transferred their land to whites who often represented

Chicago land speculators.²⁷

In order to minimize conflicts with white settlers, much of the bounded reservation lands were “remote and in...areas of marginal agricultural worth.”²⁸ The amount of work needed to successfully cultivate created a kind of toil that traditional lifestyles of hunting and gathering had not demanded. According to BIA reports, although many families cultivated gardens, only fifteen percent of Lake Superior Ojibwa families engaged in extensive agriculture, and many of these were on lands that contained the best soil in the area.²⁹ In spite of their efforts, most native farmers failed. Those receiving land allotments were, by the provision of the General Allotment Act of 1887, considered wards of the federal government, yet the problems of poverty, disease, alcohol, violence, and suicide continued. Indians now lived in a “total welfare state” where “filth, disease, starvation and crushing poverty afflicted life in almost every Indian settlement.”³⁰

Statistics can only tell us part of the story. We do know that there were cases of success among Native Americans who lived on allotted or reserved lands, but those cases were not typical. For women as well as men, disease, poverty and the toil of farm life took their toll on physical health. Economic failure, frustration with government agencies designed to “protect” them, and their status as wards of the state further deteriorated personal emotional well-being and cultural identity. Worries related to the provision of basic needs for their children and concerns about their future must have taken their own kind of toll on mental and emotional health. Issues related to race and class further affected Native Americans’ status and well-being. Yet, the Ojibwa culture continued among all of the difficulties related to federal policy. As a people, they adapted to the greatest set of changes since the arrival of Europeans in the seventeenth century--the changes introduced through the reservation system.

Responses to federal policy among native peoples varied from tribe to tribe, from band to band, and from individual to individual. Not all conformed to the government's efforts to "civilize" them. The Keweenaw Bay Ojibwa consisted of independent bands within three factions: a Methodist community, a Catholic community and free-ranging traditionalists. Ninety percent of contemporary accounts deal with the two small communities. The larger, traditional group was practically ignored in written records of the native population of Keweenaw Bay. Members of this group followed the seasonal round for subsistence, dressed in clothing that included both Ojibwa and American elements, built and lived in traditional shelters, and carried on the traditions of the healing arts and oral tradition.³¹ These bands resisted the idea of allotted land, principles of Christianity, sedentariness of the agricultural lifestyle, and impositions of American education.

All of these groups did what they had to do to survive and did what they could to maintain their culture. In many communities, men were employed in the mining, logging and fishing industries. Women worked in packing houses and as domestic laborers. Women also worked collecting and selling berries, and making maple sugar. Some produced traditional handicrafts, often for commercial and tourist industries, however as Cleland noted: "Unfortunately, the skill and artistry needed to produce these 'curios' was not rewarded in terms of the time spent to make them. An Indian woman producing these items would have to work for pennies per hour."³² Whatever means they chose to adapt and survive, most women experienced further losses in their economic and personal autonomy.

Some families and bands continued in their traditional ways of life, hunting, fishing, maintaining traditional homes, and teaching youth traditional skills. Maintaining traditional cultural ways created difficulties, however, particularly as the federal government decreased its efforts to protect Native

Americans and increased efforts to bring them under control of laws of the states. By the late 1880s Indians were brought completely under the jurisdiction of state laws, including those regarding fishing and hunting, child rearing and marriage. This led to Indians being charged with “child abandonment” in cases where relatives were raising children, with “fornication” in cases of polygamous marriage, and with “poaching” in cases where Indians engaged in traditional methods of hunting and fishing. Tragically, however, this came at a time when the state was withdrawing its support, “leaving Michigan Indians in limbo, lost on the white man’s road.”³³ Questions remain regarding the effects on women who lost custody of their children or who were “put away” by husbands who were forced to comply with laws regarding monogamy.

The ability of the Ojibwa to adapt over the centuries of contact and interaction with whites was indeed remarkable. Many Great Lakes Ojibwa persisted and, like their tribesmen in Western Canada, they “retained a crucial core of older culture, identity, and sense of heritage...Change was balanced by continuity.”³⁴ In spite of these qualities and Ojibwa perseverance, the reservation system and government intervention in native affairs proved to be particularly difficult. Peers, despite her bright outlook on the situation of the Ojibwa and her portrayal of “layering” and “augmentation” rather than of total assimilation within Ojibwa culture, admits that “they found their way of life gradually eroded by the constraints of reserve boundaries, permanent villages, government restrictions and incompetence in administering the treaties, the loss of territory to settlers, and the effect of non-Native, commercial resource-harvesting operations.”³⁵ In spite of the vast changes brought about in Ojibwa culture by the reservation system, the “core of identity” for the Ojibwa persisted: “Among the Ojibwa, the maintenance of many aspects of subsistence, religion, age-gender roles, and cultural ideals contributed

to this core of identity: who the Ojibwa were in the nineteenth century rested as much on continuity as on change.”³⁶ More study is certainly needed on the roles that women, in particular, played as agents of change and as keepers of tradition in Ojibwa culture during the years of restriction to the reservation.

