

CHANGES IN TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES FOR ALASKA NATIVES:
THEIR EFFECTS ON SENSE OF PURPOSE, DIRECTION, AND IDENTITY,
AND FAMILY AND COMMUNITY STATURE

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July 15, 2010

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A
THESIS

Presented to the Faculty
of the University of Alaska Fairbanks
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

By

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Fairbanks, Alaska

August 2010

Abstract

In the past century, especially since the 1960s, Alaska Natives have faced rapid cultural and socio-economic change as Western influences have increasingly infiltrated the Native life-ways; since the 1960s social problems, including alcohol abuse, violence, and suicide have plagued Native individuals, families and communities. Arguably, a source of these social problems is the striking shift from clearly defined gender roles for Native adults that guided youth to adulthood in the past to opaque and ambiguous roles for adults that draw on both traditional and Western cultures. Historically, clearly defined gender roles provided youth with the role models necessary for maturing into healthy, productive adults and thereby offered youth a sense of purpose, direction and identity. Today's youth must look for cues in both traditional and Western culture to envision their futures, and with often conflicting value systems and too few strong adult role models to follow, many youth, especially males, are floundering. Healthy adult and elder role models are essential to the well-being of Native youth as they mature into adulthood. The revitalization of mentors, role models and close relationships between adults and youth are critical to future health and well-being of Alaska Native individuals, families and communities.

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Dedication

For Joe

Thank you for taking all the risks, those seen and unforeseen

Introduction

During the past century, the impacts of rapid culture change on Alaska's indigenous peoples have been overwhelming. Shifts from semi-nomadic to permanent village life ways, requirements that youth attend school, conversion to Christianity, forced language change, consequences of disease epidemics, increasing reliance on wage labor, myriad technological changes and shifting cultural values have interacted to produce profound cultural change. In the wake of these generally exogenously induced changes there has been a more subtle form of change, one that has had a deep impact on individuals, families and communities – a change in the traditional roles of Alaska Native males and females that has affected their sense of purpose, direction, identity, and family and community stature. Collectively, these changes have profoundly impacted Alaska Native culture. It is the contention of the author that a shift in gender roles, weakened sense of purpose, direction and identity, and declining family and community stature lie at the heart of the widespread social problems facing Alaska Native communities in the early twenty-first century.

Traditionally in Alaska Native cultures males and females had clearly defined gender roles; roles were gender specific and complementary. In brief, men were the primary hunters and providers for their families and communities, and women raised the children, prepared and managed the foods and were the primary clothing and material makers. These clearly defined roles contributed to a sense of purpose, direction and identity for male and female adults and youth, while also providing youth with strong

role models who guided their maturity into adulthood. As Western cultures increasingly pervaded Native life, many of these clearly defined roles became more opaque. Western values, lifestyles and role models differed greatly from those of traditional life; these new influences shifted life ways away from traditional norms without offering clear pathways to viable alternatives.

Some of the most influential elements of Western cultures on Alaska's indigenous peoples and Native life ways were the impacts of Christian missionization, Western education, wage labor and technology. Also of significant influence, though more a consequence of "exposure to" than a result of being "imposed upon" was the introduction of disease, firearms, alcohol and Western foodstuffs. Firearms, Western foodstuffs and other Western influences introduced during the whaling and trading years benefited Native life ways and were easily absorbed without threatening the cardinal elements of indigenous cultures. However, the introduction of disease and the increase in the alcohol trade during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had devastating affects on Native peoples and communities; alcohol has continued to disrupt the lives of individuals, families and communities into the twenty-first century.

Western education, Christian missionaries and educators, wage labor and advances in technology all contributed to changes in men's and women's traditional roles and to their sense of purpose, direction and identity throughout the twentieth century. Christian missionaries and educators required Native youth to attend schools in their villages and/or they were sent to boarding schools. Native male and female youth increasingly developed Western knowledge and skills without being grounded in Western

cultures, and less frequently acquired adequate traditional knowledge and skills; therefore many youth and adolescents were unable to thrive in either their Native culture or in Western society. This left many unsure of which path to follow and how to be successful, which often resulted in poor self-esteem. For those adults and elders¹ who remained at home, the absence of youth in their families and communities left a void difficult to fill. The roles of parents and elders as role models and guides began to weaken in the absence of the younger generation and the contribution of older youth and adolescents to family and community life was greatly missed.

Education by the late twentieth century had changed dramatically. Students were able to attend high school in their home villages and many, especially Native women, were attending post-secondary schools and obtaining college degrees. More adolescent females than male adolescents appear to plan for their futures, graduate from high school and attend post-secondary school.² Many young women are developing marketable skills and obtaining year-round employment, becoming the primary breadwinners in their households. Many young males, however, are struggling in high school and fewer are graduating and making concrete plans for their future. Many continue to live with their parents or other relatives into adulthood, are employed intermittently and engage in subsistence hunting and fishing practices when they can. The once clearly defined roles

¹ In this thesis, elders with a lower case “e” refers to older adult Native men and women in general, whereas Elders, with a capital “E” is reserved for those older adults who have leadership positions in their communities and who are recognized by others for their exceptional wisdom, knowledge, contributions and leadership role.

² Judith Kleinfeld and Justin Andrews, “The Gender Gap in Higher Education in Alaska,” *Arctic* 59 no.4 (December 2006).

and sense of purpose, direction and identity of these young males have become increasingly obscured.

As the need for cash to purchase food and supplies and later to pay gas and electric bills grew for Alaska Natives, men and women sought wage work both in their villages and in larger cities. These demands took more and more Native men and women off the land and into white and blue collar jobs; consequently men's primary roles of hunter and meat provider and women's roles of clothing maker and procurer of wild foods declined. This shift impacted the complementary roles of men and women, creating lives which became increasingly separate; women became more independent as the necessity of the male hunter role declined. As men's role of provider and leader in the community evolved within an environment which became increasingly Western, this had a strong impact on Native male identity, and sense of purpose and direction were negatively affected.

Research in the early 1970s found Native males' sense of self was deeply grounded in the role of hunter, provider and family and community leader;³ the diminishment of this highly important role was destabilizing for many Native males. As wage work replaced much of the hunting life and cash income became the defining element of success and power, many Native males struggled with self-esteem and their sense of purpose, direction and identity. In contrast, most Native women did not derive their sense of identity from their wage work, but more from their roles as mothers and

³ Dorothy M. Jones, *Urban Native Men and Women – Differences in Their Work Adaptations* (Fairbanks: Institute of Social, Economic and Government Research, 1976).

care providers, and therefore their sense of self and self-esteem were not threatened by the Western forms of work in which many engaged.⁴

The impact of Western technology from eighteenth century firearms to late twentieth century computers on the lives and cultural values of Alaska Native adults and youth has been dramatic. Western technology has been both a benefit and a liability to Alaska Native peoples; influences such as firearms, boats and motors, Western foodstuffs, Western clothing and heating fuel eased or eliminated the threat of starvation and reduced many hardships. These influences also affected the traditional roles of men and women, individually and complementarily, which in turn affected children – the traditional activities children observed their parents engaged in had become replaced by Western activities. Technological advances also impacted the use of time; hunting and outdoor ventures formerly requiring days or weeks to complete could be accomplished in hours or days. This often resulted in time unaccounted for and contributed to the idle time with which many later struggled. Television and other later twentieth century technologies impacted the way youth spent their time and influenced their value systems. Technologies and the introduction of organized sports have also contributed to the generation gap between elders and youth; youth spend more time on computers and playing basketball than with elders learning traditional knowledge and skills.

This cultural evolution has various consequences for Native males and females, primarily since the mid-1900s when culture change was most rapid. Increased infrastructure, the establishment of military sites, advancement to statehood and later the

⁴ Jones.

discovery of oil contributed significantly to the cultural changes Alaska Natives experienced. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries many young Alaska Native males and females are struggling socially, economically and culturally. One of the greatest contributors to the challenges Native peoples face is alcohol. Mary Ehrlander notes, “today many northerners view alcohol abuse as the most pressing social problem in the region.”⁵ Rates of violent crime, child abuse, sexual assault and suicide are some of the highest in the Nation. Alaska’s alcohol mortality rate is 21 per 100,000 population, (three times the national rate), Alaska’s rate of forcible rape is more than twice the US rate, the homicide rate for 2003-2005 was 5.9 per 100,000 population, child sexual abuse is six times the national rate and Alaska’s suicide rate is twice the U.S. rate while the suicide rate for Native males is nearly four times that of females.⁶ These high rates of violence correlate with alcohol abuse.

This research suggests that a contributing factor in the high rates of social pathology among Alaska Natives is the loss of traditional gender roles due to the rapidly changing cultural environment. With the loss of gender roles, a clear sense of purpose, direction and identity has increasingly eluded many, particularly men. Additionally, as traditional roles of males and females changed and Alaska Native cultures became increasingly Westernized, each generation has been left with fewer strong role models to serve the next generation with positive examples. Furthermore, the importance of strong healthy role models who serve as beacons or guides for young people as they mature to

⁵ Mary Ehrlander, “The Historical Roots of a Frontier Alcohol Culture: Alaska and Northern Canada,” *The Northern Review* 32 (Spring 2010): 63.

⁶ Ehrlander, 64.

adulthood can not be overstated. Indeed, a resurgence of men consciously choosing to serve this role in their families and communities is necessary if Native males are to regain their purpose, direction, identity, and family and community stature and the trends in social problems in rural Alaska are to be reversed.

Methodology

This research is comprised of four components: the review of historical literature on Western culture change among Alaska Natives since contact, the analysis of interviews the author conducted with fourteen Alaska Native men and women, the analysis of a focus group conducted by the author with four Alaska Native men and women, and the author's personal experiences in Teller, a small Iñupiaq village on the Seward Peninsula, as a high school science teacher. The historical literature review is based on journal articles, ethnographies, monographs, biographies, autobiographies and oral histories. Time periods include pre-contact years (ten thousand years ago to approximately 1730), early contact years 1730-1850, transition years 1850-1980 and the "present era" 1980-2010. Research topics include traditional gender roles of Alaska Native men and women; gender role changes; identity; traditional educational/cultural practices; Western education in Alaska; Christian missionization in Alaska; the history of wage labor's impacts on Alaska Native men, women and culture; traditional and contemporary subsistence hunting and fishing practices; and contemporary issues related to the struggles of non-Native male youth. Related topics were reviewed in other circumpolar countries, mostly Canada.

Interviews with Alaska Native men and women were the second component of this research project. These interviews were conducted by the author during the winter and spring of 2009 and included seven Alaska Native men and seven Alaska Native women in three age brackets: 18-29, 30-59 and 60 and older. Interview participants were found through friends, professor suggestions and contacts, personal acquaintances, and public announcements made by the author. Interviews were conducted in person and over the phone (eleven and three respectively) and all were tape recorded.

The focus group was conducted in Barrow, Alaska in May 2009. Two Alaska Native men and two Alaska Native women in one age bracket, 18-29 responded to three open-ended questions. Focus group members were found through word of mouth and general announcements. The focus group was held in person and tape recorded.

The research topic is founded on the author's personal experience as a high school science teacher in Teller, Alaska from 2003-2006. Teaching experiences and observations of the striking effects of Western culture on village life stimulated the author's interest in Alaska Native culture, current challenges to well-being and this research topic.

Transcribing, coding and analyzing data

Personal interviews and the focus group discussion were transcribed, coded and analyzed by the interviewer/author. A total of 492 transcribed pages were color and font coded to allow for the identification of specific topics, ideas and recurring themes.

Grounded theory methodology was employed; the framework was modeled from

Qualitative Data: An Introduction to Coding and Analysis by Carl F. Auerbach and Louise B. Silverstein.⁷

Step 1 Raw Text

The transcription of each interview produced the raw text. Color coding the raw text allowed the author easily to identify areas of importance within the transcription.

Step 2 Relevant Text

The relevant text was highlighted according to the five main themes of the research question. Relevant text categories were, 1) role changes, 2) sense of purpose, 3) sense of direction, 4) sense of identity, and 5) changes in family and community stature.

Additional topic areas within the raw text offered important supportive material related to the five main themes. These were coded and identified as alternative comments of interest. Categories of alternative comments of interest were divided into five content areas; the first was information related to roles – complementary roles, contemporary roles of men and women related to hunting and the community, role models and mentors, and important influences. The second content area was related to youth - - youth and culture change, adolescence to adulthood, and futures. Thirdly, comments related to the transition between the past and the present were identified as - - traditional life to Western life, traditional customs no longer followed, and conflicts with the cash economy and subsistence life style. The fourth content area included specific topics such as - - employment, technology, education, language, drugs and alcohol, suicide, religion, violence and self-esteem. The last content area was specifically designated for the unique

⁷ Carl F. Auerbach and Louise B. Silverstein, *Qualitative Data: An Introduction to Coding and Analysis* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

ideas and personal experiences many interviewees shared in response to the interview questions.

The five major themes were divided into four subcategories: 1) Alaska Native men and women's roles past and present; 2) Alaska Native men, women and youth/adolescents' sense of purpose and direction past and present; 3) Alaska Native men, women and adolescents' sense of identity past and present; 4) family and community stature for Alaska Native men and women past and present. A "general theme" category was constructed to identify outlying important topics mentioned by many interviewees that did not fall within one of the five major themes.

Findings

Gender role changes

In analyzing the five themes the author found that gender roles for both men and women have changed significantly, however some important roles have remained consistent. Women are still mothers, home managers and food preparers; however many are now the primary bread winners in their families.

Fewer roles have remained intact for Alaska Native men. Though some men still fill the roles of hunters and providers, heads of household and mentors of men and boys, new roles for Alaska Native men include working for wages and combining part-time subsistence hunting and fishing with staying at home and raising and caring for children. Far fewer men today are the primary providers/breadwinners in their families and/or leaders in their communities.

Furthermore, the complementarity of men's and women's roles has diminished noticeably. For many a Western style family life of independence versus Alaska Native life way of interdependence has become the norm.

Sense of purpose and direction

With regard to sense of purpose and direction, the interviews showed that for Alaska Native women sense of purpose and direction have changed significantly; this includes securing a post-secondary education, maintaining year-round employment, being the primary provider for their families and managing two primary roles – mother/housekeeper and provider. However, sense of purpose and direction have remained consistent for some who care for and raise children and care for husbands, relatives and elders, as they manage the household.

Sense of purpose and direction among Alaska Native men appears to have changed significantly. For a large number of contemporary Alaska Native males, sense of purpose and direction do not appear to be as clear as they once were. Many men are struggling with obtaining employment that is challenging and meaningful; many move from job to job or have short term jobs and are unable to provide for their families; many are “laid back” and disinterested in their roles and responsibilities. Interviewees suggested that many men feel inadequate, useless, and hopeless and are experiencing despair. Shockingly high numbers commit suicide. Yet some Alaska Native men maintain a clear sense of purpose and direction in the traditional roles of providing for

their families through hunting and fishing, mentoring younger males and serving as head of the household.

Reduced sense of purpose and direction can be seen in Native youth today, many of whom spend excessive amounts of time watching television, playing video games and “hanging out”.

Sense of identity

With regard to Alaska Native men’s and women’s sense of identity, both changes and continuity can be seen. Women’s sense of identity continues to be based in motherhood, care giving and managing the household. However, many women are now the primary providers/breadwinners for their families, leaders in their communities, hunters and some are even whaling captains. Many view themselves as strong, capable and independent. This greater independence and increasing assumption of traditionally male roles are new aspects of identity for Alaska Native women in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

In contrast, sense of identity among many men has become strained. There are some men who continue to identify as hunters/providers of meat for the family, heads of the household, primary wage earners and leaders in the family and community. However, sense of identity among men is not as clear as it once was. Many men are not the primary providers in their families and communities; their status has declined, and their self-esteem and identity appear to be severely strained. According to several adult male

interviewees hunters are often viewed as unemployed people, and the role of hunting is viewed by others as less of an occupation than wage work.

Sense of identity among Alaska Native male and female youth/adolescents has changed significantly, yet there is some continuity. A boy's first successful kill of a large mammal is important in his development from boyhood to manhood and for female youth the physiological changes that occur at menstruation mark her early transition from girlhood to womanhood.

In other ways, sense of identity for contemporary Alaska Native male adolescents is not as clear as it was in the past and is often defined or influenced by Western standards. Various mile stones or achievements mark young males as no longer adolescents, but their identity as men is not clear either. The day they graduate from high school and/or turn eighteen, how much liquor they consume, holding an "adult" job, and making a significant income mark adulthood for many.

Family and community stature

Interviewees affirmed that family and community stature is directly related to the roles of men and women; role changes and reversals for many Alaska Native men and women have directly impacted their family and community stature. Men's status as hunters has been lowered because meat can be purchased at the store. Those who are economically well-situated tend to have high self-esteem and a place in the community, whereas hunters tend to experience lower status in the village because they are not earning a cash income. As noted above, men who spend time hunting tend to be looked

upon as unemployed people, rather than hunters. Women are filling more leadership positions; they are “running the village” and hold high status positions such as college president, mayor, religious leader and city council member.

General themes

In addition to the five major themes identified above, a variety of relevant topics were identified in the coding process; these “general themes” are summarized below. Regarding Alaska Native males, interviewees revealed that many young males are bored and passive, with little to do. They do little to contribute to family well being or to prepare for adulthood. Many Native men are giving up; interviewees expressed the opinion that changes in our society and in men’s roles contributed to the high rate of suicide. Interviewees mentioned that many men struggle with repeat jail offenses and that when men are incarcerated repeatedly it “marks them – they’re bad”; when they go to jail two or three times it becomes hard for men to find employment. Many interviewees recognize a generation gap between youth and parents, youth and elders and adults and elders. They see a need for role models connecting adult men and young men and that the shortage of strong male role models is harming Alaska Natives. Elders and adult men and women suggested that many marriages are breaking up because “kids are having kids”; many times relatives are left to raise the younger children. Some young couples do not marry, yet they have children, and many young fathers are ignoring their responsibilities as parents.

There were positive, hopeful comments as well. Many interviewees expressed their confidence in the value of culture camps. Culture camps have become one of the greatest efforts to help youth decide to lead healthy, productive lives. Mentorships have also become popular and important in many of the larger communities where job shadowing opportunities guide young people into a decisive path for their futures. And lastly, many adult interviewees noted that more parents and older people are pushing young men to get jobs; many have high expectations for their children and are encouraging them to stay in high school and get an education and to maintain their cultural education; and many push their children, males and females, to stand on their own feet.

Recognition of research participants

As a first time researcher I was very fortunate to be introduced to the Native men and women who partook in this research project. The time and interest they invested in the long interview process and their willingness to contribute in such a personal way was extremely valuable to the project overall. I felt that it was important and necessary for me to gain not only an in-depth understanding, but also a broader awareness of my research topics in order to write about them with confidence. Interviewing Alaska Native men and women across a broad spectrum of ages offered insights from multiple generations and across gender lines.

The wealth of knowledge shared by the Elders offered fresh perspectives on life lived long ago; their personal accounts of cultural change and their views on how these

changes have affected the culture and individuals offered depth to complex topics. The observations and insight offered by Native men and women in their late teens and early twenties contributed unique view points that only those who were born and raised in an era dominated by Western society but also an era when traditional culture is rebounding and finding its natural place in Native life could make. This is an era in which youth are encouraged to understand their cultural heritage and retain traditional values while also finding their way in Western society. Middle-aged Native men and women shared their unique observations, understanding and viewpoints from perspectives of those who may be most prepared to bridge the two worlds, having been exposed most equally to both worlds. These men and women know much about traditional life ways and have many skills passed down from previous generations; however they have also developed the skills necessary to live “successfully” in Western society. The observations and wisdom of these men and women illustrate the realities of disruptive change but also demonstrate the resilience of those who have embraced both worlds.

To be able to write a thesis based on ideas and hypotheses I had developed regarding consequences of rapid cultural change, it was imperative that I consult with Alaska Natives to learn whether my initial findings made sense to them and to ask them for their own insight regarding the impacts of culture change. The rich insight, deeply personal knowledge and cultural awareness each research participant shared during the interviews created the foundation on which this thesis now stands. Their acknowledgement, support, and affirmation of the ideas and issues I raised, as well as the contribution of their own ideas, insights and personal understandings of these challenges

enriched my comprehension of these topics, creating a more holistic and cross-cultural view from which I approached my research, findings and writing. Because of their valuable stories, examples, experiences, and integrity I have the confidence to share my findings and conclusions. To each of my interviewees: I am grateful for your time and support, and I extend a very special thank you to each of you.

Chapter One

Pre-Contact Era

Introduction

The framework for this thesis lies within seven time frames; the first is the pre-contact era considered approximately ten thousand years ago⁸ to 1730, the early contact era encompassing the first 120 years of contact, approximately 1730-1850, the early, middle and late transition years 1850-1900, 1900-1950 and 1950-1980 respectively and lastly, the present era 1980-2010.

Chapter One, the pre-contact era, addresses the cultural norms for northern⁹ Alaska Native men, women and youth with regard to their gender roles, sense of purpose, direction, identity, and family and community stature. Role models and important influences for male and female youth, skill development and education are also addressed. Chapter One provides the foundation on which all future culture change will be evaluated.

Before the age of Russian, European, and Euro-American arctic explorers, the nomadic peoples of Alaska's far north roamed the tundra, explored the seas and floated

⁸ Paleolithic peoples are thought to have passed across the Bering land bridge or Beringia between what is today the Chukchi Peninsula of Siberia and the Seward Peninsula of Alaska for more than three thousand years. When the glaciations receded and the Bering Sea covered the land bridge approximately ten thousand years ago, a significant number of Paleolithic peoples had settled in northwest North America (Haycox 2002, 15). Descendants of these early peoples include three broad, general groups of Native Alaskans: Aleuts, Eskimos and Indians (Hunt 1976, 11).

⁹ The literature upon which this thesis stands demonstrates that the gender role changes herein described have occurred among all Alaska Native groups. However, because accounting for patterns of change and for all changes that occurred (at a variety of times) in each of the major culture groups would require extensive detail that is not central to this thesis, I focus on the northern regions of Alaska.

the rivers in a cyclical pattern driven by powers belonging only to nature and tradition. As the four seasons ebbed and flowed so did the native peoples of this vast land. Semi-nomadic and nomadic life ways were shaped by the demands associated with securing the basic necessities of food, clothing and shelter. However, embedded within these basic human needs was the richness of ingenious, exceedingly adaptable and stalwart peoples. Their cultural strength was founded on the deeply ingrained traditional roles of men and women; roles that remained clearly defined over thousands of years.

For centuries, indigenous peoples of northern Alaska divided men's and women's activities into two mutually exclusive parts - those of hunter, fisherman, toolmaker, shelter builder, and dog driver and those of caretaker, food gatherer, processor and distributor, and maker of clothing and footwear, respectively.¹⁰ Though these roles were specific to each gender, they were complementary. The meat men brought home was cleaned and prepared for eating or for storage by the women. Hides and skins were cleaned, tanned or dried to be made into clothing and *mukluks*.¹¹ Women birthed, cared for and raised infants and toddlers; later men taught boys how to hunt and fish, observe animal behavior, read weather patterns, understand land topography and sea ice conditions and taught them how to drum and sing. Women taught girls how to care for young children, cook foods and prepare others for storage, gather greens and berries, sew hides and furs, cut fish, and sing and dance. Both men and women were storytellers,

¹⁰ Lisa Frink, "Fish Tales: Women and Decision Making in Western Alaska," in *Many Faces of Gender: Roles and Relationships Through Time in Ingenious Northern Communities*, eds. Lisa Frink, Rita Shepard and Gregory A. Reinhart (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2002), 99.

¹¹ Mukluks are a soft, tall boot often made of seal skin or reindeer hide and lined with fur; commonly worn by indigenous peoples of the arctic.

passing on cultural knowledge to their children through oral traditions of song and dance.¹² It is through these roles that men and women felt a strong sense of purpose, direction and contribution to the family and community and through which they developed a strong sense of personal identity.

Their intricately compatible work reflected the interdependence of men and women; each family member knew his or her role and responsibilities and adhered to them in most situations. Although there was a recognized division of labor by gender, it was far from rigid at any age level.¹³ The roles of men and women were often shared in times of need. It was in a woman's best interest to know how to hunt (otherwise she might starve) and in a man's best interest to know how to sew (otherwise he might freeze or drown if his clothing or boat cover needed repair). Individuals were not looked down upon when engaging in these activities; they were considered skilled and wise to have potentially life-saving abilities.¹⁴

It was during adolescence and young adulthood that a child's sense of purpose and direction unfolded and the lucid roles of adulthood appeared one developmental stage building upon the other. This developmental process contributed to each person's identity. It was during adolescence and young adulthood that males and females acquired

¹² Jennifer Ann Tobey, "Re-Peopling the House: Household Organization within Deg Hit'an Villages, Southwest Alaska," in *Many Faces of Gender: Roles and Relationships Through Time in Ingenious Northern Communities*, eds. Lisa Frink, Rita Shepard and Gregory A. Reinhart (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2002), 86.

¹³ Norman A. Chance. *The Eskimo of North Alaska* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), 26.

¹⁴ Barbara Bodenhorn, "'I'm Not the Great Hunter, My Wife Is': Inupiat and anthropological models of gender," *Inuit Studies* 14 (1990): 60.

highly specific skill sets, which later led to defining their roles and family and community stature.

As this chapter unfolds and the traditional roles of Alaska Native men and women are further defined, it will be clear that it was through this process of the development of childhood skill sets that clear lines of gender specific demarcation were formed. As adolescents matured, the refinement of their gender specific skill sets formed their clearly defined gender roles, which in turn offered individuals the security of a sense of purpose, direction and identity.

Identification of Men's and Women's Traditional Roles

Men's traditional roles

In historical Alaska Native culture, men's roles were steadfast and clear, based on traditional teachings, age old knowledge and an accumulation of experiences. Typical roles of Iñupiaq men included that of hunter, sled and boat builder, tool and shelter maker, storyteller, food provider and the social roles of family member: father, brother, uncle, and grandfather and community member, including leader, chief, guide, and spokesperson. These roles required physical strength, skill, patience, tolerance, ingenuity, determination, perseverance, improvisation, cooperation, and above all an unwavering sense of self-confidence and self-assuredness.

Most prominent of men's roles was that of hunter and provider. Their ingeniousness, accumulated knowledge, resourcefulness, determination and stoicism in the face of cold and physical discomforts garnered them respect. Meat was not the sole by-product of the hunt; large mammals also provided bone and antler, hide, fur, organ

tissue and sinew which were utilized by Alaska Native peoples. Animal hide for clothing and boots provided warmth and protection in the harshest of environments, as well as boat coverings and dog sled harnesses. Sinew was used as thread for sewing clothing and ties for strapping and mending; animal bone and antler were used for tool and weapon making and shelter building. Therefore the kill of an animal, primarily large ocean mammals such as seal, walrus, polar bear, and whale and the larger terrestrial mammals of moose and caribou were as essential for dietary sustenance as they were for accumulating material necessities.

Common goals for young men were to develop fine hunting skills and mature into highly respected and successful hunters. Such ideals were strongly expressed among the St. Lawrence Island Yup'ik in Carol Jolles' *Faith, Food and Family in a Yupik Whaling Community*, "To us Eskimos, hunting is our life. It very much keeps our bodies alive."¹⁵ Yesterday, as today, the Eskimo hunted to be an Eskimo. The ultimate compliment is to be told "You're a hunter!" or "You're a man!" Being a hunter and being a man are inseparable.¹⁶ "From childhood on up, hunting is our main trade out here,"¹⁷ commented a young Yup'ik man from Gambell (Sivuqaq) village¹⁸ in the mid-twentieth century. These are the sentiments of indigenous men of the arctic and sub-arctic where each young man dreamed of fulfilling the prescribed role of master hunter.

¹⁵ Carol Zane Jolles, *Faith, Food and Family In a Yupik Whaling Community* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2002), 274.

¹⁶ Richard K. Nelson, *Hunters of the Northern Forest* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 311.

¹⁷ Charles C. Hughes, *An Eskimo Village in the Modern World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960), 136.

¹⁸ Sivokak is the Yup'ik name for Gambell village on St. Lawrence Island (Hughes, 1960, v).

As young men grew into skilled hunters and sled, tool and shelter builders, their understanding of the laws of nature was fundamental to their intimate understanding of their physical surroundings in both animate and inanimate objects. Through observation of weather, sea ice, terrestrial seasonal changes and animal behavior, young men gained the knowledge required for safe travel and a successful hunt. The development of these skills in turn bolstered their self-confidence and gained the respect of others. Their roles unfolded as their sense of purpose and direction grew through the teachings, demonstrations, corrections and guidance of adult family members and elders.

And though there were practical benefits derived from one's role as hunter, there were equally as valuable psychological benefits as well. While the practicality of the hunt was to provide food and material supplies essential for survival, the psychological benefit was that bringing home these necessities provided men with a clearly defined identity; a skilled, successful hunter was pre-eminent in the prestige hierarchy of Alaska Native society.¹⁹ Anthropologist, Margaret Lantis comments on the mixed components of the hunting role, both practical and psychological, by suggesting, “. . . people depended solely on hunting and fishing, the physical need for food, social need for prestige of the great hunter, psychological need to satisfy an ideal of the self . . .”,²⁰ hunting and fishing, then, fulfilled all of these functions.

Positions of high stature within society were valued by young men. Men strove for status throughout young adulthood and into middle age. In most instances a

¹⁹ Hughes, *An Eskimo Village*, 133.

²⁰ Hughes, *An Eskimo Village*, 134.

community leader was a man of significant hunting skill, generosity, diplomacy, authority and supernatural knowledge and powers.²¹ Most notable of the leaders in northern coastal villages were whaling captains; whaling captains continue to enjoy high stature and prestige. A Native Elder and interview participant for this research project supported this assertion by commenting: “. . . if you’ve acquired that status of a whaling captain, you’re respected by the entire community.”

It was essential that one was industrious, hard working and skillful. Traditionally, men who had killed a whale or a polar bear received the highest esteem from family and community members. The skills of the polar bear hunter demanded great strength, agility and adeptness to avoid the swinging, crushing paw of an adult bear while also trying to aim and lance the animal through the heart. An accomplished hunter was famed for his skillful darting and jumping with a lance and was referred to as a man of prowess and most often singled for special honors.²² In Gambell on St. Lawrence Island it was only the great hunters, those who had killed a polar bear or a whale, who were buried on top of the mountain; all others were put on the lower slopes, graded according to their status in life.²³

Attractions of the hunting life were plentiful. Hunting offered an opportunity for men to express individuality, win the rewards of accomplishment, experience the

²¹ Shepard Krech III. “The Subarctic Culture Area,” in *Native North Americans: An Ethnohistorical Approach*, eds., Molly R. Mignon and Daniel L. Boxberger (Dubuque: Kendal/Hunt, 1997), 94.

²² Hughes, *An Eskimo Village*, 124.

²³ Hughes, *An Eskimo Village*, 133.

excitement and threat of gambling with their lives, enjoy the opportunity to prove mastered skills and experience the satisfaction of being a provider.

Roles of men in relation to other family members

Additional roles of men were demonstrated by their relationship to family and community members. Historically the relationship patterns between father and son, uncle and nephew, father and daughter, brother and brother, husband and wife and new husband and father-in-law demonstrated the respect and dignified reserve men were expected to have. There was a definite hierarchical relationship pattern between married men and women and also between the men and women of different families. It is important to recognize these relationship roles, as they actualize the traditional position and identity of males within the family and community by demonstrating the level of respect men were shown by women, children, peers and other males.

Even in the mid-twentieth century one could see evidence of traditional male kinship roles on St. Lawrence Island. Anthropologist Charles C. Hughes noted the father and son relationship was reflected in the humbleness a son expressed. There was a never ending element of “shyness”, of respect and utter obedience to one’s father; the relationship was never relaxed, even though the child may have been in the prime of his life.²⁴ A young man in Gambell village explained it this way: “As long as the children are under the control of the Dad, they can be scolded at will by him...there is no age limit. It’s not like the 21 age limit, when the person becomes an adult. He may be 30 years old

²⁴ Hughes, *An Eskimo Village*, 236.

in the Eskimo way.”²⁵ This very sentiment was expressed by an older man during our interview in the spring of 2009: “Me, I go with my dad to go caribou hunting. He then turns me over to my Uncle . . . to go whaling . . . even though I am an adult he (the father) has that authority; he retains his authority throughout his whole life . . . we do what they tell us to do . . . and there was no questioning him about it. And that’s just the way it was; out of reverence and out of respect . . . we revere our parents as long as they are alive.”

Even a male elder who is no longer an active hunter is still consulted by his sons about when to go hunting, how to properly care for the boat and equipment; decisions about the apportionment of goods are also made by the senior male. This profoundly important traditional role relationship between adult Alaska Native men of all Alaskan peoples was critical in the development of a younger man’s sense of identity and place within the larger scope of relations and community.

The father and daughter relationship in St. Lawrence Island Yup’ik culture was similar to that of father and son, one of utmost respect. Daughters’ activities are under complete control by the fathers. One adult woman in the 1950s remembered: “He used to rule me while I was with him. I used to do everything what he said to me. But when I get married, he don’t have to rule me any more. He leave all these to my husband, as I become my husband’s and no more my father’s.”²⁶ These were the very sentiments a female Elder shared during our interview: “Well, when we were growing up, (at) a young

²⁵ Hughes, *An Eskimo Village*, 236.

²⁶ Hughes, *An Eskimo Village*, 237.

age they told us to respect the boys and the men. We would have to respect them, we don't even run in front of them, we have to go around them The girls can't beat up the boys, fight them, cause when they grow up they gonna be the provider for the family . . . so that's how we are, we have to respect all the boys, since they were the babies.”

Through the mid-twentieth century, the relationship of St. Lawrence Island Yup'ik husbands and wives was not unlike that of the authoritarian father and daughter relationship; a woman was said to “belong” to her husband and upon marriage she loses her affiliation with her birth clan to join that of her husband's.²⁷ As one husband speaks of his relationship with his wife, “Leila belongs to me now. When we take our wife, we call her just like *ilakwa* [i.e. relative]. We bring her from her father, and her father give to us and she never belongs to her father anymore.”²⁸ As one female Elder explained there was a distinctive hierarchical relationship between husbands and wives too: “When we're growing, it was the men who was the rule(r) of the family . . . we submit to our husband, they told us what to do, we have to listen” However, there was also an important relationship of mutual respect based on the rich economic complementarity of men's and women's traditional roles. It was known that in order for a man to be a successful hunter, he must have a wife; their relationship was usually one of considerable support, affection and respect.²⁹

²⁷ Hughes, *An Eskimo Village*, 238.

²⁸ Hughes, *An Eskimo Village*, 247.

²⁹ Hughes, *An Eskimo Village*, 238.

These examples of the kinship roles men had in traditional St. Lawrence Island Yup'ik culture confirmed their leadership positions, their role of authority within the immediate and extended family and community. The leadership and authoritarian kinship roles of men when allied with the powerful role of hunter created a strong male identity and high stature within the family and community. Their roles were very well defined; built upon a physical and intellectual foundation of strength, authority, courage, and confidence, which had prevailed in their culture for thousands of years.

Women's traditional roles

Traditionally the roles of Alaska Native women were equally as valuable and complex as the roles of Alaska Native men across cultures. Necessary sewing, cooking, food gathering and procurement and child rearing skills were developed and refined over years of practice and modeling by mothers, aunts, sisters and female elders.

To rank women's roles in order of importance is nearly impossible, as each was critical to the survival of the family. However, one of the most important role-defining skills, often requiring years to master, was that of food procurement and processing.³⁰ For those who lived in food storage-based economies, planning, production and storage of each seasonally available food was critical for the survival of the family and at times of the community.³¹ In addition to processing and procuring foods, advanced management skills and short and long range decision making skills were essential to assure an

³⁰ Frink, 100.

³¹ Frink, 96.

adequate winter food supply.³² It was critical for women to determine the quantity of food necessary to feed their families throughout the winter, as well as budget for sled dog energy needs and for feasting at potlatches.³³ As one elderly man from Barrow describes “. . . a woman takes care of the kids and food. She should know how much they got left, how much food there is for the kids. They always check the food. A man is always asking his wife ‘how much have you got left?’ And the woman says ‘we have so much, to last us so many days or weeks.’ The woman always takes care of the food.”³⁴

A strong sense of ownership existed not only in the processing of bulk subsistence foods, but also in their management and later distribution. Control over which foods were eaten and when was also directed by the women of each household. In the Cup’ik community of Chevak, young mothers controlled the daily allocation of foodstuffs and portioned stored food at mealtimes.³⁵

In the past more so than today, men and women practiced a gender-based division of labor in the collection and processing of subsistence foods.³⁶ As hard as men worked to fish, the women worked to process this intensively harvested resource. Procurement of fish required an enormous investment in time and energy, often keeping women busy twelve hours a day.³⁷ Processing of fish was commonly an intergenerational activity;

³² Frink, 100.

³³ Frink, 104.

³⁴ Chance, *The Eskimo of North Alaska*, 51.

³⁵ Frink, 104.

³⁶ Frink, 99.

³⁷ Frink, 96.

grandmothers, mothers and daughters usually cut fish together. Storage was a learned art, requiring the correct positioning of fish in underground pits and layering of grass for proper air circulation.³⁸

Though food preparation and storage were probably considered the primary responsibility of women, naturally their roles in family life and community extended far beyond. Outside of these visible roles for women there was a deeply traditional and spiritual role; one based on the predator-prey relationship between the hunter and the hunted. Common philosophies held by most northern hunter-gatherer societies is the relationship men have with their prey; by treating the caught animal properly, the animals *give themselves up* to the hunter. Among the Iñupiat, “animals give themselves up to men whose wives are generous and skillful,”³⁹ therefore the critical role in this predator-prey relationship is actually the role the wife plays in the family. During whaling season in Barrow the whaling captain knows all too well that whatever whale they catch has first come to his wife.⁴⁰

This belief system provides that “when a woman loses a husband, she can sew, or get food by begging or working for it. But when a man loses his wife, he can’t do anything.”⁴¹ Thus, in Iñupiaq culture a man must have a *wife* to whom the hunted animal will come and give itself. A woman on the other hand can benefit from the community’s obligations to share, which are required in order to keep the animals coming back.

³⁸ Frink, 101-103.

³⁹ Bodenhorn, 61.

⁴⁰ Bodenhorn, 61.

⁴¹ Bodenhorn, 62.

Additional supporting roles of women in the hunt contribute to the development and sustainability of their identity and provide a valuable sense of purpose in the marriage. Most marked is the role of the whaling captain's wife. As the captain's wife a woman has clearly defined roles throughout the whaling season. Prior to the hunt she has made special whale hunting boots for her husband to wear during the hunt. She has also made a special pair of mittens; the left handed one her husband keeps in the boat during the hunt. While at home she places a special wooden pot and her husband's drum by the entrance of their house. It is essential that she move slowly in their home, think peaceful thoughts and act generously. Only in this way will the whale come to her husband.⁴² Once a whale is caught and brought to shore it is the role of the captain's wife to offer it a welcoming drink of fresh water.

In some communities women had important roles within pre-hunt rituals. In Wales (Kingigin),⁴³ a coastal Eskimo village on Alaska's Seward Peninsula, it was common for a woman to be considered a ceremonial member of the crew. She played an integral role in the elaborate rituals prior to, during and after the hunt.

The wife of a whaling captain had many important roles within the family and community. Prior to and during whaling season she was seamstress, food preparer, communicator, and organizer. In Barrow it was common for the whaling captain's wife to sew parkas, mittens and waterproof boots for the whalers and crew members months before the season started. New clothing was made every year because it was tradition.

⁴² Bodenhorn, 62-63.

⁴³ Kingigin is the Iñupiaq name for the village of Wales (Burch 2006, 1).

Clothing was made of caribou, wolf and seal skins; hides and furs were made into ruffs, socks, pants and mukluks. All of these materials needed to be gathered and prepared months before the sewing commenced.⁴⁴ Preparation of animal hides was also women's work; therefore her role in the whale hunt often started a year in advance. She also sewed special mittens for herself that would be worn when she poured fresh water on the whale her husband caught. Crew member's wives joined the captain's wife in sewing new *umiaq*⁴⁵ covers that were later stretched over the wooden boat frame, prior to the hunt.

Once a whale was taken in Barrow it was the traditional Iñupiaq custom for the captain's wife to take responsibility for formally greeting the whale with a 'drink' of fresh water and offering it thanks for allowing itself to be taken.⁴⁶ For the period of the hunt, she also gave her left handed mitten and her belt to her husband (the whaling captain), symbolizing the crew's ties to the land.⁴⁷

On St. Lawrence Island celebrations of the whaling season ended in late June, and foraging began in July.⁴⁸ Women picked and gathered seaweeds, greens and berries; these foods were stored in underground caches for eating during the winter months.

⁴⁴ Margaret Blackman, *Sadie Brower Neakok: An Iñupiaq Woman* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1989), 204 passim.

⁴⁵ An *umiaq*, commonly called a skin boat or kayak, is a large boat typically covered by seal or walrus hide and made with a wooden frame.

⁴⁶ Blackman, 205.

⁴⁷ Blackman, 204.

⁴⁸ Jolles, 275, 292.

Young children often helped with these tasks, as they spent much of their time with their mothers. Even older men, who were too feeble to hunt, helped with these tasks.⁴⁹

Spring bird hunting and egg gathering was work both men and women did. While men did most of the bird hunting and egg collecting (egg collecting is dangerous work when gathered from cliffs), bird cleaning was done by the women and children. Birds were skinned, gutted and dried on racks. Most of them were stored for winter and then eaten boiled along with old blubber.⁵⁰

Summertime was also fishing season; women spent much of their time cutting, drying and smoking fish, primarily salmon, arctic char, grayling, trout and Dolly Vardens. The smoked and dried fish were saved for winter meals and made ideal snacks for men and dogs when they traveled by dog team. Fish were also put up to supplement other meats for winter dog food.

Roles of women in relation to other family members

The woman's kinship roles in relation to her husband, children and other family members contributed to the larger picture of women's roles in traditional St. Lawrence Island Yup'ik culture as well. The clearly defined family roles of daughter, sister, wife, mother and mother-in-law offered a sense of boundaries and position within the family and allowed for the success of complementary roles between men and women.

Typically a warm and relaxed relationship was common among female siblings, the older often caring for, in some cases even raising her younger sisters. Younger

⁴⁹ Hughes, *An Eskimo Village*, 122.

⁵⁰ Jolles, 276-277.

siblings learned by watching and helping their older sisters, who often served as role models. Once adults, female siblings were often of great support, guidance and help to one another. Traditionally women were midwives to their sisters, helping during the birth and throughout the following days, as there was always much to be done with a newborn, tending to other young children and the daily house hold chores. Adult female siblings worked together, to put up meat, to manage the food cache, to clean, tan and sew skins together and often they harvested wild foods together with the help of their older children.

The woman's role in relation to her children of either gender was one of superiority; though this relationship was known to be based on love, support and a great deal of affection, women had the upper hand in raising their children. One Iñupiaq female Elder commented about women's traditional roles: "By being loving, caring, kind, compassionate and nurturing in their home . . . (women) provid(ed) guidance and discipline . . . love and kindness goes a long way." Mothers had age-related work and contribution expectations of both sons and daughters; children cut wood, hauled ice and water, participated in childcare and helped take care of the house. Both young boys and girls picked berries and greens and helped with other women's work, though as the male child grew up, he would reduce the amount of time he spent doing womanly chores while the daughter increased her participation in these activities.

One context in which women held preeminent control and superiority over men was in relation to foods. The game animals and all other food that a man brought into the house were turned over to the hunter's wife; these were then hers to clean and put away

and/or distribute amongst family members. The husband had no say in this matter; even upon going to another woman's house and asking for meat, he would be refused, whereas his wife would be given food without hesitation.⁵¹

Women's traditional roles and their important relationships to others contributed to the richness of Alaska Native female identity and family and community stature. These roles and relationship patterns were powerful insignias and when allied with men's traditional roles created an environment of complementarity – a dominant cultural theme in arctic and sub-arctic life.

Sense of Purpose, Direction and Identity in Relation to Manhood and Womanhood

Clearly defined roles of adult men and women offered a clear sense of purpose, direction and identity, and were formed during adolescence and young adulthood. These developmental stages occurred along the pathways from boyhood to manhood and girlhood to womanhood. As Alaska Native youth gained greater independence and responsibility while developing gender-specific skills they moved along the continuum from childhood to adulthood, and these traits were passed on to subsequent generations.

In traditional Iñupiaq culture young people were considered “adults” when they demonstrated to the community that they were able to support a family of their own. For a young man this assumed his hunting skills were proficient and for a young woman it

⁵¹ Hughes, *An Eskimo Village*, 238.

meant advanced housekeeping practices, arctic and sub-arctic food storage techniques and skills in skin-processing and in making fur clothing.⁵²

Traditionally, sense of purpose, direction and identity were not topics of conversation or of conscious concern; the natural progression of traditional life fulfilled all three components. The roles of adult men and women and the interaction they had with their children created an assumed sense of purpose and direction on an hourly, daily, seasonal and lifelong basis. Though this sense of purpose and direction was based on the necessities of survival, it provided structure, direction, and reason for living. As young men and women matured, following traditional gender based divisions of labor and developed gender-related skills, these roles in conjunction with their tribal membership created a clear sense of identity.

Young males

Men's primary sense of purpose, direction and identity was derived from their role as hunter; all other activities and relationships related to identity formation extended from this one central skill. As young boys were growing up the identity of hunter (primary meat provider), in conjunction with leadership attributes such as vigor, generosity, honesty and modesty were traits that young boys and men deemed worthy of relentless pursuit. These qualities were found in whaling captains among Iñupiat and in the leaders of all great hunting families and therefore served as examples for the development of a young man's sense of purpose and direction. There was never any

⁵² Igor I. Krupnik, "Shifting Patterns, Lasting Partnerships," *Inuit Knowledge and Academic Science in Arctic Cultural Research*. Volume of keynote speeches, 11th Inuit Studies Conference, Nuuk, Greenland (1999): 56.

doubt about the future lives of young men, what they were to become and what role they would fill. This clarity and certainty offered young men a deep sense of security, provided definition and structure to their lives and offered them a vision for the future. Charles C. Hughes' notes quite aptly in "Eskimo Boyhood" that young men "knew what they were going to be doing for the rest of their lives."⁵³

As a young man matured, adolescence and young adulthood were self-defining years; significant amounts of time were spent hunting with adult men, honing the requisite hunting skills for family and community leadership. The *qalgi*⁵⁴ known as the men's house or family place of gathering was instrumental in a young man's development. Presided over by adult men and male elders, the *qalgi* was where boys became men; it was the "portal to manhood."⁵⁵

Prior to the arrival of Christian missionaries by the late 19th century, every Iñupiaq village had one or more *qalgi*.⁵⁶ The *qalgi* was a gathering place for ceremonies, dancing and singing, but was also a place where married and unmarried men joined to manufacture and repair tools, build umiaks (skin-covered boats used for hunting sea mammals), kayaks and dog sleds. The development and successful use of an advanced tool required and displayed the creativity, craftsmanship, ingenuity and cleverness of an experienced hunter. It was also in the *qalgi*, at the start of the winter ceremonial season,

⁵³ Charles C. Hughes, *Eskimo Boyhood* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1974), 400.