Notes

1. Laura Peers, The Ojibwa of Western Canada (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1994), 210.
2. Charles C. Cleland, Rites of Conquest: The History and Culture of Michigan's Native Americans (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1992), 229-230.
3. Edmund Jefferson Danziger, The Chippewas of Lake Superior (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979), 92.
4. Cleland, *ibid.*, 234.
5. *Ibid.*, 236.
6. Danziger, *ibid.*, 114.
7. *Ibid.*, 107.
8. *Ibid.*, 93.
9. Bruce Rubenstein, "To Destroy a Culture: Indian Education in Michigan, 1855-1900," Michigan History, Summer, 1976, 137.
10. *Ibid.*, 144.
11. *Ibid.*, 147.
12. Rubenstein cited in Cleland, *ibid.*, 245.
13. Rubenstein in Michigan History, *ibid.*, 148.
14. Littlefield in Cleland, *ibid.*, 245.
15. Rubenstein in Michigan History, *ibid.*, 158.
16. Cleland, *ibid.*, 248.
17. Nabokov cited in Betty Ballantine and Ian Ballantine, eds., The Native Americans: an Illustrated History (Atlanta: Turner Publishing, Inc., 1993), 356.
18. Ballantine and Ballantine, *ibid.*

19. Rubenstein in Michigan History, *ibid.*, 158.
20. Danziger, *ibid.*, 107.
21. Rubenstein in Michigan History, 158-159.
22. Cleland, *ibid.*, 246.
23. Peers, *ibid.*, 85.
24. Cleland, *ibid.*, 250-251.
25. Bruce Rubenstein, "Justice Denied: Indian Land Frauds in Michigan, 1855-1900," The Old Northwest, June, 1976, 134.
26. Prucha cited in Cleland, *ibid.*, 254.
27. Cleland, *ibid.*, 256.
28. *Ibid.*, 237.
29. Danziger, *ibid.*, 114-115.
30. Cleland, *ibid.*, 267.
31. Cleland, *ibid.*, 241-242.
32. *Ibid.*, 258.
33. *Ibid.*, 261.
34. Peers, *ibid.*, 179.
35. *Ibid.*, 205.
36. *Ibid.*, 210.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

What does the fur trade represent in the history of the lives of native women? Can it be called a “golden age” because of the way in which both Indian and European customs blended to support the fur-based economic system, because of the ways in which women played an integral role in the trade and because of the mutual benefit enjoyed by both Europeans and Indians? Was it, on the other hand, the beginning of the end of traditional native culture because it resulted in the decimation of so many bands and tribes and because it destroyed so many aspects of traditional culture? Perhaps it was both a golden age and a disaster, as well as everything in between.

Fur traders and explorers themselves, as individuals, did not undermine the cultures they entered. Indeed, many of them “went native.” The rest at least “went along with” native ways in order to conduct trade. It was through trade, however, that capitalism was introduced, and capitalism was the system upon which other institutions--religious, governmental and educational--were built. It was the power of these institutions which caused the great cultural change and upheaval that began with the French fur trade, continued through the domination of the British and Americans, and persist today.

What was the ultimate effect of the fur trade on native women? What was the legacy that the fur trade left for women, who, at the outset, were such a vital part of the trade? Were they healthier? Did they gain access to more resources within the community? Did they gain greater autonomy? Were bonds among family and community members enhanced? Were they stronger and more secure in their positions as decision-makers? Did they gain more control over their own lives and those of their

children? Were their positions as individuals and as members of the community strengthened? The answer for most women was “no.” How, then, did the Ojibwa culture survive? How did native women carry out their daily responsibilities, meet their own needs, and manage to maintain their traditional culture in the face of vast cultural changes, especially those that had a clearly negative impact on their health, spirituality, and relationships with others? The key for Ojibwa women may have been a strong propensity for adaptation. The varied responses of women to the challenges brought about by cultural upheaval, and the traditional Ojibwa characteristics of cooperation and inclusion of useful products, beliefs and behaviors from other cultures were, perhaps, keys to the survival of the culture.