⁵⁴ The men's house or *qalgi* is referred to by various other names and spellings; common are *karigi*, *kazigi*, and *kashim* (Larson 2004, 29).

⁵⁵ John Collier, Jr., *Alaska Eskimo Education: A Film Analysis of Cultural Confrontation in the Schools* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1973), 23.

⁵⁶ Norman Chance, *The Iñupiat and Arctic Alaska: An Ethnography of Development* (Fort Worth: Holt, Reinhart, and Winston, 1990), 23.

when men and boys displayed their physical prowess, fitness, strength and skill during friendly competitions of wrestling matches, weight lifting, jumping and chinning a bar,⁵⁷ all designed to demonstrate to their peers and elders their strength and capabilities, all necessary in the identity of a confident and capable hunter. These opportunities and experiences continued to develop a young man's identity by challenging his technical and intellectual skills.

Beyond the identity of hunter was also the prospect of becoming a community leader, most often a position held by the community's greatest hunter or whaler. Chieftainship was hereditary, usually descending through a distinguished family from the father or eldest male member to the oldest son. Typically young men began training for this role of leadership at a young age, which thereby offered adolescent males a defined sense of direction and purpose often accompanied by high expectations from parents and elders. Being the oldest son was not the sole requirement for leadership; this position required the skills of a good hunter, good judgment, diplomatic skills for dealing with other tribes and often some accumulated family wealth.⁵⁸

The transition from boyhood to manhood and girlhood to womanhood had great significance for both the young individual and the family and community. This metamorphosis was critical for the good of the whole. By gaining competent hunters, food preparers and clothing makers, families increased the chances of survival for themselves and the community.

⁵⁷Chance, *Culture Change and Integration*, 23.

⁵⁸Dorothy Jean Ray, *The Eskimos of Bering Strait, 1650-1898* (Seattle and Washington: University of Washington Press, 1975), 107.

As young Alaska Native men and women transitioned from adolescence into young adulthood, significant events and markers of this developmental stage were recognized by the parents and often celebrated in the community. For young males this stage of maturity was most often recognized by the young man's first large game catch which he was required to divide and give away to elders.⁵⁹

A young boy's first successful large game catch was recognized in the family as a marker of maturity, but also conferred upon him "right to marry" status in the community.⁶⁰

For the Iñupiat of northwest Alaska, polar bear hunting always offered challenge and thrill to the hunter and required great patience, skill and knowledge of bear behavior. For instance, "Iñupiaq elders say polar bears are left-handed, so the hunter has a slightly better chance of avoiding the right paw, which is slower and less accurate".⁶¹ Hunting these animals was a dangerous activity and therefore the death of a polar bear definitively marked a young man's becoming a "real" hunter.⁶²

In villages on the North Slope of Alaska, a change in the style of clothing and facial markings for young men also marked transition from childhood to adolescence. As a boy's voice began to change, a different style of pants were given to him to wear; shorter trousers replaced longer pants. By the time he was ready to marry, often in mid-

⁵⁹ Ernest S. Burch, Jr., *Social Life in Northwest Alaska: The Structure of Iñupiaq Eskimo Nations* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2006), 60.

⁶⁰ Naomi Musmaker Giffen, *The Roles of Men and Women in Eskimo Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1930), 2.

⁶¹ Richard Nelson, "Understanding Eskimo Science," *Audubon Magazine* (September/October 1993): 104.

⁶² Hughes, *An Eskimo Village*, 124.

to late adolescence, two slits were cut in the corners of his mouth where decorative labrets were placed. The wounds healed around these labrets and signified that the boy had become a man and was ready for marriage.⁶³

Young females

For young women the advancement into adulthood was also a defining time, consumed with educational opportunities which increased her household and child care responsibilities, developed her food processing and sewing skills and contributed to the broad base of knowledge necessary for her to be considered eligible for marriage. Advancing from the role of child to adolescent female, young women developed a sense of purpose and direction as they became integral members of the family unit.

Though young boys made distinguishable breaks from their mothers, gravitating to the male dominated hunting world of fathers and uncles, the girls remained with the adult women of the household, increasing their child care and household responsibilities, while also becoming increasingly competent in food preparation and storage and perfecting their sewing skills. During young adolescence, a girl also became sexually mature; however the period of motherhood was often delayed for years providing time for the young woman to prove she was competent at women's work and had developed the complementary skills necessary to work with a husband.

For young women of North Slope villages, notable markers of maturity were similar to those of young men physiologically and superficially. A girl's transition to adolescence was marked by her first menses, which placed her in temporary isolation. As

⁶³ Chance, *The Eskimo of North Alaska*, 28.

she matured further, developing breasts, her clothing changed as well, from childhood clothing to that of an adult woman. Transitioning young women also received permanent facial markings. Instead of ornaments embedded in the skin that protruded from the face, women received facial tattoos consisting of a series of closely drawn, black, parallel lines that extended from the center of her lower lip to the chin.⁶⁴ These tattoos became outwardly, observable signs that a young woman was eligible for marriage.

A young woman's fine sewing skills marked her transition from girlhood to womanhood, proving that she was capable of keeping her family warm and dry. This in turn proved her worthy of marriage. Parkas and mukluks had to be warm and tough while also waterproof. As a woman matured into adulthood she strove to be known in her community as a fine sewer. This was a significant part of her identity. In an interview with the author, an Iñupiaq male Elder recalled that when he was growing up, a woman's sewing skills contributed to the establishment of her role in the community. "When I was growing up women (were) relegated to a certain role of course and . . . your sewing skills (were) most important in the eyes of the community . . . your status in the community (could) be high or low depending on your sewing skills. And the patterns that you (did) raise(d) your status in the community. Women were always competing as to who could make the best parkas, who could dress their families, the best"

The same was true regarding all elements of food processing: gathering, preparing, storing, distributing, and cache management. There were traditional skills which took years to perfect; success in each became a marker of adulthood for young

⁶⁴ Chance, *The Eskimo of North Alaska*, 28.

women. In Kotzebue, a girl's maturity into young adulthood was recognized by her first hand-picked bag of berries or roots which were then made ready for storage. This event was subject to the same ceremonial rights given to a young man after his first large animal kill.⁶⁵ Each of these markers contributed to young women's sense of purpose and direction as they matured into womanhood and would ultimately define their social and cultural identity.

Naturally motherhood, the role of birthing, raising and caring for children was another marker of a young woman's transition from adolescence to adulthood. When a young woman became pregnant, her life changed. Pregnancy defined womanhood much more than the onset of menstruation.⁶⁶ Adulthood characteristics of patience, care, and proper support of a child were required. Children were most often carried on their mothers' backs for the first few years of their life or until another child was born,⁶⁷ ensuring the warmth and care of a child while also leaving a woman's hands free to meet other household demands. Therefore a young woman needed to be strong and agile in order to carry on multiple tasks simultaneously. Motherhood was a very distinctive and important role in the lives of Alaska Native families. The birth of a child instantly actuated motherhood identity while additionally fostering a sense of purpose and direction.

As male and female youth matured, the parallel lines belonging to childhood roles diverged; boys became young men, girls became young women and within the confines

⁶⁵ Giffen, 10.

⁶⁶ Jolles, 159.

⁶⁷ Chance, *The Eskimo of North Alaska*, 21.

of those biological boundaries the clarity of their new roles were defined. Female youth learned the ways of their mothers, aunties and grandmothers; male youth followed the mentoring leads provided by their fathers, uncles and grandfathers. And though both men and women were capable of skills belonging primarily to the opposite gender, they each developed, maintained and eventually mastered the skills and roles defined within their own gender.

Role Models and Important Influences

Adult role models are essential in the development of youth. Role models influence, enrich and mold the lives of younger generations; in traditional Alaska Native culture, role modeling was the primary influence in the development of male and female youth. An Iñupiaq Elder man commented on the importance of elders when he was growing up: “. . . the connection with the elders had the strongest influence among my entire generation.” Various relationship combinations: men to boys, women to girls, elders to youth and even peers to peers were the foundation of all young people’s lives. As primary role models and influences, adults understood that it was their responsibility to share their experience with their children, to “tell them how to live.”⁶⁸ This very sentiment was expressed by a female Elder of northwest Alaska during an interview with the author: “Well, the elders . . . (they) will teach you, they gather in the villages and will tell you how to follow your parents the way that they live.” It was through these important influences that young boys and girls became responsible, capable and

⁶⁸ Chance, *The Eskimo of North Alaska*, 23.

knowledgeable adult men and women able to provide for their families and communities in one of the harshest environments in the world.

Role models and important influences for males

Iñupiaq and Siberian Yup'ik men learned the skills of whaling from their fathers, uncles and elders, as knowledge was transmitted from one generation to the next.

Apprenticeship for many years was essential in learning the ways of a whale hunt.

Leonard Apangalook from Gambell describes how he learned whaling. "It all began with my father. He was a very successful whaler. I began participating on whale hunts when I was about twelve years old. I guess you might say as a cabin boy when I first started, kind of a handy boy around the boat. That's how I began, but like most other jobs, I progressed onto operating the motor, crew man, striker, and then, finally captain. I went through all the progressive steps a whaler goes through as he grew up all the way to captain."⁶⁹

Among the St. Lawrence Island Yup'ik, boat crews consisted of a complement of brothers, uncles, fathers, sons and grandfathers, all based on patrilineal and patrilateral kinship lines.⁷⁰ Whaling crews were comprised of eight or more men, plus a young boy or two, who as apprentice crew members, ran errands and assisted at the camp.⁷¹ During the actual butchering of a whale young men were placed alongside their elders learning

⁶⁹ Jolles, 303.

⁷⁰ Jolles, 289.

⁷¹ Blackman, 204.

the best ways to cut into the whale, how to portion it, and how it was determined what family members received certain parts of the whale.⁷²

Not only were skills of whaling passed down to younger men of whaling families, including knowledge and proper usage of harpoon heads and points, but talismans and supernatural charms were entrusted and carefully passed down from father to son.⁷³ Iñupiaq men devoted practically all of their conversation to hunting, constantly exchanging valuable information and accounts of their outings with their peers, but more importantly this exchange also occurred between the oldest and wisest men and the younger men and boys. This shared knowledge ensured that each Iñupiaq male, regardless of age, acquired a very large body of knowledge throughout his lifetime.⁷⁴ The traditional role of adult males in the lives of Alaska Native boys and young men could be considered one of the essential backbones of Alaska Native cultures.

Young boys were eager to learn the means and ways of hunting by skilled and knowledgeable adult men as well as eager to please their mothers by sharing hunting stories. Hughes provides such an example of one young boy's hunting experience on St. Lawrence Island in the 1930s and 1940s: "Around the wooden eating platter I was proud and self-satisfied to tell the good hunting story with my Dad to the happy family. Mom was pleased with me for becoming a real help in providing for the family."⁷⁵

⁷² Jolles, 295.

⁷³ Shannon Lowry, *Natives of the Far North* (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 1994), 103.

⁷⁴ Nelson, *Hunters of the Northern Forest*, 306.

⁷⁵ Hughes, *Eskimo Boyhood*, 255.

Other forms of verbal instruction and even chastisement, by influential male adults, helped to shape a young man's physical and psychological strength, both necessary for the well accomplished hunter. One young man recalls a particularly cold and frustrating hunting experience:

Every time I looked at my Dad and James they were always just chatting. They didn't seem to mind the boring day. The biting cold didn't seem to bother them at all. They were very much concerned in their story or in whatever it might be. Sometimes they both climbed to the top of the iceberg and scanned the vast ice field that looked endless all around. Maybe on the tenth time they did that, they both turned to me and gave me some hunting lessons talk. . . They lectured in turns. "This is only one of the countless days ahead for you or any hunter that will turn out to be this way . . . Good hunters never let poor hunting days take the sport or spirit out of them. No matter what the day is, a real hunter enjoys it. At the end of such a day he just looks forward and hopes for a better day ahead . . . So take away the hard feelings and cheer up."⁷⁶

Another lesson was learned from that long, unfruitful day of walrus hunting:

We walked on and on. My poor thighs and calves were aching with fatigue. All over under my clothing I was very damp and hot with sweat, but my cheeks, chin, and nose were stinging from frostbite. My fingers were stiff, cold and numb from holding the ice tester pole. That was bad enough, but the thing that hurt me most was going home without having shot anything to take home except that frozen liver . . . Sometimes I lagged behind, my dad gave me no mercy. They didn't stop for me to catch up. They just kept walking even without slowing their pace a bit. I forced myself to run to catch up. Sometimes I stumbled over a jutting piece of ice, and plunged into the snow. . . James looked at me, he had a mocking grin all over his face when he asked me "What's the matter? Are you tired out already in a short, slow walk?" I forgot my sadness, but took up lots of madness. I said "Naw!" right in his face. But I guess he wanted me a little more mad. He said "How come?" Then I got up and went up to him, until I caught myself telling him, "I'm not tired! Now I'm not. Do you hear me?" . . . James glanced at me. I looked him in the eyes and almost shouted "Yessir!" The madness burning in my mind made me stick right to their tails all the way. Either the rest or the warmed-up temper put new strength to my tired legs . . . James gave me a little apology for what

⁷⁶ Hughes, *Eskimo Boyhood*, 209.

he had done. He explained, “I knew how you felt while we were coming. I wanted you to forget the discouragement that was eating your energy. I knew you were strong enough to take a hard day, but the poor day is what you haven’t learned to take. And I knew that madness would do a good job on you. That’s why I made you mad... I have had the very same experience as you have. Some days that were worse than today. Your disappointment won’t do you any good. Just start thinking of those nice days ahead of us.”⁷⁷

These powerful examples of important influences and role models for young men deeply affected the development of their mental and emotional maturity. The effect of positive influences and role models was highly critical in many Alaska Native cultures in the north and northwest because the staying power of the family and the community rested primarily on the prowess of the big game hunters. Without meat for food, fur for warmth, skins for sewing clothing and bone for tools, the aboriginal peoples of the arctic and sub-arctic would not have survived. These significant bonds were shared between men and boys, uninterrupted, generation after generation, for thousands of years.

Role models and important influences for females

Role models for female youth were equally valuable. Adult women and female elders modeled daily the plethora of responsibilities associated with womanhood; these responsibilities spanned a broad spectrum of skill sets and demands necessary for their family’s survival. Child-rearing, food preparation and storage, preparing skins for boot and clothing making, and common daily chores such as hauling water and wood, keeping the fire, and feeding dogs were all tasks shared among the women and children of the

⁷⁷ Hughes, *Eskimo Boyhood*, 211-213.

household. Modeling, intermittent instruction and correction by adults molded the younger generation of girls into what would become their clearly defined roles.

Living in close proximity to one another allowed young women easy observation of adult women's roles. Verbal exchange of information about their developing roles was not a common means of teaching and learning (more typical of educational practices in Western societies); observation and mimicry by youth and young women of the adult was more common. Through trial and error adolescent girls learned the ways of womanhood. Over time and with practice, young women became increasingly proficient at their gender specific skills; eventually skill proficiency led to the title of "highly skilled," a credit bestowed upon a woman only after years of practice and recognition of her fine work. During developmental years a young child was given increased responsibility by her mother, auntie or elder as was deemed necessary and suitable. New skills were formed with words of guidance, direction and encouragement.

An Iñupiaq Elder from the Bering Sea coast commented to the author about role models and important influences in her life: "My father, mother and grandmothers and aunts were the first and foremost positive influence. My mother would be the top person, as she was full of unconditional love. She was a very busy person and knew the most as far as I was concerned. Elder grandmothers were with the family and there was pure sense of security for a child. I am told by my siblings that this is how they felt."

Sewing skills were taught with little room for error. It was not uncommon for a young girl's highly skilled auntie or elder to rip out stitches sewn by the young apprentice and have her start again, even though only a few may have been flawed. Waterproof

stitches were essential and the adult women felt it their obligation to instruct well in the early stages of a young child's life. When this girl matured, mediocre stitches would not keep her family warm and safe. Men relied implicitly on the impeccable sewing skills of women as they often spent days out hunting; warm, durable and waterproof clothing was essential. These skills over time increased the self-confidence and self-esteem of a woman.

Young women were also shown the valuable techniques of food preparation and storage. It was also essential that a young woman develop skills and knowledge about the quantity of food needed for winter and how that varied depending on the size of the family, number of sled dogs, extras for others in times of need, and always the ability to contribute to potlatches⁷⁸ and feasts throughout the year. This was one of the most important responsibilities of Alaska Native women and one they took very seriously.

The processing of fish during the summer months is a primary example of extensive efforts by women to process and procure foods in large quantities in relatively short periods of time. Fish runs were often fast and furious, requiring all able bodied women to assist in the catching, cleaning, drying and storing of this essential food resource. Fish processing was also an intergenerational activity in which knowledge was conveyed and learned through years of experience; grandmothers, mothers and daughters usually cut fish together.⁷⁹ Young girls learned first by watching their mothers, aunts and elders cut fish and lay them on the drying racks until they were ready for storage.

⁷⁸ A potlatch is a collective ceremonial event that includes singing, dancing, feasting and gift giving. It is based in spiritual beliefs and often intended to improve the reputation of the host family. Potlatch ceremonies often differed among Alaska Native cultures.

⁷⁹ Frink, 101.

Once shown how to use an ulu, then the young girls would try their hand at this new and essential skill.

Role models and important influences among peers

For Alaska Native youth childhood becomes increasingly peer-centered as both genders transition from childhood to adolescence. By the time a young person reaches adolescence, most of his/her time is spent with others of the same approximate age; therefore role models and important influences are found among one's peers, not just adults.

Peer relations among young Native males living along the north and northwestern coast were essential in the development of young hunters. Being young, strong and agile they often bantered back and forth, challenging one another in mock hunts, practicing their skills and techniques to determine who could throw a harpoon the farthest and with the greatest accuracy, who set the best snares and traps, whose aim was the best for birds and small land mammals, and who could run the farthest and jump the highest. They often exchanged hunting tales upon returning from a trip accompanying their fathers and uncles on a walrus, seal or moose hunting trip, recalling close calls, moments of fear and wallowing in their youthful pride at having returned home with meat for the family.

Hughes in *Eskimo Boyhood* relays the pride a young adolescent male from St. Lawrence Island feels in relation to his peers: "I had lots to tell about my hunt, and my friends were all pleased to hear my story. And I felt proud. We played with the bird

catching pole and net, taking turns. One of us threw tin cans and one of us caught them with the pole and net. I proudly showed my friends how it is done.”⁸⁰

How role models and important influences shaped the future for youth

As was suggested in the role model section above, it was through various activities that adult male and female role models were highly influential in the lives of youth, adolescents and young adults. Young children experienced feelings of importance, self-worth and value because they learned early on that they were expected to be useful, working members of the family and that their contributions and participation were important to the life of the family. Competence and security developed not because parents demanded tedious chores, but because they included them in daily activities which enhanced a child’s feelings of family participation and cohesion. Parents rarely denied children their company or excluded them from the adult world.⁸¹

One Iñupiaq Elder from a village on Norton Sound expressed to the author the importance of role models in her life:

I was the youngest in the family and was secure knowing that there was love, structure, (and) discipline in the home . . . I had many teachers to show me how to do many different things. Elder grandmothers were with the family and there was a pure sense of security for a child . . . The elders in the village were so . . . encouraging to all of the children, they would correct us also. My father, mother and grandmothers and aunts were the first and foremost positive influence . . . My mother would be the top person (the most influential) as she was full of unconditional love . . . My father was the epitome of security. One felt so safe and secure even just thinking of him.

⁸⁰ Hughes, *Eskimo Boyhood*, 137.

⁸¹ Chance, *The Eskimo of North Alaska*, 22 passim.

A middle aged male interviewee described his relationship with his mother and grandparents:

My mom has always loved me as a son and there's no question about that . . . I mean both parents really explained when I (did) something wrong why I should not. I learned from my grandmother about being receptive to people, because I remember going to her house and she always had a piece of candy for me and I've never forgotten that. You know just very generous. My other grandmother always gave me a hug and always offered me (a) cracker or something like that. And then my dad, he taught me a lot of lessons about life and responsibility. He did things and I observed him and I followed his example. Like I mentioned earlier, he's the one who taught me about raising children through experience. I understood the lesson years later.

In addition to love and respect, children were also taught to honor their parents, elders and other immediate adult family members. Though this relationship between children and adults placed more emphasis on equality than subordination, there was no question who was the more dominant, authoritative party.⁸² In historical Iñupiaq culture a child was assumed to be a miniature adult, mentally as well as physically; it was assumed that with the help of proper tutelage and grooming he/she would mature with time into adulthood.⁸³ A male Elder interviewee explained how children's opinions were viewed in traditional culture: “. . . in our decision making process, as children, when we were able to speak, we could go into the meeting . . . in the qalgi . . . and express ourselves ‘This is how I feel about that.’ Sometimes it shocked the elders, ‘Wow, this child is knowledgeable. He's presenting something we didn't think about.’ And they would consider that . . . young adults, adults, elders, everybody's opinion was considered . . .

⁸² Chance, *The Eskimo of North Alaska*, 23.

⁸³ Hughes, *Eskimo Boyhood*, 395.

once you (had) that ability to speak, you (were) considered a person and every person's opinion counted.”

Though a child was given considerable autonomy and his/her whims and wishes were often met with respect, the child was taught to obey all adults.⁸⁴ Therefore, a child was expected to be restrained, quiet and respectful in his parent's presence. For example, in the role of apprentice hunter, the young male was expected to accept demands, directions, and to be obedient. It was not uncommon to hear a father lecturing his children before they set out on a camping trip: “We stir them up a little to live right. Tell them to obey the parents. Do what people tell them to do . . . They young. They don't know what to do. We tell them how to do things. Like our parents used to tell us. Same they used to talk to us.”⁸⁵

Thus, through the ages Alaska Native youth were shaped through the guidance of their parents, close relatives and elders to ensure that they would mature into highly skilled competent young men and women. The love, support, respect and discipline Native youth experienced enabled them to develop self-respect and maturity at a young age.

Skill Set Development

The aggregate of adaptive skill sets and comprehensive knowledge that developed over millennia were necessary for survival to indigenous peoples of the north. The perfecting of cognitive, behavioral and technical skills associated with their environment

⁸⁴ Chance, *The Eskimo of North Alaska*, 24.

⁸⁵ Chance, *The Eskimo of North Alaska*, 23.

gave the hunter and gatherer strength and vitality. In order to survive, it was imperative that adaptive characteristics such as resourcefulness, foresight, cooperation, physical skills, and technological sophistication became highly developed among the members of the tribe and passed down to younger generations.⁸⁶

The environments within which Native peoples of the arctic and sub-arctic live are harsh and considered by most outsiders unwelcoming. It was the degree to which adaptation and improvisation emerged that ultimately determined who lived and who died. The Iñupiaq peoples were superior in these talents. The improvising of natural materials into hunting and gathering tools and their extraordinary resourcefulness meant that no part of an animal was wasted and much of the natural surroundings were utilized for building sledges, tools, shelter, housing, additional sources of nutrition and weaponry.

Iñupiaq Eskimos also exhibited remarkable foresight. As a hunter living from the land and sea, it was clearly advantageous to the survival of the individual as well as the collective to anticipate long and short-range variations in environmental conditions and availability of renewable resources. Long-range foresight enabled families to be prepared for the coming seasons' hunting and gathering activities while traditional knowledge of food storage enabled them to be prepared for the possibility of lean times. Preparation of planned activities, poor weather conditions and equipment and supply readiness demonstrated their short-range foresightedness.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Nelson, *Hunters of the Northern Forest*, 300.

⁸⁷ Nelson, *Hunters of the Northern Forest*, 307-308.

Knowledge of the environment and the ability of a hunter to exploit nature's renewable resources contributed to the development of a young man's identity. Accruing such knowledge held a primary interest in their lives. Each man accumulated a tremendous breadth of knowledge; the more he knew the greater his respect and prestige within the community.⁸⁸ The most expert hunters and trappers were men with an almost "scientific" curiosity and knowledge about their environment. Of utmost importance was the ability to identify and remember the geography of their environment. Knowledge of sea ice quality, integrity and movement was essential during winter hunting and fishing to secure a successful hunt and to return home unharmed. Predicting and observing the weather were skills used throughout the day, often indicating the movement of wildlife and determining the safety, direction and means of travel for a hunt. Intimate knowledge of animal behavior was used not only during the hunt, but also in preparation for the hunt. The making of tools and snares, types of bait, methods of stalking, shooting, trapping and killing were refined and honed constantly, as food, clothing and shelter relied on the success of the hunter.

Children developed these skills by observing parents, elders and community members as they were engaged in everyday activities. Though most skills were typically androgynous, their teachings followed gender lines; men taught boys and women taught girls. As proficiency increased, so did pride, prestige, and self-worth, followed by an elevated position within the community. Individual identities deepened and roles within the immediate and extended family and the larger community became increasingly vivid.

⁸⁸ Nelson, *Hunters of the Northern Forest*, 302.

A clear sense of purpose, direction, identity, and family and community stature unfolded creating emotional, social and psychological stability while promoting competence and self-assuredness thereby eclipsing insecurities.

Traditional Education

Educational patterns followed similar life patterns of aboriginal peoples worldwide; children learned from the sharing of age-old traditions, by observation and from their physical environment. Dissemination of knowledge was passed down through generations from adults to children by closely related individuals. Education took place through observation, practical experience and apprenticeship. Children learned by modeling the adults with whom they lived in close proximity. By a certain age, young people were expected to ask questions, but also devise their own interpretation of a lesson being taught. Alternatively, children and young adults were often “taught” lessons through storytelling by elders; listening to storytellers was the highest respect given to the intellectual experts in the community.⁸⁹

A Siberian Yup’ik elder from the Bering Strait area described one way knowledge of the weather was shared with future hunters of a younger generation.

Usually the father was suppose to teach his sons all the stuff he knew about hunting. My father taught me a lot and he also taught Uvoqa, my elder brother. But these experienced hunters and elders, they often picked up some boys and youth right on the beach and just talked to them. Where the current goes as the tide changes – high tide, low tide . . . I remember the old ones, Patqhha and Uyghaq, they always taught us. They said: you guys watch the clouds over the hills all the time. If the cloud is slow or just stays firm above the hill – you can go ahead, you move on the ice without fear. But if the cloud is moving fast you better dash home quickly.

⁸⁹ Krupnik, 56.

That's the northern wind coming. It's the snowstorm that pulls the cloud. I do remember them telling all these stories, right on the beach. We were still boys, like 15-16 year olds⁹⁰

In Iñupiaq culture a hunter must be knowledgeable about every aspect of the environment from which he derives life sustaining food and material for clothing. Inordinate amounts of knowledge based on the environment and its living inhabitants were highly valued; especially knowledgeable individuals were given special respect and prestige. Therefore each individual was anxious to learn from fellow hunters, both by watching during the hunt and later listening closely as men recounted their experiences. Men and women learned not only by watching and listening, but being highly observant of their surroundings and experiences. Personal observations were always passed on to others thereby creating a plethora of cumulative knowledge invaluable for surviving and even thriving in arctic and sub-arctic climates.⁹¹

The timeline for education was a persons lifetime; there was no special or specified time frame for learning and studying. Young children and adolescents often had the steepest learning curve, but individuals continued to hone skills necessary to survive throughout their lifetime. Inuit culture had its own 'curriculum' and designated symbols of 'graduation' and mastery.⁹² As discussed previously, young adults were considered such when it became clear that they had developed specific skills enough to support families of their own. For men this required proficiency in hunting and for women it was the mastering of food preparation and storage, proper child care and proper skin

⁹⁰ Krupnik, 57.

⁹¹ Richard Nelson, *Hunters of the Northern Ice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 374.

⁹² Krupnik, 56.

processing and sewing. Development of these skills denoted the transitions between boyhood to manhood and girlhood to womanhood as well as innately providing individuals with a sense of purpose, direction, identity and family and community stature.

Critical factors of note are the three imperatives defining traditional Inuit education. First, children and young adults learned from immediate and/or indirect family members creating an environment of role modeling while deepening family ties. Secondly, the skills and knowledge being realized were directly relevant to their lives in both a practical and applicable sense, thereby directly connecting the content of their education with their sense of purpose, direction and identity. Thirdly, with increased knowledge, experience and practice, the mastery of these skills fostered self-esteem and confidence.

As Western education began to play an influential role in the lives of Alaska Native peoples and the new educational practices deviated from aboriginal norms this created conflict and disturbance for Alaska's Native youth while also deeply affecting family and community cohesiveness. Anthropologist Richard Nelson notes in his 1993 article *Understanding Eskimo Science* "Like other Native Americans, the Iñupiat [*sic*] acquired their knowledge through gradual accretion of naturalistic observations – year after year, lifetime after lifetime, generation after generation, century after century . . . since then, Western education and cultural change have steadily eroded these traditions."⁹³ Indeed, as shall be seen in Chapter Three, Western education practices did

⁹³ Nelson, *Understanding Eskimo Science*, 106.

much to diminish the bonds among generations, traditional knowledge, and the sense of purpose, direction and identity among Alaska Natives.

Conclusion

Prior to the arrival of Russian, European and Euro-American explorers, whalers, missionaries and educators, slow cultural advances created by the aboriginal peoples of the north were a natural part of cultural evolution. Gradual, intermittent changes were passed on from generation to generation, shared within kin groups and at times across cultural lines. The impetus for perpetual change naturally derived from desires to improve and enhance the quality of life. Advanced hunting and snaring techniques, improved food procurement techniques, improved seasonal dwellings, composition and quality of clothing, sled modifications, and increased knowledge of the land, oceans and rivers, weather, and animal behavior improved not only the quality of life, but also the survival rates of individuals, families and communities.

Though adaptation to change was not foreign to the aboriginal peoples of Alaska, change came about slowly. Incremental changes accumulated over generations improving the quality of human life without threatening the foundation of traditional culture. In addition, most people expected that their future would not be radically different from that witnessed by their ancestors. Survival and meeting the needs of family and community was paramount; it was the cultural foundation that offered clear guidance, direction and support for future generations. Ensuing members of each generation took cues from their

language, clothing, foods, spirituality and later religious faiths, cultural traditions, and geographical location.

When change occurred slowly and from within the culture young men and women grew up knowing what roles they would fill; the roles of men and women within the family and community remained stalwart, steadfast and true. The clear outline and fabrication of men's and women's individual and complementary roles were the backbone of a successful population of aboriginal peoples who survived and thrived in one of the worlds harshest climates.

For centuries the consistency of men's and women's roles within the culture remained essentially unchanged. Futures were based upon strengthening survivorship skills, competence and self-assuredness and the cultivation of cultural norms. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries rapid change began to impact the clearly defined futures of Alaska Natives. The silent, safe assumption of a past way of life was forever changed. As Alaska Native cultures were imbued with Western cultural practices, indigenous cultural norms came into flux and the steady, well-worn path of slow, incremental change vanished.

Based on the understanding of the rich, historical past in relation to the traditional roles, sense of purpose, direction, identity, and family and community stature of Alaska Native peoples, the remainder of this thesis explores the possible causes for the contemporary struggles of many young Alaska Native youth and young adult men and women. This thesis argues that these struggles are due in part to the dramatic changes and

shifts in gender roles, purpose, direction, identity, and family and community stature many are experiencing.

The following chapters examine historical periods of transition since Russian, European, and Euro-American peoples made contact with the aboriginal peoples of Alaska. Early arctic and sub-arctic exploration began during the mid-eighteenth century. Alaska was purchased from Russia by the United States in 1867. The missionaries and educators who began arriving during 1870s did much to transform traditional life in the following fifty years. Statehood in 1959 was followed by economic development and social change that overwhelmingly changed Native life ways in the following fifty years. This history will provide a political and social context of the culture change experienced by Alaska Natives during the last century, creating a vivid picture of the challenges which have led to the current struggles of Alaska Native males and females, which the author contends are rooted in changes in traditional gender roles, sense of purpose, direction, identity, and family and community stature.

Chapter Two

1730-1850 Early Contact Years and 1850-1900 Early Transition Years

Introduction

Chapter Two reviews in brief the history of the early contact years of 1730 to 1850 and the early transition years of 1850 to 1900, focusing on the effects of contact on Alaska Native life ways. In order to understand the effects of culture change on Alaska Natives it is imperative to view historical events not as solitary, independent events, but to consider their cumulative impact on the social cohesion, health and welfare of individuals, families and communities. Furthermore, influential change came to Alaska Natives through two primary venues; one being the *exposure to* outside influences and the other being changes *imposed upon* them. “Exposure to” elements of non-indigenous cultures affected Alaska Natives during the early contact years approximately 1730-1850. “Imposed” change came during the years associated with rapid culture change, approximately 1880-1980 for north and northwestern coastal peoples. (Imposed change came much earlier to the indigenous peoples of southeast and southwest Alaska). Alaska Natives were exposed to disease, alcohol, firearms, and foodstuffs, all of which had unintentional consequences. Enslavement; forced language change; Western education; religious impacts including discontinued ceremonial events, celebrations and shamanism were quite intentional and constituted elements of “imposed change,” a function of assimilation and acculturation.

Exposure of Alaska Natives to alternative foodstuffs, firearms, disease and alcohol, was not the fault or design of any one particular outside culture, but was inevitable as oceanic travel and exploration of the North Pacific Ocean and Bering and Chukchi Seas advanced. Seafaring explorers typically carried implements of weaponry, diet and drink on board ship, which easily became common trade goods. The exposure to and adoption of alternative foodstuffs and the use of firearms were a mixed blessing. Supplies of Western foods often provided a reliable source of nutrition when wild game was scarce; alternatively in later years these also became a means to the notable decline of subsistence hunting as it sometimes became easier to purchase food (where the cash economy was accessible) than to catch it. The access to firearms potentially increased the amount of game caught in a single hunt; alternatively hunters often lost sea mammals as it was common for them to sink before the hunter could reach them, and land mammal herds were drastically reduced in size. Disease came as an invisible intruder with devastating effects; typically sweeping through in waves of epidemics. It wasn't uncommon for entire families and communities to perish in a matter of days or weeks. The introduction of alcohol had devastating consequences. For over 250 years its continual use and abuse has caused families and communities greater strife than any other single foreign item. Alcohol use and abuse continues to be prevalent in the lives of many Alaska Native individuals, families and communities today.⁹⁴

In contrast, imposed change was quite intentional, forced upon Alaska Natives by a dominating outside culture. Imposed change came to the peoples of Southeast Alaska in

⁹⁴ See Ehrlander (2010) for an account of the effects of alcohol's introduction to Alaska and northern Canada.

the form of slavery; as the demand for sea otter pelts became an obsession for members of the Russian American Company, so did the control of Alaska Native men, women and children. Later, during the middle and late transition years (1900-1950 and 1950-1980 respectively), imposed change came to the indigenous peoples of northern, western and interior Alaska; the majority of imposed changes occurred from approximately the late nineteenth century to the later half of the twentieth century. These years were marked by the determination of Christian missionaries and outside educators to assimilate Alaska Natives. Educators and missionaries were determined to remove the “savageness” and primitive life ways of Alaska Natives and force upon them the civilization of nineteenth century Western culture and society. The demands to replace Native language with the English language, the requirement that children attend school and the disregard for traditional spiritual beliefs while simultaneously evangelizing the Christian faith, all were components of imposed rapid culture change.⁹⁵

Overview of thesis argument

Owing to the rapid cultural shifts of traditional norms, Alaska Native males and females of all ages have experienced dramatic changes in their traditional gender roles. This thesis argues that changes to these roles have impacted men’s and women’s sense of purpose, direction and identity. Additionally, gender role changes appear to be

⁹⁵ It should be noted that the attitudes and practices of missionaries from different denominations varied greatly in their approach to the teachings of Christianity and Western education. Episcopal Archdeacon Hudson Stuck, who spent decades ministering to Alaska Natives in Alaska’s interior, criticized harshly the missionaries of other denominations who led church services in English and tried to transform Natives into white people. See Hudson Stuck, *Ten Thousand Miles with a Dog Sled* (Prescott: Wolfe Publishing Co., Inc., 1988).

contributing to shifts in their family and community stature. If the changes in traditional gender roles are related to a loss of clear purpose, direction and identity and shift in their family and community stature, then this may help to explain the social problems many Alaska Natives are experiencing today.

Original gender roles, grounded in pre-contact traditional life styles had two primary purposes – the daily practicalities of survival for families and communities (food, clothing and shelter) and passing on traditional knowledge to younger generations. Gender roles also contributed to the foundation of identity and to family and community stature. During the middle and late transition years gender roles were permeated by Western societal and cultural norms. By the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, changes in gender roles had evolved to a point of role reversal as some Alaska Natives have exclaimed.⁹⁶

Sense of purpose, direction and identity among Alaska Natives also has undergone transformation in the past hundred years. Though these notions likely were rarely considered by Alaska Natives two hundred years ago, purpose, direction and identity were inherent in their traditional daily life and offered each member a sense of belonging and importance. Identity formation began with the name(s) each individual was given at birth. Often children were given multiple names as “names carry personality, relationship and history.”⁹⁷ Common in Inuit culture is the belief that the

⁹⁶ Chapter Five discusses contemporary changes in gender roles; quotes by Alaska Native men and women suggest role reversal is common in many families and communities today.

⁹⁷ Jolles, 107.

spirit of a recently deceased person was transferred to the newborn child blessed with carrying the deceased person's name.

During the early, middle and late transition years (1850-1980), cultural norms of gender roles and sense of purpose, direction and identity were significantly altered. As Western cultural norms pervaded Alaska Native cultures, cultural norms became blended, resulting in dramatic changes in the roles Native males and females filled, creating a more opaque sense of purpose, direction and identity for many. Some became adrift struggling with questions such as "Who am I?" and "What path should I follow?" Observable behaviors such as increased high school attrition rates; high unemployment rates; excessive drinking; illegal drug use and abuse; abuse and neglect of elders, spouses and children; depression, apathy, and attempted and completed suicide all become telltale signs of emotional and psychological conflict and despair.

Since the mid-to late twentieth century when rapid culture change peaked, the change impacted not only men's and women's roles, but their family and community stature. As noted above, many Alaska Native males once the leaders and primary providers for their families and communities had become seasonally employed or experienced long-term unemployment and by the early twenty-first century many have taken on the role of caring for children at home. Many Alaska Native women by the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have gained a college education, are employed year-round and many have become leaders and primary breadwinners in their families and communities. This role reversal has also had a direct impact on men's and women's sense of purpose, direction and identity.

In summary, I argue that rapid culture change is responsible for the dramatic changes in traditional gender roles for Alaska Native males and females. These changes have undermined their clear sense of purpose, direction and identity while also shifting their stature within their family and community. It is my contention that the loss of clearly defined gender roles, sense of purpose, direction, identity, and a change in family and community stature is contributing to many of the social problems Alaska Native men, women and youth experience today.

Early Contact Years: 1730-1850

Early influence in Southeast Alaska: 1730-1850

Russian explorers were the first non-Natives to reach the most westerly islands of the Aleutian chain, eventually exploring lands further east, to what later become known as Southeast Alaska. Peter the Great, tsar of Russia from 1672-1725, was fascinated with Siberian geography and with the “great land” which he suspected lay to the east of Siberia.⁹⁸ He therefore funded numerous expeditions as early as 1719 and later the two famous voyages of Vitus Bering, referred to as the First (1728) and Second (1741) Kamchatka expeditions. Bering was successful in discovering the great land of Alaska on his second voyage while sailing through the strait that now bears his name.⁹⁹

With Alaska now discovered the doors were open for further Russian exploration, a pursuit quickly fulfilled by fur traders, private individuals, and entrepreneurs. The intention of these explorers was not to find more of America but to pursue the highly

⁹⁸ Raymond H. Fisher, “Finding America,” in *An Alaskan Anthology: Interpreting the Past*, eds. Stephen W. Haycox and Mary C. Mangusso (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1975), 4-5.

⁹⁹ Ray, 11-13.

sought after fur-bearing animals that had been discovered by the German naturalist and physician George Wilhelm Steller during Bering's Second Kamchatka expedition. News of the whereabouts of the sea otter was the stimulus for what became the predominant activity of Russians in Alaska for the remaining half of a century or more. Between 1743 and 1790, approximately eighty voyages were made between eastern Russia and the most westerly Aleutian Islands.¹⁰⁰ It was this concentrated attention on fur hunting that diminished any interest in further exploration of the northwestern and northern coasts of Alaska. The Russians maintained almost exclusive interest in the Aleutian Islands.¹⁰¹

As the hunt for fur-bearing sea mammals and the trade for their pelts expanded along the Aleutian Islands and the coastal communities of southwest and southeast Alaska, so did the number of trading companies; probably the most prominent was the Russian-American Company developed in 1799.¹⁰² It was during the last two decades of the eighteenth century and nearly the first half of the nineteenth century that the Aleuts, Alutiit, and Tlingit peoples suffered most at the hands of Russian fur hunters, traders and members of the Russian-American Company.

Sea otter hunting required great skill. Aleut, Alutiiq, Eyak and Tlingit children as early as six to eight years of age were instructed in the management of kayaks, spear throwing, marksmanship and knowledge of the wind and currents; by adulthood these

¹⁰⁰ Fisher, 17-18.

¹⁰¹ Ray, 26.

¹⁰² Fisher, 19.

children were expert ocean-going hunters.¹⁰³ Russian hunters, unskilled in hunting the highly prized sea otter, quickly abandoned their attempts to develop such expertise, instead enslaving Native peoples already quite adept at such skills. Ironically, this essential life skill which had kept their people alive over millennia soon became the tool of their decimation.

By 1794 Aleuts essentially became Russian serfs living by the laws of compulsory labor in exchange for clothing, tobacco and food. All males between the ages of fifteen and fifty were required to work for the Russian-American Company, which exploited the Natives of the colony for almost seventy years, from 1799 to 1867. These men were forcibly separated from their families, relocated to new hunting grounds, subjected to harsh labor environments and exposed to cold, hunger, and disease. By 1790, after almost fifty years of Russian contact, the Aleut population had declined by almost two-thirds.¹⁰⁴ The decimation of the skilled male portion of the Aleut population significantly impacted the long-term cultural health of this people.

In addition to suffering in Russian serfdom, indigenous peoples also succumbed to outbreaks of smallpox and measles. By the late 1830s Tlingit populations in southeast Alaska were half of their original size. Though the Tlingit were known for their fierce fighting and war like nature, which often kept the Russians at bay, it was the smallpox outbreaks of the early and mid-nineteenth century that weakened the Tlingit culture.

¹⁰³ James R. Gibson, "Russian Dependence on Natives of Alaska," in *An Alaskan Anthology: Interpreting the Past*, eds. Stephen W. Haycox and Mary C. Mangusso (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1975), 23.

¹⁰⁴ Gibson, 25.

These epidemics took the lives of many elders, those most hostile toward the Russians and very influential in establishing this aggressive attitude in the younger generations.¹⁰⁵

Similar themes of cultural oppression and crippling diseases became familiar to other indigenous peoples throughout Alaska over the next century. Though the challenges all Native peoples faced had unique qualities, the overarching results were indistinguishable; every aspect of traditional customs and historical everyday living patterns changed.

Early influence in North and Northwest Alaska: 1790-1850

For indigenous peoples of north and northwest Alaska first contact with Russians and Europeans came in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Further north exploration emerged as interest in knowledge of the geography grew and additional ethnographic information became increasingly desirable.

Outside influence did not originate with the Russian and European explorers, traders and whalers; Alaska Natives of the north had been trading with Siberian Chukchi since approximately the early seventeenth century.¹⁰⁶ This early trade had introduced Eskimos to metal-tipped spears and tobacco, the latter to which many had become severely addicted. As with the Natives of southeast Alaska, change began to occur as other foreign outside nations brought amenities, alcohol and disease.

¹⁰⁵ Gibson, 31.

¹⁰⁶ Tom Lowenstein, *Ultimate Americans Point Hope, Alaska: 1826-1909* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2008), 23.

During the late eighteenth century, Russia was not the sole country searching for furs and exploring lands along the northern Pacific Ocean; England, France and Spain as early as 1779 and the United States in 1791, sent ships to the Alexander Archipelago and Prince William Sound.¹⁰⁷ From this time on Russian, European and American explorers conducted surveys of the northern Pacific Ocean, the Bering Sea, and the islands and coastal villages from southeast Alaska to the North Slope of the Brooks Range.

As explorations of uncharted territory unfolded, so did the drawings and mapmaking by each ship's cartographer; each map, building upon the one before, created increasingly accurate depictions of the lands east of Siberia. As explorers traveled north the first mapping and naming of northern villages of Alaska were made by Nikolai Daurkin and Ivan Kobelev. Daurkin recorded the first four northwest Alaska place names – Point Hope, King Island, Kauwerak and Cape Prince of Wales in approximately 1765.¹⁰⁸ It wasn't until James Cook sailed through the Bering Strait region in 1778, that these areas were seen again by outsiders.¹⁰⁹

It was during the late eighteenth century when Captain James Cook and Captain Charles Clerke left England for the northwest coast of America in search of a water route between the Pacific and the Atlantic Oceans. By 1778 Cook sailed into Prince William Sound and the Bristol Bay area *en route* to the Bering Strait.¹¹⁰ Cook explored much of

¹⁰⁷ Ray, 47.

¹⁰⁸ Ray, 29.

¹⁰⁹ Ray, 40.

¹¹⁰ Ray, 40.

the coastal lands and islands along the eastern shores of the Bering Sea. The extent of Cook's travels is illustrated by the broad geographical range of areas and communities named under his auspices. Numerous islands, capes and coastal villages Cook named are familiar place names today: Cape Darby, Cape Denbigh, Cape Stephens, Bald Head, Stuart Island, Besboro Island, Saint Michael and Stebbins were denoted by Cook that late summer of 1778.¹¹¹

Based on these European discoveries and a desire to expand Russian possessions westward, Catherine II hired Joseph Billings (a former ship mate of Cook's) in the last decade of the eighteenth century to explore the coast of northern Siberia and Alaska, to investigate the possibilities of northern fur trade and the hope of establishing a stronger Russian presence in the North.¹¹²

Billings traveled north toward Nome in 1791 aboard the *Glory of Russia*; on July 28th Billings cast anchor at Sledge Island. It was here where Gavriil Sarychev, Martin Sauer and Carl Merck, the ship's naturalists, encountered indigenous peoples with whom trade readily began. They exchanged the skins of black and red fox, river otters, martens, lynxes and wolverines, hides of caribou and hare, wooden bowls, bows, arrows and spears and trinkets made of jade for the new treasures Europeans had to offer. Items made of iron, metal buttons, knives, and beads were all popular. Interestingly, as will be noted later, tobacco was of no interest, in stark contrast to its popularity among Natives of the south and southeast. During their stay on Sledge Island, Sauer and Merck made detailed

¹¹¹ Ray, 40-45 passim.