Great changes in daily life resulted from the change from a needs-based economy to a profit-based economy. Production of surplus was an element of both systems; however, in the needs-based economy, surplus was held to fulfill future needs within the family or clan or to be given away with the expectation of reciprocity. The social status of an individual or family was, in part, dependent on what the individual or family could give away. In the profit-based economy, surplus was used to increase the wealth for the individual or family. Status became dependent on the amount of material wealth an individual or family was able to accumulate. This basic change in the economy affected women as producers of goods and as recipients of community resources. The concept of “work” changed for women because of the increased birth rate, decline in the ratio of men to women, move from the clan to the nuclear family, changes in marriage and family structure, changes in women’s status within the society, and the move from the traditional economy to capitalism.

The fur trade introduced a 300-year period of higher rates of disease, births, violence, homicide, alcoholism, poverty, economic dependence, and cultural, as well as economic, destruction.

The voices of most native women, as well as those of many native men, were silenced. We do not really know the extent to which these social phenomena affected individuals in the native culture. We do not know what happened to Lucy Penaseway after William Thompson stole her land to strip it of lumber, nor do we know how Susan Johnston managed, on a daily basis, to work with her husband in the fur trade and manage a household that included eight children. We do not know how women restructured their lives after they were “put away” because of laws regarding monogamy. We do know, however, that women played an important role in adapting to new ways of life:

Women, though they emerge less often in the non-Native records as leaders, also played an important role in accepting, rejecting, and initiating new ideas and behaviour. Their decisions about how to switch between resources to cope with short-term changes, their relations with non-Ojibwa marriage partners, their role in socializing children within mixed-group camps, their acceptance or rejection of new decorative techniques and means of clothing construction all affected Ojibwa responses to change. And it was the interplay among all of these factors--Native and non-Native, natural and supernatural, human and nonhuman, the influences of leaders and the desires of followers, the similar and different needs of men and women--that formed the very basis of the development of Ojibwa strategies for coping with change.¹

Young women began learning their social roles not from their mothers and other women in the clan to which they belonged, but from church authorities and, later, the church-run or government-run school. Girls who had gained from their culture a sense of autonomy in all things, including sexuality, began to learn Christian values of obedience, silence and chastity. Women who had once held equal and complementary positions with their partners in marriage were now learning to be subservient to their husbands. Women who had once had a voice in the decisions of the group now learned to defer to men for those decisions. Some women, but not all, learned these lessons well. Many continued to practice autonomy and self-expression to the extent that they could, and many continued to tell the

stories that are alive today and contain the tenets of Ojibwa belief. Some women did not endure, as statistics regarding alcohol abuse, violence, and suicide indicate.

Many questions arise regarding the change in roles within the family, not only for women who were mothers, but for grandmothers, also. If traditional women had three or four children, on average, and two of those were females who, in turn, had three or four children, then a traditional older woman would have six to eight grandchildren to whom she held a responsibility. A woman could reasonably be expected to carry out the demands placed on her by this arrangement. The needs of a capitalist system dictate control over the sexuality and reproduction of women, however, and women in fur trade society experienced a dramatic increase in the birth rate, averaging eight to twelve children. Their daughters, in turn, also had eight to twelve children. What changes occurred in the mother-child relationship and in the grandmother-grandchild relationship for these women who were likely to have a dozen children and forty or more grandchildren? What effect did this have on women's work, on provision of food, on traditional values and on the teaching of those values?

Changes in health and spirituality created other situations to which the Ojibwa had to adapt if they were to survive. In spite of epidemics, changes in traditional practices (both medical and spiritual), subsistence patterns, housing, and education, as well as a loss of status and autonomy, many women coped and adapted while maintaining the basic tenets of the culture. Ojibwa women continued, as part of the white world, as part of the traditional world, or as part of a culture that comprised both worlds. Many contributed to the continuation of the culture through traditions in folklore, subsistence patterns, healing practices, and spiritual rituals and beliefs. As Peers concludes: "Ultimately,...the western Ojibwa were unable to prevent the destruction of fur and game populations, the loss of land, and the

seizure of political control over their lives by the...government. [But] even during the worst years of the early reserve era...the western Ojibwa continued to adapt and to cope...From forest to parkland to plains...the western Ojibwa have displayed a vital spirit made flexible by their willingness to adapt and strengthened by their sense of continuity with an unbroken Ojibwa heritage.”²