¹¹² Ray, 47-48.

written recordings, and the ships artist, Mr. Voronin, made drawings of their many interactions with the Eskimos. Though Billings reached the far north, he was not successful in meeting Empress Catherine's research intentions (investigating northern fur trade and establishing a firmer land claim for the Russians). Instead, his contributions lay in the most extensive ethnographic recordings about an Eskimo population along the northwestern Bering Sea coast up to that time.¹¹³

Russia's next major investment in exploration of Alaska's northwestern coast was not until 1816 when Count Nikolai P. Rumiantsev financed Otto von Kotzebue's search for, yet again, the ever elusive Pacific-Atlantic all-water passage. In the course of that single summer Kotzebue, Gleb S. Shishmarev (his lieutenant) and their crew explored and recorded sites and activities in numerous Eskimo villages, on small islands of the Norton Sound area, and through the Bering Strait to the northern coast of the Seward Peninsula.¹¹⁴ Here Kotzebue visited and named current day Shishmaref, Deering, Cape Deceit, Cape Espenberg, Good Hope Bay and, of course, Kotzebue Sound.¹¹⁵ The captain and his crew had numerous encounters with the Iñupiaq of the Seward Peninsula; for some this was a first time encounter with Europeans, however it was clear that prior outside contact had been made as these men often bartered hard for tobacco, knives, and looking-glasses.¹¹⁶ Kotzebue returned to Russia with valuable observations about

¹¹³ Ray, 48-49.

¹¹⁴ Ray, 57-59.

¹¹⁵ Ray, chap. 5 passim.

¹¹⁶ Ray, 57-59.

possible fur trade along the Seward Peninsula and with the suggestion that Russia establish trading stations north of the Bering Strait as he could foresee the advancement of the Hudson Bay Company soon branching out from Canada toward the Bering Strait.¹¹⁷

Early interactions between Native and non-Native peoples along Alaska's northern coast were quite different from early interactions between Russian explorers and Tlingit, Aleut and Alutiiq fur hunters to the south. Early contact in the north was generally benign in comparison with that in the south. Of note is the Beechey 1826 expedition; prior to sailing, the British Admiralty required Beechey to be considerate and respectful toward Native Americans. "You are to use every endeavor to preserve an amicable intercourse with the Natives and to caution your ship's company to avoid giving offense or engaging in disputes with them; and you are to show every act of kindness in your power." Trade was to be conducted fairly "taking care that when purchases are made, an officer may always be present to prevent disputes." Even in the case of interactions with Native women, officers were ordered to be "guarded in their intercourse with the females, so as to avoid exciting the jealousy of the men."¹¹⁸

This respectful and harmonious approach, directed by those in highest command set the course for amicable relations established between explorers and Alaska Natives during most of the 19th century. Certainly there were specific incidences of offenses, and not every ship's men conducted themselves appropriately; however written accounts of

¹¹⁷ Ray, 63.

¹¹⁸ Lowenstein, 4.

the time period suggest that trade between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples did not result in harm toward individuals or the culture at large. This early contact with Native peoples, largely by Europeans, did not lead to the destruction of the core elements of traditional culture, i.e., elimination of native language, housing, semi-nomadic life styles, traditional customs or belief systems – all of which remained intact throughout most of the 19th century. Imposed or intentional change was not the agenda of early explorers and traders. This picture changed dramatically at the turn of the twentieth century as American culture and value systems began to infiltrate Native life and cultural norms.

Further Russian exploration of the north Bering Sea, the Bering Strait and the northern coastline of the Seward Peninsula continued from 1820-1850, often prompted by the threat of further English exploration, just as Kotzebue had warned. During the early 1820s trading tensions between Russia and other foreign countries increased as the tremendous volume of sea otter skins was bartered with the English and American traders for the far superior trade goods they had to offer the Natives. Eventually Russian concern for the financial stability of the Russian-American Company became so great that by 1821 Russia claimed exclusive possession of both land and sea off the shores of Russian America north of 50 degrees north latitude. Naturally this unilateral decision was met with significant resistance by foreign trading ships and often went unheeded. Finally, by 1824 a treaty between Russia and the United States set the southern boarder of the

Russian Territory at 54 degrees, 40 minutes north latitude, and offered both countries open trading and fishing rights with Natives for ten years.¹¹⁹

Russian exploration between 1819 and 1822 pursued the elusive Northwest Passage, mapping Alaska's northern coastline and seeking new trade materials. Sailing ships belonging to the Russian Imperial Army and the Russian-American Company, under the direct leadership of such men as Vasili S. Khromchenko, Gleb S. Shishmarev, and Adolf Etolin, set the course for future relations with Alaska Natives, confirmed the geography of more of Alaska's northwestern coastline, and located and named villages, bays and islands.¹²⁰

Common trade items during these years were knives, hatchets, needles, scissors, and cooking pots in exchange for Native weaponry, clothing, otter, marten, bear and fox furs. Again, tobacco was of little interest, often turned away as a commodity unworthy of equal trade.¹²¹ However, Native peoples continuously sought gunpowder, lead and weapons. These items were hard to procure, as a clause within the ten-year fishing and trading agreement between Russia and the United States prohibited the trade of firearms, liquor and related supplies to Native peoples.¹²²

During the two years Khromchenko, Shishmarev, and Etolin explored these mostly uncharted waters, they discovered Cape Romanzof, Golovnin Bay, Nunivak

¹¹⁹ Ray, 64-65.

¹²⁰ Ray, chap. 7 passim.

¹²¹ Ray, 68.

¹²² Ray, 65.

Island, and Point Hope, and they found the mouth of the Yukon River. While traveling further north, Shishmarev explored Kotzebue Sound, went as far north as Icy Cape and on his return to warmer waters, surveyed St. Lawrence Island.¹²³ During the last phase of their exploratory efforts, Khromchenko and Etolin spent significant time at Stuart Island and Golovnin Bay (today Golovin Bay), both recording extensive interactions with Native peoples.¹²⁴ Observations of Native dress – clothing, footwear and jewelry were noted, as were lavish trading styles and unique communication systems. It is from comprehensive notes of this sort that collectively we are able to piece together historical events and traditional customs, creating an understanding of what once was.

Though the Russians continued their exploratory adventures, the north Alaska waterways and coastal territories became dominated by the famous Franklin William Beechey expeditions of 1826-1827. Beechey, a former English Navy man, was expected to set sail in 1825 to provide material aid to Sir John Franklin and William Edward Parry on their second Arctic expedition. Ultimately Beechey's voyage resulted in the most extensive ethnographic and geographic recording of the Seward Peninsula and Kotzebue Sound area to date.¹²⁵

Fair and equal trade was often a matter Iñupiaq women were consulted for. Beechey noted that the advice of old women was often sought when the value of a

¹²³ Ray, 66.

¹²⁴ Ray, 71-73.

¹²⁵ Ray, 77-78.

bargain came into question.¹²⁶ This age-old practice was affirmed to the author during an interview in the spring of 2009. A middle-aged Iñupiaq male explained this accounting role often assumed by women in Iñupiaq culture:

You'd see with our people . . . they used to be trading and bartering because we didn't have a monetary system before settlement came. Certain men would be going out there to travel to meet with people and then take other people with them . . . they would also take a lady with them . . . and then these ladies would be able to see how much they were going to be bartering with. When they would be bartering they would haul a couple sleigh loads out there and putting it out there and would look at what the other tribe or people would be offering in exchange and then they would walk back to their own campfire and say "No" (the lady would be faster at calculating what they're trying to trade from one point to the other) so they would say "No, we can't do that, we'd better take some down or ask for more items" and then they would know how to be accountants . . . and so they would throw something else on the table and try to get more for what items they know the other party might have.

Exploration and outside cultural influences from Russian and European explorers and traders continued from the 1820s to the 1850s, with moderate impact on the daily lives of Alaska Natives and on Alaska Native culture. The Russians had established trade forts as early as 1818 on the Nushagak River¹²⁷ (near Dillingham) and by 1833 at the village of Saint Michael in Norton Sound.¹²⁸ Trade forts were built to enhance centralization of trade between Native and non-Native populations, while also encouraging indigenous peoples of the interior to bring trade items to the coast. The establishment of centralized trade significantly increased access to and the incorporation of outside trade goods into Alaska Natives' daily lives. As Dorothy Jean Ray notes in *The*

¹²⁶ Ray, 80.

¹²⁷ Ray, 65.

¹²⁸ Ray, 123.

Eskimos of Bering Strait, 1650-1898, “by the end of the 1820s Native traders of Alaska and Siberia were exchanging wares in significant quantities from traveling traders . . . to change considerably the household inventory of every Eskimo in the Bering Strait region.”¹²⁹

In 1848 additional European contact with northern coastal Alaska Natives came with the first whaling ships and the first ships in search of Sir John Franklin’s missing expedition, both of which sailed through and north of the Bering Strait. During this time period numerous ships wintered over in Native villages along the northwestern coast. These situations led to the development of entirely new relationships between Europeans and Natives, both coastal and interior.¹³⁰

Interactions with indigenous peoples during the first half of the nineteenth century remained exploratory in nature; trade, information and resource gathering were the primary interests of explorers and traders. Cross-cultural influences were notable, but remained mostly superficial and therefore did not threaten cardinal elements of Native cultures. Outside influences did not affect traditional gender roles for Native men and women, nor did they affect their sense of purpose, direction and identity. Traditional roles remained intact. Ernest Burch Jr., in his most recent work *Social Life in Northwest Alaska* notes that 1800 to 1850 was “the latest time in which Iñupiaq societies were essentially free of Western influence . . . neither the explorers nor the early traders had much impact on Native ways of life . . . no European diseases are known to have reached the north and

¹²⁹ Ray, 121.

¹³⁰ Ray, 140-141.

northwest area yet, no Westerners had tried to settle there, and no missionaries or other outsiders had attempted to transform Iñupiaq beliefs or behavior.”¹³¹ One exception was the ever increasing demand by Alaska Natives for alcohol. Though trade for alcohol had been banned in 1824, this was nearly impossible to enforce.¹³² However, alcohol abuse had not yet become the pervasive evil within families or communities that it would during the twentieth century.

Thus, the majority of European and Russian influences were not destabilizing to individuals, families or communities of the North, but were generally benign and often mutually beneficial to explorers and Native peoples; change was slow and relatively unobtrusive. Indigenous cultures were able to absorb these changes as they did not threaten the foundation of Native cultures or the integrity of families and communities. These outside influences did not constitute the imposed changes of assimilation and acculturation from an outside, dominate culture. In other words these changes were easily absorbed and generally enhanced the quality of Native people’s lives. A contrasting picture emerged between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries.

Early Transition Years: 1850-1900

Six broad influences can be considered the hallmarks of Alaska Native culture change during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The onset and cumulative impact of international whaling fleets in the Bering and Chukchi Seas, an increase in the importation and trade of alcohol and firearms, the introduction of disease, Christianity,

¹³¹ Ernest Burch, Jr., *Social Life in Northwest Alaska* (Fairbanks, University of Alaska Press, 2006), 2.

¹³² Lowenstein, 25.

and Western education, and the emergence of wage labor became significant sources of cultural and social permutation.

Exploration of Alaska's coast continued during the mid-nineteenth century with a push to the north by Russian, European and American explorers and whalers. As Tom Lowenstein points out in the preface of *Ultimate Americans: Point Hope, Alaska 1826-1909*, it was not the occupation of native lands or the conquering of its peoples that initially interested Euro-American explorers, but the animal resources found in its bordering waters and from the land.¹³³ In fact it was the bowhead whale that lured many a seafaring man north into the Bering and Chukchi Seas in pursuit of its highly prized oil and baleen. During the summer of 1848 Thomas Roys was the first American whaler to hunt bowhead whale in the Bering Sea and return to the Hawaiian Islands loaded down with thousands of pounds of oil and baleen, the byproducts of eleven whales.¹³⁴ News of innumerable whale pods and the thought of great riches prompted a rush to the Bering and Chukchi Seas not unlike rushes to stake a claim for Alaska's gold. According to historian John Bockstoe 2,700 whaling cruises occurred in northwest Alaska from 1848-1914.¹³⁵

The massive whale hunts that dominated the Bering and Chukchi Seas for over fifty years decimated not only the whale populations, but had devastating effects on Alaska Native populations. Reverend Elijah H. Edson, an Episcopalian missionary living

¹³³ Lowenstein, xi.

¹³⁴ Lowenstein, 39.

¹³⁵ John Bockstoe, *Whales, Ice, and Men: The History of Whaling in the Western Arctic* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986), 15, cited in Lowenstein, 34.

at Point Hope in 1895, wrote in a letter that “the ‘bomb gun’ in whaling and the ‘repeating rifle’ are fast exterminating the whales and other sea-animals upon which the Eskimo depend for food. Already the deaths among them from starvation have been alarmingly frequent.”¹³⁶ This rapid decline of a critical food source ultimately led to hunger and even starvation and increased Native dependence upon non-Native food sources.

By the turn of the twentieth century the near extinction of the bowhead whale resulted in the reduction of a primary food source and what had also become a primary source of income for Alaska Natives. The losses of these foods and related material sources essential to the survival of coastal Iñupiat were devastating throughout north and northwest Alaska. As Native food sources declined, Native peoples became increasingly dependant upon non-Native foods for survival. Eventually, the necessity for and the availability of Western foodstuffs changed not only the diet of Alaska Natives, but also the historical hunting practices and traditional lives of men.

Whalers and traders contributed to the already active illegal trade for alcohol and firearms;¹³⁷ increasing the availability and accessibility of both while also sharing the knowledge and ingredients necessary for its distillation.¹³⁸ The increase in trade for alcohol and breech-loading weapons significantly altered traditional life styles. Increased alcohol consumption bred family violence and disrupted community cohesiveness.

Furthermore, intoxicated adults spent less time engaged in subsistence

¹³⁶ Lowenstein, 214.

¹³⁷ Ray, 190-199 passim.

¹³⁸ Lowenstein, 62.

activities,¹³⁹ which often resulted in insubstantial winter food storages, leading to hunger and starvation.¹⁴⁰ The replacement of bows, arrows and ingeniously devised traps and snares with firearms often decreased animal populations to the point of local extinction¹⁴¹ and/or diverted entire herds from their traditional migration routes, both of which added to the often prevalent Native food shortages.

Adding to the rapid changes brought about by increased alcohol consumption and the use of firearms was the devastation of epidemic diseases. International bowhead whale hunters and traders unintentionally brought transmitted diseases,¹⁴² to none of which most Alaska Natives had immunity. Epidemics that men, women and children and sometimes destroyed entire villages in days and/or weeks. Though venereal diseases had infected many since the early nineteenth century,¹⁴³ the spread of epidemic diseases from non-Native peoples to the Alaska Native population started as early as 1851.¹⁴⁴ Later epidemics of 1900¹⁴⁵ (originating in Nome and spreading across the Seward Peninsula)

¹³⁹ Robert Fortuine, *Chills and Fever: Health and Disease in the Early History of Alaska* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1992), 167.

¹⁴⁰ One such example occurred on St. Lawrence Island in 1878-1879; over two-thirds of the Eskimo population died of starvation. It is suspected that due to a long period of drunkenness hunters missed the fall walrus herd migration leaving families and communities without sufficient winter meat stores (Hughes, 1960, 11-12).

¹⁴¹ Burch, 386.

¹⁴² Lowenstein, 55.

¹⁴³ Ray, 73.

¹⁴⁴ Burch, 2.

¹⁴⁵ Harold Napoleon, *Yuuyaraq: The Way of the Human Being* (Fairbanks: Alaska Native Knowledge Network, 1996), 10-11.

and 1918¹⁴⁶ (reaching nearly all the villages in western Alaska) were equally as devastating in death count and in trauma to survivors. Influenza, measles, smallpox, and tuberculosis were some of the most life threatening illnesses that severely impacted individuals, families and communities for many generations. Some villages were completely depopulated, while others were left with only a few remaining survivors.

An Iñupiaq male Elder shared with the author the struggles and challenges men, women and children experienced during an epidemic that struck his Native community.

One of the most severe or traumatic and . . . mournful instances is . . . the encounters the people had with . . . diseases – like influenza, measles (and) diphtheria These came at a time when . . . the people did not realize that these would be so harmful to the people as a whole. My father’s generation is a generation of orphans These are people that were born between 1910 and 1920 and many of them, like my father, lost his parents when he was just three years old. And . . . he in turn lost three uncles who would be just like a teacher to (him). (His coastal village went) from a community of probably 400 . . . down to a community of about 100 – 50 in the space of a week. You know that was a severe loss, a traumatic loss and . . . it was very, very traumatic for my . . . Dad’s generation because . . . that part of our . . . history with (the) winds of change was not ever hardly told or mentioned. And when later on I came to realize . . . whenever questions were directed to someone in my mother’s or father’s generation about . . . how (they) would face those days with (that) loss of their families . . . (it was) just like zipping your mouth shut. You know they didn’t want to discuss that It’s . . . true trauma you know that we get from those of us who survived Dad or mom will tell specific things like . . . my mom was so sick . . . all the strength that she had was to slit (open) . . . a seal poke full of salmon berries – that’s all the strength she had to slit it open and go back to her bed . . . so that somebody can help feed themselves as they get hungry – and this was living only on berries . . . and available meat they might have. These are small children – one, two, three, four, five years old, six years old, seven years old, you know some of them were as old as twelve years old and (they) took the role . . . of parenthood with their younger siblings. How many people can do that?

¹⁴⁶ William A. Oquilluk with Laura L. Bland, *People of Kauwerak: Legends of the Northern Eskimo* (Anchorage: Alaska Pacific University Press, 1981), 205-208 passim.

Harold Napoleon, a Yup'ik Elder from Hooper Bay, Alaska describes the effects of one of the greater epidemics this way:

Compared to the span of life of a culture, the Great Death (1900 influenza epidemic originating in Nome) was instantaneous Out of the suffering, confusion, desperation, heartbreak, and trauma was born a new generation . . . they were born into shock. They woke to a world in shambles, many of their people and their beliefs strewn around them, dead. In their minds they had been overcome by evil Everything they had believed in had failed. Their ancient world had collapsed . . . they had witnessed mass death – evil – in unimaginable and unacceptable terms. These were the men and women orphaned by the sudden and traumatic death of the culture that had given them birth.¹⁴⁷

During the years of major disease outbreaks, many missionaries and educators cared for the sick, dying and the survivors, often taking sufferers into their homes and schools and providing food, shelter, Western medicine and health care.¹⁴⁸ Many children were orphaned as a result of the disease outbreaks and became members of the newly formed mission boarding schools;¹⁴⁹ this influence was critical to the establishment of long term, deep seated culture change. The traditional role models and primary influences in these young children's lives had been lost in a matter of days or weeks and were replaced by Western men and women who raised and educated them in their own traditional life ways.¹⁵⁰ The tremendous loss of traditional knowledge held by adults and elders and the loss of adult and elder role models, who represented indigenous life ways

¹⁴⁷ Napoleon, 10-11.

¹⁴⁸ Ross F. Hidy, ed., *Frost Among the Eskimos: The memoirs of Helen Frost Missionary in Alaska 1926-61* (Concord: Lutheran Pioneer Press, 2001), prologue ix-xi.

¹⁴⁹ Frink, 98.

¹⁵⁰ Napoleon, 13.

for youth, severely impacted individual survivors and the culture as a whole. Napoleon explains, “Their medicines and their medicine men and women had proven useless. Everything they had believed in had failed. Their ancient world had collapsed.”¹⁵¹

By the late nineteenth century missionaries brought Western education and religion, enforcing the substitution of the Native language for the English language while simultaneously evangelizing the Christian faith. The introduction of Western education hobbled the traditional semi-nomadic life style, as mandatory school attendance prevented families from traveling to seasonal hunting grounds. Missionization was responsible for silencing the song and dance that accompanied traditional celebrations while also preventing the spiritual work of shamans.¹⁵² In conjunction with the impact of Western medicines, the forbidden spiritual rituals and practices of the shamans destroyed the identity of many shamans; a point expressed by a man from Point Hope in 1900, “Before whites came, everyone respected shamans.”¹⁵³

Wage work first came to Alaska Natives slowly as whaling companies established hubs in native communities along the north and northwest coast,¹⁵⁴ which enabled ships and their men to winter over in Alaska. Whaling companies often employed Native men and women both in the village and even on board ship.¹⁵⁵ The availability and the

¹⁵¹ Napoleon, 10-11.

¹⁵² Mary Larson, “The Evolution of the Qalgi in Post-Epidemic Point Hope” (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 2004), 38.

¹⁵³ Lowenstein, 153.

¹⁵⁴ Charles D. Brower, *Fifty Years Below Zero* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1942), 73.

¹⁵⁵ Lowenstein, 73-74.

demand for wage work dramatically increased in the larger villages during the first fifty years of the 20th century. Wage labor increasingly affected male and female gender roles and initiated subtle changes in their sense of purpose, direction, identity, and eventually family and community stature.

As noted above, during the early years of contact, most outside influences had been relatively minor, altering Native culture in small increments easily absorbed by the indigenous peoples. Culturally defining elements such as language, food, customs, clothing, semi-nomadic life styles, shamanism, and ceremonies remained intact. However, by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the severity and rapidity of culture change began to affect Alaska Native individuals, families and communities to such a degree that deep cultural impact was imminent.

These turn of the twentieth century influences altered traditional gender roles and eventually clouded the once clear sense of purpose, direction and identity for Native men and women, while also diminishing their family and community stature.

Global Context for the Dramatic Change Occurring in Northern Alaska

A brief review of the international context at the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries offers perspective and understanding of the attitudes of many outsiders who imposed a multitude of Western cultural norms upon Alaska Native peoples throughout much of the twentieth century. Globally, this era was the age of imperialism and nationalism, an era imbued with an attitude of racial superiority especially on the part of Western Europeans and Euro-Americans. This combination of attitudes provided a basis for the policies of acculturation, assimilation, and domination

by the more powerful states of France, Britain, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, China and the United States as they expanded worldwide for increased economic, political and territorial power. Traditional Western imperialists considered it best to put into practice what Rudyard Kipling called the “white man’s burden” by bringing advanced Western society to “civilize” the “inferior” peoples of less developed regions – primarily those in Africa and Asia.¹⁵⁶

As imperialism was fueled by nationalism, this pervasive attitude spurred nation-states to compete for world power and influence. The combined efforts of strategic imperialism and cultural imperialism ensured Western powers’ dominance over the inhabitants of foreign lands and control of key waterways and seaports. As dominating countries expanded their naval powers, strategic imperialism became a central theme. Control of key waterways, ports and military outposts was essential during early stages of domination of smaller, less powerful states.

Cultural imperialism grounded Westerners’ argument that “it was the white man’s burden to bring benefits of ‘superior’ Western civilization – its technology, its religion, its institutions – to the ‘inferior’ non-whites of the world living in ‘darkness and ignorance.’ ”¹⁵⁷ This pervasive attitude was endemic worldwide, and Americans were no exception. To compound this sentiment, the proponents of social Darwinism contended that natural selection (the belief that competition, elimination of the weak, and survival of the fittest) was relevant not only to non-human species but also to humanity. The

¹⁵⁶ Richard Goff and others, *The Twentieth Century and Beyond: A Brief Global History*, 7th ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill Press, 2008), 4.

¹⁵⁷ Goff and others, 23.

argument suggested that it was “right or ‘natural’ for strong, superior cultures to control or even eliminate ‘weaker, inferior cultures.’”¹⁵⁸ And finally, centuries of Christian missionary perseverance contributed to the ethos of early twentieth century cultural imperialism. Missionaries from Europe and the United States were determined to spread Christianity throughout Africa and Asia.¹⁵⁹

During this era of domination and control by imperial powers, it was common for Western states to attempt to transform newly eclipsed countries into their own self-image. Entire societies throughout Africa, Asia and Latin America were transformed, and at times even eliminated. Most Christian missionaries believed they were benefitting “immoral and savage races” by bringing ‘civilization’ and the Christian faith.

Understanding this historical context is critical to appreciating the assumptions with which Western missionaries and educators approached Alaska Natives and their cultures. As the migration of non-Native peoples from the Lower-48 to Alaska increased rapidly throughout the twentieth century, many held the above-mentioned opinions and belief systems which impacted indigenous peoples throughout the state.

Thus, by the turn of the twentieth century a new era had dawned; gone were the days of seafaring explorers and traders in search of uncharted waters and foreign goods, even the massive whale hunts were coming to a close. Eighteenth and nineteenth century international explorers and traders had been relatively unobtrusive; their interests lying within the realm of discovery. Twentieth century American missionaries and educators

¹⁵⁸ Goff and others, 23.

¹⁵⁹ Goff and others, 23.

came with the vision of acculturating and assimilating indigenous peoples into Western culture, profoundly different motives from those of previous intruders. This was a complete switch from previous outside influence. The new emphasis on land occupation and “civilizing” Alaska’s Native population began a new chapter in Alaska’s history.

Chapter Three

1900-1950 Middle Transition Years

Introduction

Alaska Native peoples were strongly impacted by the accelerated convergence of two vastly different cultures during the first fifty years of the twentieth century. The combined impacts of disease epidemics, new religious faiths and practices, Western education, wage employment, advancements in technology and increased infrastructure impacted the roles of Alaska Native men, women, children and elders, and they affected family units and community structure. As roles changed and life ways became increasingly imbued with Western cultural norms, sense of purpose, direction and identity for many adults and youth were also affected. As each generation became increasingly Westernized some indigenous customs began to lose ground, at times replaced by Western values and Western cultural norms. This mix of indigenous cultural practices and Western life ways created internal conflict and confusion for many.

Education

The infusion of Western education and Christianity into the lives of Alaska Natives was in part due to the action of Sheldon Jackson. Jackson, a Presbyterian missionary and the General Agent of Education in Alaska from 1885-1906, became the engine behind combined religious missions and Western education.¹⁶⁰ Though Russian

¹⁶⁰ Richard L. Dauenhauer, "Two Missions to Alaska," in *An Alaska Anthology: Interpreting the Past*, eds. Stephen W. Haycox and Mary Childers Mangusso (Seattle: University of Alaska Press, 1996), 81-82.

and American missionaries and educators were active in southeast Alaska during the early to mid-1800s, it was not until the late nineteenth century that missions and schools were established north of the Kuskokwim River.¹⁶¹ Jackson's intention was to create an educational environment in which Alaska Natives would receive a Western education while simultaneously becoming Christians. Jackson's approach to establishing Western education and the Christian faith in Alaska aligned with the prevailing attitudes of cultural imperialism, acculturation and assimilation.

An important aspect of this outside influence that has not been addressed is the effect education had on the family roles of youth and how it altered the development of young people's sense of purpose, direction and identity. This largely unrecognized effect of acculturation and assimilation practices is critical to understanding the striking developments of culture change by the mid-to late 1900s.

By the turn of the twentieth century the efforts of Christian missionaries and educators became more pervasive throughout Alaska as Western education and the Christian faith spread. Traditionally, Native education was a process whereby youth learned via a process of observation and practice, always with the guidance of a family or community member. Watching adults and elders as they conducted daily chores allowed children to develop the skills they would need as adults. The guidance, direction and support of family members throughout the development of these skills were essential to indigenous education. These skills were practical, useful and had immediate benefits to others. Education was also a life-long process, not limited to a set period of time in a

¹⁶¹ Ray, 210.

young person's life. The educational roles of both children and adults were clearly defined and contributed to identity development. The roles of children and adults would change markedly as school attendance became a requirement of Native children.

The contrast between Western and indigenous educational content and practice was stark. In schools Native children learned information which was mostly irrelevant to their environment and served little purpose in their lives. Compounding this issue, they were taught by adults unrelated to them, rather than close family members. Time spent in school was time spent away from their families; this change impacted adults and children. Richard K. Nelson comments in *Hunters of the Northern Ice*, "At five or six years of age they begin spending six hours each day in school, and the remainder of their waking hours are occupied by play activities with other children. There is very little communication between adults and children . . . and almost no opportunity for youngsters to accompany their elders for hunting activities . . . so the child spends eight or nine years in school within the village, during which time he acquires little more than a beginning knowledge, and even less interest, in traditional subsistence activities."¹⁶² With the onset of Western education children's mandatory school attendance had deleterious effects on the continuation of cultural ways and for the development of clearly defined male and female roles and their clear sense of purpose, direction and identity.

A young female interviewee spoke of her perception of the effects elementary school had on Alaska Native parent-child relationships; communication and skill development were impacted, parents' roles shifted from educator/mentor to by-stander.

¹⁶² Nelson, *Hunters of the Northern Ice*, 385.

(T)he communication between the father and the kids (would) probably be like nowadays ‘How’s school? How’s practice?’ . . . and back then he’d probably already be with the kids. Or at least the older adult men or younger adult(s), about the age to go out hunting, maybe ten-twelve . . . they’d be spending that time to go out hunting, they wouldn’t have to ask that question ‘cause they’d already know ‘Oh, you’re doing a good job hunting, you know how to tie this on your sled already . . . you’re growing up’. So . . . they’re losing that communication between (them) Now with Western society changing everyday (children’s skill development is) hard to see . . . normally the parent would see it right away instead of having to ask him and he would know the different techniques he’s learning . . . or how fast he’s learning it ‘cause he would have to ask a teacher . . . so those different roles would probably be changing if he had a daughter too. Because the daughter would be with the mom and she would just see what she has been doing, if she’s sewing with the mom (she would) see how she’s going with it and just be like ‘Oh, she got it this far’, you know.

Indigenous education was also directly related to daily chores; youth learned responsibility and dependability as they provided an important role in the family and community. Nelson’s observations of Iñupiaq society affirm the indigenous mode of education, “When the Eskimos lived in mobile camps, children learned at an early age to accept responsibility – to ride the sled, hitch the dogs, haul and carry equipment or game.”¹⁶³ Daily work created an important sense of purpose, both immediately in gratification, and longer term in overall personal development resulting in a sense of accomplishment, contribution and belonging. Anthropologist Norman A. Chance comments in *The Eskimo of North Alaska*, “Much of Eskimo childrearing is designed to prepare the young person to assume the orientations and values of the adult group. He is

¹⁶³ Nelson, *Hunters of the Northern Ice*, 385.

made to feel that his contributions and participation are important to the life of the family.”¹⁶⁴

The initial shift children and parents experienced from indigenous education to elementary schools was the preliminary stage of what later became an even greater shift as teenage children left home and attended boarding schools. Boarding schools were a federally funded program initiated during the mid-nineteenth century by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). First intended for the assimilation of American Indian children, the program was extended to Alaska Natives decades later. By 1881 there were sixty-eight boarding schools throughout the United States, and by the 1920s three vocational boarding schools were established in Alaska.¹⁶⁵ As educational aspirations of missionaries and educators increased, many Native children and teens were sent away from their villages to boarding schools in the Lower-48.¹⁶⁶

Boarding school experiences varied between extremes. Many Alaska Natives considered these educational experiences positive opportunities that in some respects enriched their lives. Boarding schools allowed students to meet others their age statewide, people they otherwise never would have known. A middle-aged Yup’ik male interviewee commented to the author, “You know the benefit of boarding schools is that you’re exposed to other peoples. You know my roommate in high school . . . was from Shishmaref (and) they were Iñupiaq. We had roommates from southeast Alaska, that’s

¹⁶⁴ Chance, *The Eskimo of North Alaska*, 28.

¹⁶⁵ Diane Hirshberg and Suzanne Sharp, *Thirty Years Later: The Long-Term Effect of Boarding Schools on Alaska Natives and Their Communities* (Anchorage: University of Alaska Anchorage, 2005), 1.

¹⁶⁶ Hirshberg and Sharp, 1.

Tlingit/Haida, Tsimshian, we had roommates from the Aleutian chain and the Alutiiq, and Athabascans and just a wonderful mix of people we run into and we were amazed by the stories they would tell and also amazed by our own similarities.”

Often life-long friendships resulted from the years spent at boarding schools. An Elder interviewee commented on the close connections he has maintained since his boarding school days at Mount Edgecombe. [EKW – So you’re still in contact with those students who you went to school with?] “Oh, yes. Everywhere I go – like I just went to a concert and ran into my friends from Kodiak and a friend from Ouzinkie on Afognak Island on the other side of Kodiak. Port Lions is on the other side. There’s . . . some friends from Port Lions. We saw some class mates from Dillingham, two from Holikachuk, several from Nome, some from my home town, and you know, all over and there we are.”

For others it was a period of loneliness and painful struggle. Adolescents were sent to environments completely unfamiliar to them. Institutions designed to assimilate and acculturate Native youth by supplanting traditional Native life styles with Western language, clothing, customs, and skills were all part of the intended and enforced identity change.¹⁶⁷ Some Native men and women explain their experiences this way: Florence Kenney, an Iñupiaq woman who was sent to a Catholic mission school in the 1940s said, “We didn’t have names; we were called by numbers – like I was Miss 14.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ Kathy Graves, “Resilience and Adaptation Among Alaska Native Men” (Ph.D. diss., Smith College, 2003), 19-20.

¹⁶⁸ Jon Reyhner and Jeanne Eder, *American Indian Education: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 125.

Additionally, “language and culture were suppressed at the mission school . . . we had to adopt European values and European lifestyle. We could not practice our culture, speak our language, or sing our music . . . we had to give up all our Indian ways.”¹⁶⁹ An Athabascan adult commented, “Not only did I feel like they were taking away our identity, they were taking away our language and our culture and they were trying to make us into another culture that we were not familiar with”¹⁷⁰

This was a dramatic change for Native youth, families and entire communities. In Alaska Native cultures, early adolescence was a time when older children contributed significantly to family and community life. Teens were developing advanced hunting, sewing and food preparation skills, all critical to ensuring the survival of their future families and the community. Parents and extended family depended heavily on teenage youth to care for their younger siblings, to help with daily chores, to join large-game hunting groups, and to gather wild foods and prepare them for storage and daily meals. As noted in Chapter One, had boys been home during these formative years, they would have been in the role of apprentice, spending countless hours with their fathers, uncles and/or male elders who served as role models during these years. During this time boys developed advanced skills in hunting and sled building, learned advanced traditional knowledge and developed important bonds with these role models in the qalgi. For girls, this too was an important time of apprenticeship – time spent with their mothers, aunties and female elders developing skills necessary to manage their own families. Along with

¹⁶⁹ Reyhner and Eder, 125.

¹⁷⁰ Hirshberg and Sharp, 12.

childcare and advanced sewing skills, knowledge of food procurement and storage was typically developed during these teen years. Avoiding spoilage of stored foods while ensuring abundant food stores were essential skills for young women. The absence of children and young adults left a void in families and communities;¹⁷¹ the repercussions of this separation affected individuals and families and altered the fabric of the culture for future generations.

The absence of youth in homes and communities also affected the roles and sense of purpose and direction of parents, relatives and other community members. In traditional culture children and youth were not raised by their parents alone; successful adulthood came with the guidance, direction and mentorship of immediate and extended family members within the community. It had been the traditional role of parents, aunts, uncles and elders to teach the children, to care for them, to raise them and to mentor them into adulthood. Parents, aunts, uncles and elders identified with their roles as those of teachers, guides and mentors of the younger generation.¹⁷² Their lives, their roles, and their implicit sense of purpose and direction and even their identity came into question in the absence of the youth. In addition to the weakening of adults' roles as mentors, communities experienced physical hardships as well. Families and communities missed the strength, energy, vitality and skills of adolescents. Much of the laborious work that young men and women provided was now left to adults and elders.

¹⁷¹ Hirshberg and Sharp, iii.

¹⁷² Burch, 90.

With exposure to Western lifestyles and Western education during these prime developmental years, the sense of purpose, direction and identity for young Alaska Natives lost its grounding in Native culture and became open to mixed influence. This was a very trying period for many who became unsure of which path to travel to be successful and who lacked confidence that they could be successful in either. These young men and women often viewed themselves as not entirely Alaska Native anymore, but certainly not white American either. They had skills and knowledge derived from both cultures, but were not proficient enough in either to thrive.¹⁷³

Returning to the village created unease for many; newly formed Western skills were of little use, but neither were these young men and women as skilled in the traditional roles as the youth who had remained at home. One male Elder who attended boarding school commented about the struggle to return to village life: “. . . when they returned they lacked the skills required of them in the traditional way, so there’s a severance from the cultural knowledge and the modern knowledge. This also created a generation gap, not only between these youth and their parents, but the youth and the elders.” This left many in a state of imbalance, insecure about their cultural membership and sense of belonging.¹⁷⁴ One interviewee for this research project commented: “The young men in essence . . . we went through a period of time . . . when you’re considered a man of marriageable age, off to high school you went, severed from that connection to our past, to our history, and we did not learn that until after we were 18-20, so we had to

¹⁷³ Nelson, *Hunters of the Northern Ice*, 385-387.

¹⁷⁴ Hirshberg and Sharp, 19.

come back and learn it So there's that disconnect." Upon return from boarding school, many lagged behind their peers (those few who had remained at home) and suffered ridicule and teasing. Some parents were impatient with their children after they returned from boarding school because they were not as adept at traditional skills as they would have been had they remained at home. One man recalls that his father got very angry and impatient with him and his siblings because they had not learned how to do the basic things necessary for living the Iñupiaq way of life. Therefore, many young Native men and women upon returning home from boarding schools felt insecure, suffered from poor self-esteem and were unsure where they belonged or how they could be useful.¹⁷⁵

Thus, teens' attending boarding schools, their long absences from families and communities and their return to village life without the skills to provide for their families and communities all contributed significantly to the breakdown of traditions and Native culture. These changes impacted the cohesiveness of families, created internal acculturative stress and ultimately contributed to the dramatic shift in gender roles and to the opaqueness of a once clear sense of purpose, direction and identity.

Religion

The effects of Christianization had various consequences within northern Alaska Native communities. As the great epidemics swept through Alaska and as Natives' confidence in shamanism was shaken,¹⁷⁶ having an alternative belief system offered great

¹⁷⁵ Hirshberg and Sharp, 19-20.

¹⁷⁶ Hughes, *An Eskimo Village*, 99.

comfort to many. Additionally, an alternative belief system that offered the comforts of a prescription for salvation provided relief from the fears of a taboo-based faith.¹⁷⁷

Christianity offered an answer to the unknown. On the other hand, the loss of shamanism and the combined indigenous spiritual belief systems with the Christian faith contributed to cultural loss in myriad ways and with far reaching consequences.

Of relevance to gender role influence was the elimination of the qalgi, or the men's house. The qalgi was also the community house, a place of gathering for all family and community members especially throughout the winter months when storytelling, dancing and drumming took place more frequently. It was also considered the men's house, a communal environment where adult men, elders and male youth gathered regularly.¹⁷⁸ These gatherings were times for adult males to share stories of hunting excursions and lessons, a time of storytelling by elders to older boys and young men, and it was a place where stories, songs and traditions were passed from one generation to the next.¹⁷⁹ The qalgi was also a place where sport and game activities took place; men and boys held contests demonstrating their strength, agility and endurance.¹⁸⁰ As young boys were old enough to understand the significance of the qalgi, it became a special place of which they longed to be a part. Boys looked forward to being old enough to enter the qalgi during these male-only times; this was recognized as one of the early passages

¹⁷⁷ Robert F. Spencer, *The North Alaskan Eskimo: A Study in Ecology and Society* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1959), 381.

¹⁷⁸ Spencer, 187.

¹⁷⁹ Larson, 41.

¹⁸⁰ Spencer, 188.

toward manhood.¹⁸¹ These experiences also contributed to the development of young males sense of purpose, direction, identity, and the early establishment of their future family and community stature. Though these children were young by current American standards, they were often hunting with their fathers, uncles and elders by the time they were seven to nine years old, therefore membership in the qalgi at such a young age was not an anomaly, but considered essential to the development of a fine hunter and family and community provider.

One of the dramatic changes to the community and to the male maturation process was the dissolution of the qalgi (both the physical structure and its cultural significance) by missionaries. Christian missionaries tended to view communal dancing, drumming and singing (intricate components of Native culture) as elements of the savage life, and considered the qalgi places of evil in need of eradication.¹⁸² This resulted in the discontinued use and quick destruction of the qalgi; they were simply torn down or burned. In some instances qalgi made of wood were salvaged, the wood used for the construction of new buildings or burned as a heat source in newly adopted wood stoves.¹⁸³

The loss of this influential environment impacted the cohesiveness of Native families; profoundly affecting the relationships among males of all ages and the building of future generations molded in traditional customs, knowledge and life ways. The loss of the qalgi was an instantaneous blow to the important roles adult men played in the lives

¹⁸¹ Spencer, 190.

¹⁸² Larson, 38.

¹⁸³ Brower, 232.

of younger men and the invaluable roles elders played in the lives of youth and other adult males. The loss of the qalgi was also the loss of a critical venue for cultural teachings and sense of belonging and membership.

The loss of a communal gathering place aided in the assimilationist process of strengthening Western style nuclear families while discouraging the Native custom of large extended families often cohabiting under one roof. Single family housing also affected the roles adult relatives played in the lives of other adults, but more importantly, it affected the roles they played in the development of youth. Communal living and social gathering enhanced by life in the qalgi allowed children the continual observance of adult behavior and verbal and demonstrative interaction between adults and children. This environment and family influence created deep bonds and a sense of place for children with their parents and other close relatives. This was essential for the healthy development of young men's and women's sense of well-being, stability and interconnectedness,¹⁸⁴ and to the development of their roles, sense of purpose, direction, identity, and future family and community stature.

The destabilizing effects of Western education and missionary practices on Native culture and particularly intergenerational relations in the early twentieth century contributed significantly to the fundamental changes Native culture underwent during the middle transition years, 1900-1950.

¹⁸⁴ Lisa Wexler, "The Importance of Identity, History, and Culture in the Wellbeing of Indigenous Youth," *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 2.2 (2009): 268-269.

Wage Labor and Cash

The incorporation of cash into the lives of Alaska's indigenous peoples and into the construct of Native cultures was not entirely new at the turn of the twentieth century. Earlier years of whaling had introduced a cash economy; the sale of baleen, whale oil, bone and walrus ivory had been the primary source of cash flow into coastal communities. Additionally, early trading posts and small supply stores established along the coast carried foodstuffs and supplies from outside Alaska, offering Native peoples access to Western consumer goods;¹⁸⁵ purchases of such goods were increasingly made with an exchange of cash.

By the late nineteenth century whaling had declined, and had all but disappeared by 1915 owing to a decline in the whale population and the invention of alternative materials that substituted for whale oil and baleen.¹⁸⁶ Whale meat was a staple of the Iñupiaq diet and the whaling trade had earned Natives significant income.

Therefore, as the whale population declined coastal hunters sought alternative sources of food and cash; many had developed a taste for and dependence upon Western goods.¹⁸⁷ The increased demand for and value of Arctic fox pelts soon surpassed the benefits of whaling. Arctic fox had not been of interest to Alaska Natives prior to contact (fox had little meat and their pelts were fragile),¹⁸⁸ however, once hunters were

¹⁸⁵ Nelson, *Hunters of the Northern Ice*, 383.

¹⁸⁶ Chance, *The Eskimo of North Alaska*, 14.

¹⁸⁷ Chance, *The Eskimo of North Alaska*, 16.

¹⁸⁸ Nelson, *Hunters of the Northern Ice*, 181.

introduced to steel traps¹⁸⁹ and the art of running a trap line, many men became avid trappers. By 1920 the price for a single white fox pelt was \$50 and a blue pelt was worth \$100.¹⁹⁰

Though running a winter trap line was a major deviation from the seasonal hunting cycles and group hunting practices for Iñupiaq men (traditionally winter was the time for storytelling, singing, dancing and gathering in the qalgi, and hunting was commonly conducted by a group of men), the need for alternative wild foods, furs and cash over-rode tradition. Between the turn of the twentieth century and the stock market crash of 1929, trapping had become a way of life for many Native men, a life often lonely and solitary. Approximately \$2 million in furs were taken in Alaska prior to 1929, providing most or all of the cash income for Alaska Natives.¹⁹¹ This change in kinship relations and hunting patterns also contributed to the decline of family and community cohesion.¹⁹²

Though the transition from bartering with traders and whalers to trading with the local village store owner for cash or store credit constituted a shift in customs, trading for cash still allowed Alaska Native men to remain essentially “self-employed.” In the future cash incomes would accrue from wage labor and within a hierarchical environment of supervisor and worker, a context unlike that of the individual trapper. Trapping suited

¹⁸⁹ Ronald J. Glass and Robert M. Muth, *The Changing Role of Subsistence in Rural Alaska* (Transactions of the 54th North American Wildlife and Natural Resource Conference, 1989), 225.

¹⁹⁰ Spencer, 361.

¹⁹¹ Claus M. Naske and Herman E. Slotnick, *Alaska: A History of the 49th State*, 2nd ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 109.

¹⁹² Chance, *The Eskimo of North Alaska*, 16.

most men in that it utilized their keen outdoor navigation and survival skills, and it required the use of animal knowledge while also challenging the intellect by developing new knowledge. Until further technological advances in transportation occurred, trapping also continued the use of sled dogs. The primary drawback was that trapping was most often a solitary venture, creating an environment of loneliness and isolation uncharacteristic of Native cultures.¹⁹³ Trapping for furs however did support the male role of family and community provider and of confident and competent male identity. Trapping also maintained the adult male role of teacher and educator for young males and allowed men to story-tell and offer guidance to younger generations of future trappers.

During the first quarter of the 20th century, the vicissitudes of America's economy affected even the lives of Alaska Natives thousands of miles away. The swell of the financial market in the 1920s met by the sudden stock market crash in 1929 created a boom and bust cycle, bringing the viability of trapping to an abrupt halt. The stock market and subsequent fur market crash required that most Alaska Natives return to a life of almost entire subsistence.¹⁹⁴ Though this shift was inconvenient, as Native families had become accustomed to store-bought foods and supplies, many Native males had maintained their extensive seasonal hunting and fishing skills enabling them to sustain their families and communities. Generally speaking men's and women's roles and sense of purpose, direction, identity, and family and community stature remained intact.

¹⁹³ Chance, *The Eskimo of North Alaska*, 16.

¹⁹⁴ Spencer, 361.

During this same time period, advances in land and air travel brought jobs and additional Western goods to rural Alaska. The first railroad, completed in 1923 ran from Seward to Fairbanks. This first large construction project funded by the federal government in Alaska created hundreds of jobs.¹⁹⁵ Another advancement in travel was air service starting in the 1920s. Air travel was the most advantageous of all means of travel in Alaska; bush pilots accessed even the most remote villages, hauling supplies and people to and from communities.¹⁹⁶ This single advancement in Western technology brought more goods, materials and Western influences to rural Alaska than any other by this time.

Alaska Natives experienced a second wave of dramatic change in relation to cash income and wage labor during World War II and the early Cold War years. With the Japanese invasion of the Aleutian Islands in 1942, the subsequent build-up of military arms and supporting facilities across the Territory of Alaska dramatically altered the region. From approximately 1942 to 1945, the United States War Department spent nearly \$3 billion on military construction and operations in Alaska. Additionally, 300,000 military personnel came to a Territory which in 1940 had a population of 73,000.¹⁹⁷ This dramatic shift in outside influence, both in population density and infrastructure development brought rapid culture change to Alaska Natives.