Difficult problems abound in the study of Native American people and their relations with Europeans and European-Americans. It is not enough simply to say that the story of Indian-white relations is a story of an unchanging, static native culture being overtaken by a stronger and more dynamic European culture. Native culture, in fact, was not static, for as Dorris notes: “Native American societies rested upon intelligence. They developed and maintained usable, pragmatic views of the world. Those of their systems that had survived long enough to have been observed by fifteenth-century Europeans were certainly dynamic but clearly had worked for millennia.”³ Indians had developed many ways of adapting to other cultures before the arrival of white men. They had been in contact with other tribes and had already made adaptations to new homelands. In their dealings with white men, many decisions were based on advantages that could be gained through trading. Many new spiritual concepts were integrated into traditional thought and practice.

Every person who studies Native Americans does so from his own cultural perspective and with his own built-in biases. He cannot escape these. He must be aware of them and realize that he can approach, but never really reach, a true understanding of the complexities of the Native American peoples and their varied adaptations for survival or their ability to maintain a continuity of culture. Even “the historian who examines the history of a single tribe, during a brief period of time, may even in such restricted compass find it difficult to discern the character and distribution of beliefs within the native

community.”⁴ Stories that comprise the experience of the American Indian are intricate and complex. Relating any one of them, let alone giving one overall representation, is a challenging task, and when the stories are told in a format such as this thesis, they appear in an oversimplified form, re-told by a writer who has been unable to escape his own “-centrisms” (be they anthropological, temporal, cultural, racial or personal) and his own biases. As Dorris observes: “For most people, serious learning about Native American culture and history is different from acquiring knowledge in other fields, for it requires an initial, abrupt, and wrenching demythologizing.”⁵

Why pursue knowledge in a field that seems as unfathomable as that of the study of the Native American? In part, we do so in order

to learn from and, perhaps in a limited way, to emulate...[in] their careful observation of and pragmatic use of local minerals, plants, and animals, and their creative development of numerous plant forms for human benefit,...[their] enduring trust for kinship relations...[their] spirituality: undogmatic, experiential, integrated into a whole way of life, including environmental and kinship relations, with goals not only to worship suprahuman powers but also to protect, repair and improve the life of the individual and the tribe...Indian materiality, sociality and religiosity all have structures with a long interconnected history from which I (and others) can learn.⁶

We must accept the risk inherent in using sources that reflect views of white observers and historians and others separated from the culture under study. We must also accept the oral tradition and remembered experiences of the Ojibwa. We must use what we have in order to gain at least some insight to the ways in which Native Americans thought and behaved as human beings with human problems, motives and ways of coping.

We must, if we are to survive as a species, learn new ways of relating to each other and to the environment. We must examine the ways in which native women and men played their roles in “the life-

sustaining web of human, environmental, and spiritual relations.”⁷ As women today emerge from their era of silence and invisibility, they must look at the ways in which native cultures assured that the basic needs of native women were met, as well as the ways in which native women contributed, in turn, to the maintenance and improvement of life within their cultures. Certainly, if we are to live lives that are as fully humane as possible, we must look to those who came before us with the same basic needs, desires, and basic motivations. Native Americans were (and are), after all, human beings, and offer a great deal to other cultures.

Vescey reminds us that, in studying Native Americans,

what we learn about ourselves is that we white Americans are more deeply and tragically human than we tell ourselves in our political and congratulatory rhetoric...the study of Indian life that transcends Indian-white contact can help us expand our concept of who we are...History can serve as cultural therapy, releasing for us and our students the repressed images of our full humanity...Indian traditions have something to offer us non-Indians: values we have repressed or never known regarding environment, society, and the spiritual world...insights concerning the possibility of human systems that we might recover or attain...Historians like myself can teach us to say, “We have met the Indians and they are us.”⁸

Notes

1. Laura Peers, The Ojibwa of Western Canada (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1994), 139.
2. Ibid., 211.
3. Michael Dorris, “Indians on the Shelf,” in Calvin Martin, The American Indian and the Problem of History (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) 102.
4. Mary Young, “Pagans, Converts, and Backsliders, All: A Secular View of the Metaphysics of Indian-White Relations,” in Calvin Martin, *ibid.*, 79.
5. Dorris in Martin, *ibid.*, 103.
6. Christopher Vecsey, “Envision Ourselves Darkly, Imagine Ourselves Richly,” in Calvin Martin, *ibid.*, 123-124.
7. Ibid., 124.
8. Ibid., 126.

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