¹⁹⁵ Naske and Slotnick, 106.

¹⁹⁶ Naske and Slotnick, 107.

¹⁹⁷ Fern Chandonnet, ed., "Introduction", *Alaska at War, 1941-1945: The Forgotten Front Remembered: Papers from the Alaska at War Symposium* (Anchorage: Alaska at War Committee, 1993), ix.

In part, the military sites from as far south as Kodiak and the Aleutian Islands to the northwest at Port Clarence on the Seward Peninsula, to the north at Barrow, to Anchorage in the Gulf of Alaska and to Fairbanks in the interior, brought “the West” to Alaska.¹⁹⁸ The development of sea ports offered coastal communities improved access to Western goods and services. The larger cities were transformed by the construction of new buildings and the technological advancements of automobiles, communication systems, air travel, and train travel.¹⁹⁹

One critical component to the development of Alaska’s infrastructure was the expansion of wage labor opportunities, producing a surge in what had once been a minor cash economy. World War II and the subsequent Cold War development brought employment opportunities with wages paid in cash. By the late 1940s the desire, and in many cases the need for Western goods (gas, oil and ammunition had become essentials for hunting and heating homes) increasingly induced Alaska Natives to seek employment. Their training in vocational boarding schools and/or experience and training during the War years qualified many men and women for work in a vast array of service and/or labor employment.

Though further economic development throughout Alaska occurred during the late transition years (1950-1980), the initial explosion of construction activity began in the early 1940s. While these new employment opportunities were welcome and in many ways improved the living standard of Alaska Natives, men’s hunting roles were often

¹⁹⁸ Naske and Slotnick, 122-139 *passim*.

¹⁹⁹ Chandonnet, ix.

eclipsed by the desire and the need for cash. Traditional cultural systems related to family cohesiveness, role models, use of time, values, gender roles and sense of purpose, direction and identity were changing rapidly, being overridden by Western value systems. As employment opportunities for women became available, the definition of primary wage earner began to shift. This became increasingly apparent in the late transition years (1950-1980) and especially in the present era (1980-2010). Not only the means by which men provided for their families (hunting and/or wage employment), but what they provided (meat and/or cash) was changing rapidly by the middle of the twentieth century and men's roles and family and community stature began to change noticeably.

As Western culture became increasingly influential in Native communities, Western value systems increasingly pervaded. One such example is the Western value of financial independence and responsibility to oneself and ones immediate family. Aboriginal customs were based on interpersonal dependence and community cooperation.²⁰⁰ Men hunted together and were obligated to share their catch with extended family and community members, creating a social environment of sharing and collaboration.²⁰¹ Though Western employment was often team-oriented, it earned an individual pay check that was viewed as money one had made for oneself and was entitled to spend however one saw fit. Therefore, as Western values including individualism and the nuclear family increasingly impacted Alaska Natives, community

²⁰⁰ Spencer, 361.

²⁰¹ Jolles, 287-309 *passim*.

cohesiveness weakened.²⁰² A young Native female interviewee commented about this change in cultural values: “We don’t really practice those cultural things anymore; now it’s more survival of the individual not survival of the couple.” Another interviewee, an Elder, has observed that youth have been influenced to adopt Western values of individualism: “Most of these young folks don’t have responsibility to community. They have been raised as responsibility to themselves.” William Oquilluk, an Iñupiaq man from Point Hope summarizes this concept of traditional and Western concepts of wealth in *People of Kauwerak*, “An Eskimo was a rich man if he had good luck in hunting, plenty of strong weapons, nets, and tools, good boats, a strong body, and a large happy family with lots of children. Then he knew lots of things about how to hunt, fish, and travel, and everybody liked him. He was a rich man with wisdom. Others put gold and silver in banks to become rich. They bought things made in factories. They went mining for gold. But, now the Eskimos have learned from white people what value gold and other minerals have for them.”²⁰³ These conflicting cultural value systems contributed to the challenges Alaska Native men and women experienced as wage labor became increasingly prevalent in their lives.

Cash and wage labor provided an additional means by which Native men and women supported their families; however these Western institutions contributed to conflict between Native and Western value systems. This situation often undermined men’s hunter and provider role, thereby affecting their sense of purpose, direction,

²⁰² Spencer, 362.

²⁰³ Oquilluk with Bland, 225.

identity, and often even their family and community stature. New advances in Western technology also affected male and female roles and relationships in the early twentieth century.

Technology: Roles of Men and Women and Advancements in Technology

By the mid-twentieth century advancements in technology were also beginning to affect the culturally-based roles of men and women, and each change brought about another. For example, the introduction of air travel and mail service to rural communities in the 1920s introduced the use of mail order catalogues and thereby increased the accessibility of Western clothing.²⁰⁴ As women purchased more Western-style clothing they sewed less.²⁰⁵ In turn, this affected the roles of men and their need to hunt for large animals that provided the skins and furs women made into clothing.

Additionally, an increase in the accessibility and availability of store-bought foods, owing to the establishment of village stores and advanced modes of transportation, changed the roles of Native men and women significantly. While store-bought foods made daily life easier and staved off starvation during lean hunting periods; purchasing foods instead of hunting weakened the male role of hunter and mentor. An Iñupiaq man interviewed for this research project spoke to these points: “I asked my father if he could teach me how to hunt; he said he didn’t have to because . . . he said ‘the store’s right

²⁰⁴ Spencer, 377.

²⁰⁵ Hughes, *An Eskimo Village*, 217.

there' It's really changed in my life time . . . but I really wanted to learn how to do it.”

By the mid-twentieth century store-bought foods supplemented a diet still heavily based in subsistence derived foods. However, this dietary balance and the activities of many Native males began to shift as store-bought foods became increasingly accessible and the need for wage incomes grew. By the mid-twentieth century and into the late transition years (1950-1980), Western foodstuffs and supplies outweighed subsistence derived foods in many villages and Native households.²⁰⁶ This shift in diet changed the roles for both men and women and directly impacted their traditional sense of purpose, direction and identity.

The complementarity of men's and women's roles had been an essential element of indigenous culture.²⁰⁷ As families increasingly purchased food from the store, men spent less time hunting and women spent less time handling men's catch and other wild foods. The changes in the roles of men and women also affected the kinds of mentoring roles they played in their children's lives; as women spent less time handling wild foods, animal skins and sewing, young females spent less time observing and being mentored by adult women who would have taught them these skills. Similarly, as adult men spent more time “on the job” or away from home and employed in the larger cities, fewer young males had hunter role models. These conditions became increasingly prevalent during the late transition years (1950-1980) as Western culture and societal norms came

²⁰⁶ Hughes, *An Eskimo Village*, 154.

²⁰⁷ Bodenhorn, 55.

to dominate the day-to-day lives of Alaska Native individuals, families and communities.²⁰⁸

Moreover, the ability to purchase foods throughout the year decreased the need for women to estimate and prepare for storage the large quantities of food necessary to feed their families and others throughout the winter and through lean times. This change in women's traditional role of food procurement and preparation reduced the time spent modeling these skills for children. As younger generations of males and females spent less time watching and apprenticing with adults and elders, they became less assured of their future roles and sense of purpose, direction and identity.

Technological advances in hunting materials and supplies also altered the way men hunted and the amount of time it required. These factors played an even greater role in the lives of Native men during the late transition years, as means of arctic transportation changed dramatically by the 1960s and 1970s. However, early technological advances introduced the advantages of boats and motors, thereby quickly replacing the use of skin boats. Advances in weaponry, such as shotguns and rifles, which replaced breach-loading weapons, and greater access to ammunition also affected the way men hunted and the time it took to return with meat for a family meal.²⁰⁹ Furthermore, advanced weaponry reduced the distinguished role of master hunter in relation to the role

²⁰⁸ Norman Chance, "Culture Change and Integration: An Eskimo Example," *American Anthropologist*, New Series 62 no.6 (December 1960): 1030-1031.

²⁰⁹ Hughes, *An Eskimo Village*, 104.

of novice hunter thereby subverting the mentoring role of expert hunters and diminishing their status in the community relative to younger hunters.²¹⁰

Naturally, these advances made hunting easier in many respects and often ensured men of a successful hunt. Time saved through more efficient means was an advantage; however increased idle time, time unfilled with challenging, meaningful and purposeful activities and duties that were rewarding in their own right undermined men's traditional roles and sense of purpose, direction and identity.

²¹⁰ Stephen Conn, *No Need of Gold – Alcohol Control Laws and the Alaska Native Population: From the Russians through the Early Years of Statehood*, ed. Antonia Moras (Anchorage: University of Alaska School of Justice, 1986), 59.

Chapter Four

1950-1980 Late Transition Years

Introduction

The late transition years (1950-1980) were marked by rapid culture change; further influences from Western culture affected urban and rural Alaska Native life. Territory and statewide changes in response to pre and post-WWII activities, the introduction of President Johnson's Great Society programs, advances in Western education, increasing employment opportunities, and advancements in technology contributed to further evolution in gender roles and affected the sense of purpose, direction, identity, and family and community stature of Native Alaska men, women, youth and elders.

WWII – Territory and Statewide Change

The speed at which social and cultural change came to Alaska Native communities peaked during the late transition years of 1950 to 1980. The dramatic influx of non-Natives, cash, jobs and federal government influences changed the state and its indigenous life ways significantly in this short thirty year span. Pre and post-WWII events essentially put Alaska on the map; the development of infrastructure, the building of Cold War radar stations and the construction of military bases in Anchorage and Fairbanks created high paying jobs and expanded these cities.²¹¹ The advancement from

²¹¹ Stephen Haycox, "Mining the Federal Government: The War and the All-American City," in *Alaska at War 1941-1945* (Anchorage: Alaska at War Committee, 1995), 203.

territory status to statehood in 1959 also brought significant changes. By 1968 oil was discovered in Prudhoe Bay, leading to increased exploration and great pressure to start drilling. Since statehood, tension had arisen over the state's selection of the 103 million acres of land provided in the statehood act. Alaska Natives had protested the selection process, because their land claims, acknowledged in the 1884 Organic Act that organized the territory shortly after its purchase, had never been settled. In 1966, the U.S. Secretary of the Interior issued a land freeze, stopping further state selections until Native claims were settled.²¹²

The discovery of oil put pressure on both sides to settle Native land claims in order to create a right-of-way for the pending oil pipeline. The result was the signing of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) in 1971. ANCSA awarded Alaska Natives \$963 million and 44 million acres of land; these assets were conveyed to corporations of which Alaska Natives were shareholders.²¹³ ANCSA corporations and the non-profit organizations associated with them eventually provided thousands of jobs to Alaska Natives (and non-Natives) and shareholders have received dividends of various amounts over the years. The signing of ANCSA also allowed pipeline planning and construction to forge ahead. By the mid-1970s the building of the trans-Alaska pipeline brought a new wave of employment opportunities for Native peoples while also drawing more non-Native peoples, companies and corporations to Alaska from the Lower-48 and from around the world. The “boom years” of the mid- to late 1970s are legendary in

²¹² David Case, *Alaska Natives and American Laws* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1984), 15.

²¹³ Case, 15.

modern Alaska history. All imaginable excesses took place, and rural Alaskans were propelled into the modern world with its emphasis on material wealth and comforts. The contrast with traditional life could not have been starker.

President Johnson's Great Society Programs

President Johnson's Great Society programs of the mid-1960s were designed to confront two longstanding problems in the United States; poverty and racial injustice. New programs sought to advance civil rights, erase educational inequities and thereby "pull poverty up by the roots." In other words, these efforts sought to extend America's "unlimited opportunities" to all Americans by providing truly equal educational opportunities²¹⁴ and by providing job training and income assistance (including food stamps, particularly for single mothers with young children at home). Social programs designed to support those in need were developed through the Office of Economic Opportunity; programs promoted health, education and general welfare of the poor.²¹⁵ By the 1960s many Alaska Natives, most in rural villages, were considered to be living below the poverty level; incomes were often irregular due to the shortage of steady year-round employment opportunities in rural Alaska. Therefore, many Native families and individuals were eligible for financial assistance from the federal government. These

²¹⁴ This would mean compensatory educational programs for children from deprived backgrounds designed to assist them in catching up with their middle class peers, for instance in elementary reading, writing and mathematics.

²¹⁵ For an explication of President Johnson's aims in his War on Poverty, see Lyndon Baines Johnson, "First State of the Union Address," 8 January 1964, accessed 17 March 2010, available from <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/lbj1964stateoftheunion.htm>.

financial gains were of great help and often supported both the elderly and families with children who could not otherwise support themselves.

Over time, such assistance programs decreased the need to hunt and fish for subsistence. The increased dependence on such programs weakened traditional sources of pride, independence, competency, and self-reliance. Anthropologist Richard K. Nelson found that within a few years of instituting transfer payments: “the government has made it easy for men to live without being self-sufficient. In fact even the most active hunters accept this easy money. Welfare is another factor which is destroying the initiative of even the older hunters, and is aiding in the breakdown of incentive. It is obvious, therefore, that the native economy will die with the passing of the present adult generation.”²¹⁶

As families received unearned government assistance the contrast between the current male image and that of the great hunter could not have been starker. In rural villages, transfer payments were one of the greatest influences that took people from the land, often discouraging their motivation to pursue productive traditional endeavors. The very programs designed to help often did as much harm by undermining men’s role as provider, jeopardizing their identity as strong, capable and honorable men and impacting their leadership status in the family and community. Many Alaska Natives found “their lives had become a meaningless routine of sitting around watching the seasons pass, waiting for a new welfare program that will ‘help’ more.”²¹⁷ According to Norman

²¹⁶ Nelson, *Hunters of the Northern Ice*, 387.

²¹⁷ Nelson, *Hunters of the Northern Forest*, 296.

Chance, apathy led to men giving up their jobs in order to qualify for welfare.²¹⁸ Richard Nelson observed that men were seeing themselves becoming “lazy, useless and spoiled.”²¹⁹

“Eskimos never get stuck” is a sentiment long believed and understood about indigenous peoples of Alaska’s northern coastal lands. However, this dynamic, powerful image began to erode for many Alaska Natives as Western society increasingly offered its paternalistic, helping hand. Within a few generations, and most noticeable by the later twentieth century, many Native men had all but given up. An Iñupiaq woman Elder commented, “so many young men are giving up today. That’s why the suicidal is so big right now in the village . . . they depressed . . . sometime the men think they’re failures, but it’s not their fault you know. There’s a lotta men like that (who) give up you know and some will go and turn to alcohol and some . . . you know whatever . . . so it’s hard for the men.” The identity shift from hunter to wage laborer had created acculturative stress for most Native men, but the additional shift to being simply a by-stander was much more damaging. An Iñupiaq adult male responded to the boredom and apathy he observed in his community as many males had less to do, “They just have kids and be on welfare and if there’s work they’ll get work, but a lotta men . . . are bored. Men don’t have anything to do unless they go out and do something.” He continues, “More things have come into our lives that are negative . . . with welfare coming in and the availability of jobs being so low and skills being lost . . . some men feel that they are useless; a lotta times there’s no

²¹⁸ Chance, *The Eskimos of North Alaska*, 90.

²¹⁹ Nelson, *Hunters of the Northern Forest*, 296.

work available and it's easier to just stay home.” One middle aged Iñupiaq male explained how he views the consequences of government hand-outs since the 1960s: “When people lack their regular skills and grow up to be part of the institutional . . . (the) government would be paying to give them skills, living skills, and paying for homes and paying for different things. It would be a gap again, falling back into the hands of the government with a hands-out attitude and they would be thinking everything's going to be given to me so . . . it's very destructive.”

Though Johnson's Great Society programs proved to be helpful and necessary for many, there have also been unintended consequences. Transfer payments increased the level of dependence Alaska Natives had on a dominant outside culture. For many men and women the decreased motivation to subsistence hunt and/or find wage work also reduced their self-esteem. These impacts have been witnessed over several generations, each trying to find a balance between accepting needed assistance and self-determination.

Education

By the 1950s most Alaska Native children were attending school regularly, although how and where varied among Alaska's regions, tribes and even within villages. Most communities had elementary schools and the larger hub communities had high schools; therefore these children remained in their villages usually through the 8th and/or 12th grades. However, from the early 1900s to the 1970s Native children living in villages that did not have schools were usually taken from their homes and sent (at times with their parents' consent and at others without) to boarding schools either in Alaska or

outside the territory.²²⁰ Until the late 1970s most communities with elementary schools did not have high schools; therefore consistent with the mid-transition years (1900-1950) most high school age children were sent to boarding and/or vocational schools or boarding homes established throughout Alaska and to vocational boarding schools in Oregon and Oklahoma.²²¹

In the late 1970s a significant shift occurred in rural education; the law suit commonly known as the “Molly Hootch Case,” or *Tobeluk v. Lind*, was settled out of court resulting in a legal mandate that required any village with a population of a minimum of eight (later increased to ten) high school age children to have a local high school.²²² The decision to construct each village high school depended upon the vote of local community members; in other words village residents and parents of each rural community (not state and federal officials) decided whether their children would attend high school in their home community or continue to be sent to boarding schools. As of 1983, all but eleven communities had exercised their option to have local village high schools.²²³

Within ten years all but a handful of villages had opened public high schools. Children were no longer required to leave their families and communities to attend high school. Though village high schools did not solve all the educational problems for Alaska

²²⁰ Hirshberg and Sharp, iii.

²²¹ Hirshberg and Sharp, 1.

²²² Stephen E. Cotton, “Alaska’s Molly Hootch Case: High Schools and the Village Voice,” *Educational Research Quarterly* 8 no.4 (1984): 1, http://www.alaskool.org/native_ed/law/mhootch_erq.html.

²²³ Cotton, 8.

Native families (in fact the near future would introduce new challenges), they clearly eased many of the tensions related to separation.

By the late transition years generations of Alaska Native teens had attended boarding schools and many had since become parents. Males and females who had been away from home during their adolescent years had not developed the necessary practices of observing and participating in child rearing (typically the rearing of siblings and cousins). Therefore young parents who were products of the boarding school era had very little knowledge of how to parent children, especially adolescents.²²⁴ An Elder male interview participant explained how he has seen parents who were products of boarding schools struggle with raising their children:

the generation of adults have been disenfranchised by the government because they were removed from their parents. So they did not learn the skills of raising children . . . (they lacked) skills required to raise teenagers. Because they were removed from parents and grandparents just when they reached that fourteen year old point . . . (they) did not learn to care for children after the age of thirteen, fourteen They were teenagers themselves among a population of about seven hundred, maybe eight hundred, (at boarding school) all an entire community of teenagers, raising themselves, and also being isolated from communities They are learning (skills) now, by experience, but many parents I see I would say meet with failure, many parents are not encouraging their children enough, especially their teenagers to strive for something.

Many adults had to learn how to be parents after they had children. This often resulted in challenging situations for parents and children. One male interviewee expressed this concern: “And today my generation . . . (we) really had to grow up with our children, we all have to grow up with our children because we didn’t know any better . . . because we were disconnected from the traditional knowledge and so many of us

²²⁴ Hirshberg and Sharp, 19-20.

endeavored to regain what we had not been taught and some of us were successful, others were not.”

Research Dianne Hirshberg and Suzanne Sharp conducted in the early twenty-first century addressed a similar, but unique aspect of the affects of adolescents attending boarding schools and therefore being absent from their village communities. Their interview participants noted that once villages had their own high schools few adults knew what to do with the teens that now remained in their communities. Some villages had not had adolescents at home for thirty or more years, therefore it was difficult for parents and the community alike to adjust.²²⁵ By the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries Native customs that would have kept teens busy had all but disappeared, therefore teens were often bored; adults who had not grown up at home during their adolescent years did not know what to do with these adolescent youth. Many teens were getting into trouble and parents were often unskilled in managing these behaviors.²²⁶

Challenges of youth claiming to be ‘bored’ and many adolescents appearing to be lazy and unmotivated suggests that the loss of parenting skills is effecting contemporary generations. As one male Elder observed: “They’re feeling bored, but they don’t want to get up and do anything. They have to be practically coerced out the door to get them to do something. And then they’re angry because they have to do something I see this as being totally, downright, spoiled, rotten. And they think this is the normal way to grow up.”

²²⁵ Hirshberg and Sharp, 23-24.

²²⁶ Hirshberg and Sharp, 24.

The challenges for parents who were students of boarding schools in the early and middle transition years created stressful situations as they were faced with having to raise adolescents without having had earlier training. For some, these parental role modeling skills remain abstract and out of reach today, creating an adolescent environment of excessive freedom with few boundaries and youth lacking in purpose and direction often resulting in bored and lazy teens.

Wage Labor

Throughout the late transition years (1950-1980) wage labor for Alaska Native men and women became not only an option, but a necessity. Most aspects of urban and rural life required a cash income. Many of life's necessities were now purchased; food, clothing, hunting and fishing equipment, heating fuel and gasoline for outboard motors and snow machines were typical expenditures requiring a steady flow of cash. Wage labor, though not new to Alaska Natives, had begun to play a primary role in men and women's lives eventually becoming one of the leading influences that contributed to changes in their traditional gender roles. Gender roles for men and women, for wives and husbands, and for family and community members shifted ever more toward those of Western cultures. This shift affected outlooks on life, visions of the future, roles Alaska Natives played in their children's lives, and it resulted in a broader shift of cultural values.

Many Alaska Native men were making the shift from the role of hunter to wage worker and remained the primary provider or breadwinner; this satisfied their role as head of the household and coincided with cultural norms. However, often times their jobs

required minimal training and therefore were highly unsatisfying compared to the satisfaction they derived from their roles as hunters. Research in the 1960s and '70s by sociologist Dorothy M. Jones on Alaska Natives with regard to wage work, employment and social adjustment to city life, indicates that men who were husbands and fathers tolerated unsatisfactory work conditions, were more apt to keep their jobs and were less likely to abuse alcohol than those who were not responsible for families. Young men who came to cities as single men or adult men who left a wife and children behind tended to struggle more with alcohol abuse and ultimately with job retention.²²⁷ Married Native males were more apt to maintain low-skill jobs than unmarried males, in part because they had wives who helped sustain them during difficult times.²²⁸ The masculine ideal in Native societies was incompatible with many of the low-skilled jobs available to Native males and therefore compromised the self-worth of many.

As the larger cities became increasingly established, hotels, restaurants, hospitals, and stores offered positions that were deemed to be more suitable for women, i.e. secretarial work, maid service, waitress work and janitorial service. Though these jobs required little training and often reinforced negative stereotypes of Alaska Natives (similar to the work environments of men), Jones found that Alaska Native women in general found it more tolerable to remain employed under these conditions, as they retained their identity established at home and amongst family members (the role/identity of mother, wife, caregiver, nurturer and home maker) and did not adopt the identity

²²⁷ Jones, 38.

²²⁸ Jones, 42.

associated with their employment role. Therefore wage employment did not tend to call into question women's identity or reduce their self-esteem.²²⁹ Because men's identity was grounded in the cultural norm of being strong, capable leaders, and this role and source of identity and status were not satisfied in their wage work, they typically experienced greater acculturative stresses,²³⁰ losing sight of their once clearly defined role, sense of purpose, direction, identity, and eventually their family and community stature. Advances in women's employment roles, their sense of identity and their ability to maintain their sense of purpose and direction even in the face of rapid culture change will be addressed during the present era of 1980-2010.

Thus, wage work affected the roles of males and females and appears, especially for males, to have contributed to a change in their sense of identity. For some it reduced the complementarity of work and interconnectedness between family members.²³¹ As men spent more time on the job, they spent less time hunting and preparing for the hunt. This in turn impacted the roles of women. Historically, men and women had complementary roles; it was not uncommon for a couple to operate as a self-sufficient pair; both the man and the woman were able to meet their gender-appropriate work expectations, confident that his/her spouse was capable of doing the rest.²³²

²²⁹ Jones, 32.

²³⁰ Jones, 34.

²³¹ Chance, *The Eskimo of North Alaska*, 42.

²³² Bodenhorn, 60.

While division of labor still occurred in Native households in the late transition years, the complementarity of men's and women's roles was less notable and partners became less directly reliant on one another. Spending time on the job rarely resulted in their work needing to intersect, therefore the family's interconnectedness, a foundational characteristics of Native culture, declined.

Another aspect to wage work that varied notably from former work traditions was that women were now able to earn wages, which translated to purchasing power. As women earned an income and food could be purchased from the store, women and families became less dependent upon men for their primary food supply and/or income. A young female interviewee observed how the role of male hunters had been affected by the ability to purchase meat at the store: “. . . now that the roles have changed, they don't really see that they have to go out and hunt right away, 'cause they can just go to the store and grab it and they can bring it home to their mom for her to cook it.” Another young Native woman shared her view about the change in sense of purpose men have since food became available at the store: “. . . men are now nothing I guess. Women are like ‘I don't need you, you're not going to go out and hunt; I can just go to the store.’”

The increase in wage labor for men and women also affected their traditional communal work pattern, rendering it more individual in character. As noted earlier, men generally had not hunted alone, but had hunted with other adult men and male youth. And, women's work was most often done in companionship with other adult women, elders and young children. As wage labor played an increasing role in the lives of Native men and women, the time spent interacting in these companionship roles declined.

Role Models

By the 1950s, as the pace of change increased, adult role models representing indigenous life ways were less influential. No longer were Native youth being raised with the solid cultural foundation their elders had known. The generations of men and women who came of age in the mid- and late twentieth century are the role models for contemporary Native youth; many of these youth look to both their Native culture and to Western culture to find grounding and identity, but find no clear pathway to a fulfilling future in either. For Native males in particular, the challenges of identifying their future roles in their families and communities and therefore their sense of purpose and direction have become increasingly difficult.

Moreover, by the 1950s and '60s the roles that fathers and uncles played in the lives of their children had begun to change. Male youth less frequently spent days out hunting with adult men, in part because they were in school, but also because that was rarely where their fathers and uncles spent time. Hunting became an irregular or weekend activity, as opposed to a primary occupation.²³³ As Anthropologist Norman A. Chance notes in his research on the Iñupiat, “as these men could hunt only on occasional days off or during short two-or-three-week vacations . . . the frustration and ambivalence felt by a father who was limited in his ability to provide this Native food quickly carried down to the son.”²³⁴ Not only men’s work schedules, but hunting and fishing regulations limited access to wild game and contributed to the decline of traditional hunting practices. For

²³³ Nelson, *Hunters of the Northern Ice*, 385.

²³⁴ Chance, *The Iñupiat and Arctic Alaska*, 104.

many who had moved to the larger cities for employment, obstacles to hunting and fishing were even greater. During the 1950s and 1960s the male and female role models for youth growing up in the cities differed notably from the role models of those still living in rural villages where many families remained closely connected to the land and to traditional life ways. Yet, as transportation and communication technologies advanced, village life increasingly resembled city life in many ways, and traditional practices declined there as well.

By the 1970s and 1980s role models for Alaska Native youth had changed substantially. Role models originated from two entirely different cultures, Alaska Native culture and Western society. Only one or two generations before, role models had been immediate and extended family members who represented Native life ways passed down for thousands of years. They offered visions of the future; youth knew that by watching and learning from adults and elders they would develop knowledge that would allow them to contribute to the survival of their people and their culture. They knew that what they were learning was important, and that their level of skill and proficiency would directly affect their future well-being and the well-being of their families. By the 1970s and 1980s these truths were no longer self-evident to many youth. Modern day life and influences of Western society depicted images of the future that were quite different from those of the past. Boys watched their fathers leave for work in the morning and return in the evening, while girls watched their mothers struggle with the demands of family finances, children at school, religious commitments and obtaining and maintaining employment. Additionally, educational environments, teachers and television introduced

alternative models of adulthood. This multitude of authority figures from the dominant culture created ambiguity and uncertainty for Alaska Native youth about how to prepare for the future; in reality how to thrive in both an indigenous and Western setting.²³⁵ As one researcher in the late 1980s suggested “young Native persons experienced the combined uncertainty of the traditional subsistence lifestyle and an uncertainty of access to the Western job market.”²³⁶

Technology: Time, Education and Adolescence

By the latter half of the twentieth century each generation of Alaska Natives had been impacted differently by the advances in Western technology, transportation, and information and communication systems. These advances impacted the use and conception of time, altered indigenous value systems, increased the desires for Western goods and services and reduced the communication and interaction within immediate and extended family members. Furthermore, conformity to the culture of Western education, in particular secondary education, inadvertently extended the once shorter childhood years of indigenous youth into a Western time period considered adolescence. The combination of secondary education and the newly recognized era of adolescence affected the way youth spent their time and often enabled them to avoid meeting the demands of young adulthood, once an essential developmental marker in the transition from childhood to maturity in Alaska Native cultures.

²³⁵ Chance, *The Iñupiat and Arctic Alaska*, 104.

²³⁶ Comm, 59.

As indigenous peoples became increasingly aware of the advantages Western technologies offered, the desire for these commodities resulted in shifting goals and interests for Native males and females and inevitably influenced their sense of purpose, direction and identity. The enhanced desire for Western goods and a modern lifestyle often reduced the amount of time spent engaging in indigenous cultural practices.²³⁷ These shifts in interests and aims were more typical of adult men and women and youth than for elders. By the latter half of the twentieth century most middle aged and younger Native men and women had incorporated many components of Western culture into their everyday life. This was also true for Alaska Native youth as they became increasingly enamored of Western influences.²³⁸ Radical shifts of identity in the later stages of life were rare. Elders had spent the majority of their lives invested in traditional indigenous ways and were deeply grounded in their cultural heritage and identities.²³⁹

Technological advancement impacted time; the amount of time required to do most traditional indigenous activities became noticeably shorter. As one interview participant said, “When you think about it, technology has really changed our notion of time.” Naturally, it appears that if a chore or a task can be done in less time and with less effort, then this is beneficial to all. Certainly this was true in Alaska Native cultures; men and women made continuous efforts to hone their skills and advance their techniques

²³⁷ Seymour Parker, “Ethnic Identity and Acculturation in Two Eskimo Villages,” *American Anthropologist: New Series* 66, no. 2 (April 1964): 330.

²³⁸ Chance, *The Eskimo of North Alaska*, 80.

²³⁹ An Elder interviewee described Ifñupiaq elders this way: “We have elders who are very independent, who are very skilled at making things they need for themselves and live the old way of life, and they don’t need money to be happy, to enjoy life, and to know their place.”

intending to improve the quality of life or increase the assurance of a successful hunt.

With the dramatic advancements of Western technology, much of life did become easier, however at a cost, time saved by using new technologies often left time with no obviously necessary task to tend to. Subsistence and subsistence-related activities that had once taken days or a week to accomplish, now took a single day or an afternoon. The same interview participant elaborates:

Growing up listening to my grandmas and grandpas you know the stories they tell about being out in the wilderness, hunting and camping out and fishing . . . and then when you come home what do you do? You start preparing for the next event; your time is filled with preparing and doing something all the time. And you know this is on a yearly basis, it is not a daily basis, it's not on a weekly basis There's so much that is now available that used (to be done) by preparation, the need for preparation and the need to go do what you need to do to in order to make sure your family survive(s). It used to be that when you're hunting by kayak it took a lot of time, often you had to . . . camp out for several days even if you're going ten to fifteen miles or so, if you're going after the animals and the fishes. But nowadays it can be done in a matter of hours and so the use of time I think has changed . . . the act of catching fish and animals, and mammals hasn't changed, it's the time used to do that that has changed. So that created a lot of empty space and that has implications for how people use that time.

Extra time became problematic for youth; indigenous and Western cultures varied greatly in how the teen years were experienced. Probably one of the most significant evolutionary changes for Alaska Native youth was that adolescence had become a recognizable specific period of time in life; a time of approximately eight years between childhood and adulthood (as defined by Western cultures). As noted in Chapter One the onset of adulthood and right to marry among the Iñupiat was recognized by a boy's first large game kill or labrets (lip plug) placed in the lower lip. For young Iñupiaq women, this time was recognized by the onset of menstruation and/or the tattooing of the lower

lip to chin area.²⁴⁰ Though both genders still had much to learn, most at this age were highly functional, capable, and strong and were skilled in much of what would be expected of them throughout the remainder of their lives. In other words, there was little time between childhood and adulthood, essentially none in Alaska Native cultures.²⁴¹

As the lives of Indigenous Alaskans became increasingly Westernized, especially by the late 1970s and early 1980s, the time of life considered “adolescence” was now part of mainstream Native culture. The introduction and assimilation of Western secondary education was largely responsible for this dramatic cultural shift. With teenage youth spending their days in school, they became absolved of the responsibilities earlier associated with this stage of maturity; several years of unstructured leisure time took its place. For those who had attended boarding schools, daily life had been structured and disciplined; extra-curricular activities such as sports, drill team, and chorus²⁴² consumed free time after the academic school day. However, newly established village high schools were limited in this regard, often leaving teenagers with little to do after school. Teenage years for many became an extension of their childhood, a time of play and experimentation. As extra time became abundant in rural villages and city life, the demands which had accompanied clearly defined roles became increasingly vague. This vagueness was often accompanied by boredom, often resulting in apathy or a search for

²⁴⁰ Spencer, 241-243.

²⁴¹ Spencer, 241.

²⁴² Hirshberg and Sharp, 10.

alternative stimuli. Boredom was observable as teens just “hung around”;²⁴³ apathy was noticeable as school attendance and academic achievement declined,²⁴⁴ and fewer young men put forth the effort to hunt.²⁴⁵

It was not simply the advent of a time period considered “adolescence” or the Western introduction of secondary education that shifted how Native teenagers spent their time. Alaska had become less isolated since statehood in 1959 owing to advancements in transportation and information technology, advances that both increased the awareness and accessibility of Western goods.²⁴⁶ Satellite systems and air and rail transportation brought media systems such as television, news print and mail order catalogues to rural villages. This added infusion of Western culture affected not only what people could buy, but influenced value systems and indigenous self-image.²⁴⁷

The arrival of television to rural villages impacted every generation and the community as a whole.²⁴⁸ Its influence on the roles of Native men and women and on the sense of purpose and direction for youth had a snowball effect. Television brought

²⁴³ Chance, *The Eskimo of North Alaska*, 31.

²⁴⁴ Judith S. Kleinfeld, G. Willimson McDiarmid, and David Hagstrom, *Alaska's Small Rural High Schools: Are they working?* (Anchorage: Institute of Social and Economic Research and Center for Cross-Cultural Studies, 1985), 146.

²⁴⁵ Nelson, *Hunters of the Northern Ice*, 384.

²⁴⁶ Mathew Berman and Teresa Hull, “Community Control of Alcohol in Alaska,” *Alaska Review of Social and Economic Condition*, XXXI (Anchorage: University of Alaska Anchorage Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1997), 1.

²⁴⁷ Chance, *The Eskimo of North Alaska*, 91-92.

²⁴⁸ Graves, 117-118.

unimaginable aspects of Western life and the international world to the homes of Alaska Native peoples. One interviewee explained the interest in television in rural Alaska:

“Cause it’s something new . . . there’s a whole new world out there ‘cause I can watch it, ‘cause I can learn about . . . people in the Amazon – never knew about that before. I mean you can read about it in books, but it’s not the same.”

Many older Native adults vividly remember the day television came to their community. Many say it changed one more aspect of Native culture in an instant. The social practices of extended family members congregating, conversing and engaging in storytelling, working and/or simply playing together stopped the day television arrived. People have said the village became eerily quiet. Everybody was transfixed by the television. A young Iñupiaq male shared with the author: “I had a friend, a youth pastor was saying from the day . . . like it was night and day the years before, people would visit each other, and go to somebody’s house, have coffee and talk, you know. And then the day TV came (he snaps his fingers) that stopped. He was a kid; he can remember this . . . everyday somebody would come over and then after that it just stopped, the village got quiet.”

Television became an instant consumer of the above-mentioned extra, unstructured time. Furthermore, television viewing superseded time spent out-of-doors, typically hunting and/or food gathering. Thus, the advent of television was another blow to traditional cultural practices. For many who had maintained their motivation, desire and interest in subsistence activities such as hunting, food gathering and/or sewing, television watching was irresistible. An interviewee explained, “cause they’d rather stay

home and watch TV or their favorite show is on tonight . . . so that afternoon I don't want to go hunting cause I don't want to miss my favorite show”

Eventually the novelty of television wore off but remained a powerful force in the continued cultural shift from earlier Native life ways to Western cultural norms.

Technology in its entirety continues to impact Alaska Natives, sometimes as a benefit and at others as a liability.

Chapter Five

1980-2010 Present Era

Introduction

Western cultural norms have continued to alter Alaska Native life ways during the present era (1980-2010). However, changes in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century have come at a pace much slower than the rapid cultural transformations of the transition years (1850-1980), in part due to now existing conditions of assimilation. Cultural changes initiated during the early, middle and late transition years were amplified during the present era. Changes in Western education, wage labor, and technology have continued to move Alaska on a trajectory toward greater social, economic and political integration with the mainstream society of the United States.

Chapter Five addresses the continuing changes in men's and women's roles, the impacts of these role changes on sense of purpose, direction and identity and changes in family and community stature for men and women. Additionally, this chapter considers the importance of role models for youth, especially for young males. The value and importance of healthy adult male role models is essential for boys as they learn to combine Native traditional cultures and Western cultures while creating a clear path for their future.

Education

Challenges associated with Western education have been endemic in rural Alaska since its arrival in the late 1800s; a hundred years later the academic climate for Alaska

Natives continues to be challenging. By the present era many of the historical educational practices faced by earlier generations have been eradicated, but new challenges have arisen. Native youth no longer face involuntary boarding and vocational school attendance or punishment for speaking their Native languages. However, the late twentieth century brought new challenges associated with the quality of education accorded rural high school students: high dropout rates among Native students in urban schools, low graduation rates in urban and rural schools (especially amongst males) and an increasing disparity between the number of Alaska Native males and females who attend and complete post-secondary education.

At the end of the twentieth century and in the first decade of the twenty-first century the roles and sense of purpose, direction, identity, and family and community stature for Alaska Native men and women have continued to change. Success in high school and college has often led to greater employment opportunities for Native women; these advances in education and the wage economy often affect the roles women fill and the stature they obtain in their families and communities. Interviewees suggested that the disproportionate success of Native women is having consequences on the relationships between men and women and in the roles Native men are filling in their families and communities.

By the late 1980s the primary topic of concern related to rural high schools was “Are the students in these small rural schools receiving a high-quality education?”²⁴⁹ It had become quite clear that there were advantages and disadvantages to teens attending

²⁴⁹ Kleinfeld, McDiarmid, and Hagstrom, 1.

rural village high schools. For instance, small rural schools offered personal, one-on-one teaching practices between the teachers and students, teachers were able to take advantage of the flexibility of small class sizes to be creative with their curriculum, small high schools were safe and supportive environments and children were able to remain at home during these important developmental years. There were drawbacks however. Small schools typically had only a few teachers for the entire student body and in some cases teachers were required to teach courses for which they were not qualified. There was also a concern that small schools did not adequately prepare students socially and academically for post-secondary education. Small schools were also often limited in their extra-curricular programs such as art, music and competitive sports teams.²⁵⁰

By the 1990s, many Native teenage youth were attending public school in urban communities such as Anchorage and Fairbanks. These students had high drop-out rates,²⁵¹ significantly higher than students attending village high schools. Problems associated with prejudice and minority status, the movement of students back and forth between urban and rural residences, differences in cultural backgrounds and inadequate academic preparation in rural schools decreased the chances of academic success in urban settings considerably.²⁵² Regarding graduation rates, there has been a trend since 2003 of

²⁵⁰ Kleinfeld, McDiarmid, and Hagstrom, 7.

²⁵¹ Note of explanation re: drop-out rates (Kleinfeld, 1992, 14). “Drop-out rates are difficult to calculate because different schools use different definitions of drop-out and different systems for calculating drop-out rates. A standardized system of reporting drop-outs is being developed, but no data are yet available.”

²⁵² Judith Kleinfeld, *Alaska Native Education: Issues in the Nineties* (Anchorage: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1992), 14.

more females than males graduating from public schools statewide.²⁵³ This data supports the evidence that more Native women than men are successful in school and planning ahead for their futures.

Though the percentage of Alaska Native students graduating with four year college degrees had increased by 1990, a noticeable gap in college success between males and females had developed. For example in 1990 only nine men graduated from the University of Alaska system with a four-year degree, compared to forty-one women.²⁵⁴ Gender disparity had not always been this significant; in the 1960s college graduation rates of Native men and women were much more similar. By the 1970s the gap began to widen as Native women were graduating with four-year degrees at a ratio of two to one over Native men. The widening of this gap continued and by the 1980s the ratio had grown to four to one.²⁵⁵ The trend continued through 2004. In 2003, 31% of Alaska Native students who enrolled at the University of Alaska were males while 69% were females. Among rural Native students this gap was even greater – only 27% were male and 73% were female.²⁵⁶ This data suggests that women are seeking academic opportunities that prepare them to obtain high paying, steady employment. As more Native women have become educated and steadily employed, many have become the

²⁵³Personal communication with Peggy Corazza, 16 March 2010, Department of Education and Early Development data; derived from the districts through the annual Summer OASIS data collection.

²⁵⁴ Kleinfeld, *Alaska Native Education*, 12.

²⁵⁵ Kleinfeld, *Alaska Native Education*, 12.

²⁵⁶ Kleinfeld and Andrews, 430.

primary breadwinners in their families, which has led to new strains between husbands and wives. This topic will be addressed further in the following section on wage labor.

Many young Alaska Native women today are motivated to graduate from high school and seek higher education, which they know will lead to challenging and well paying jobs. They know what twenty-first century life outside the village has to offer: higher education, greater opportunities for steady employment and a larger social environment.²⁵⁷ Therefore, during their high school years they tend to look toward the future and make decisions which enable them to have access to these opportunities. Though many challenges remain for female adolescents, it is likely that their greater apparent stability in adulthood lies in the fact that they are successful in school and plan for the future.

The pursuit of higher education and full-time employment by Native women can be seen as a change in their sense of purpose, direction and identity, which in turn impacts their family and community stature. Traditional roles continue to resonate in contemporary life, including motherhood, childrearing, meal preparation, homemaking, and nurturing husbands, elders and extended family members. Iñupiaq women in the twenty-first century often are employed full time, and the combination of being both breadwinner and family/home care provider is both exhausting and empowering. A middle aged interview participant put it this way: “Young women . . . the glass ceiling that some people actually had before them has already been pushed higher. Some of these ladies have already grown strongly in this area and took over family provider role and

²⁵⁷ Aaron T. Doyle, “Drifting and Directed: The Post-High School Plans of Student from Three Communities in Rural Alaska” (Master of Arts thesis, University of Alaska Fairbanks, 2006), 108.

motherhood role and be willing to foster their family role because they already have kids and then they're willing to take care of these kids and then make them strong individuals and so the ladies are already taking over strongly in this area." An Elder male interviewee commented: "In many cases the woman will have . . . two jobs, one being at the home and one being at the office, you know." This change in traditional gender roles, sense of purpose, direction, identity, and stature for Native women is reflective of Native culture in the new millennium.

By the late 20th century, alternative forms of post-secondary education became available as an alternative to college. Alaska Vocational Technical Center (AVTEC) and Job Corps have been educational alternatives for young men and women since 1969 and 1994 respectively.²⁵⁸ AVTEC, originally Alaska's Skill Center, opened its doors in Seward forty years ago. Job Corps (a national program developed during the Johnson administration as a part of the War on Poverty) became increasingly popular for Alaska Native males by the late twentieth century. Though widely available throughout the Lower-48 since the late 1960s, Job Corps was not available to students in Alaska until 1994. Both institutions have provided training in careers that require technical, hands-on skill development. AVTEC and Job Corps have been successful starting points for many Alaska Native males and females who otherwise were not interested in or were unsuccessful in post-secondary educational environments.

Yet, regardless of the academic programs chosen by today's Native youth, their roles and sense of purpose, direction and identity continue to be affected by conflicting

²⁵⁸ Personal communication with Job Corps and AVTEC administrators; February 18, 2010.

messages from indigenous and Western cultures which stir questions of “Who am I?”, “Where do I belong?” and “What does it mean for me to be successful in today’s world?” Though contemporary teenagers were born into a lifestyle dominated by Western society, strong indigenous cultural influences endure. Recent recognition and promotion of pride in Alaska Native cultures has strengthened Native youths’ and adults’ connections with their rich past. Yet, the contradictory messages and values emanating from indigenous and Western cultures often make it difficult for youth to define themselves and determine what kind of future they envision for themselves. Contributing to the struggles of many youth are the continuing effects of the challenges parents, grandparents and great-grandparents confronted during the years of rapid culture change: Western education practices, language loss, culture and identity shifts, tensions between wage work and subsistence life styles, adjustments to wage employment and male and female role changes. These experiences have affected multiple generations and many Alaska Natives find themselves unable to serve as strong positive role models for their children and grandchildren. Without having clear pathways presented to them, many of today’s young adults are experiencing anxiety about their futures and can not envision a pathway to a fulfilling and productive life as an adult.

Wage Labor

The wage economy in northern Alaska during the present era (1980-2010) has varied greatly. A surge in job opportunities and high wages available for both men and women during the early 1980s resulted from billions of dollars the state received as royalty and tax revenues from oil production on the North Slope, Prudhoe Bay in

particular.²⁵⁹ Typically women were employed in white collar, year-round work and men in blue collar and/or seasonal work. The significant influx of income from wage work impacted village life and Native culture with a variety of Western influences. Increasing demand for Western goods and the greater purchasing power, accompanied by enhanced infrastructure, altered village and city life.

Throughout much of the twentieth century Alaska Native men found seasonal and/or temporary work to be plentiful and accessible while also more appealing than year-round employment. The most appealing aspect of seasonal or temporary work is that it gives men the freedom to subsistence hunt, fish and trap without having to request time off or risk losing their jobs.²⁶⁰ Male hunters and fishermen along with other family and community members benefit when men are able to engage in the many activities associated with subsistence hunting and fishing practices.²⁶¹ From a practical standpoint, wild foods incorporate natural, healthy foods into the diet²⁶² and reduce the need for store-bought foods. Furthermore, men derive satisfaction from time spent pursuing and capturing large mammals,²⁶³ whether from the ocean or the land. Pursuing wild game and

²⁵⁹ Lee Huskey, "The Economy of Village Alaska," (Anchorage: University of Alaska Anchorage Institute of Social and Economic Research, March 1992), 11, http://www.iser.uaa.alaska.edu/Publications/fuelcosts_viabilityref/Huskey%20Economy%20of%20Village%20Alaska.pdf.

²⁶⁰ Judith Kleinfeld, "Different Paths of Inupiat Men and Women in the Wage Economy," *Alaska Review of Social and Economic Conditions XVIII* (Anchorage: University of Alaska Anchorage Institute of Social and Economic Research, May 1981), 12.

²⁶¹ Graves, 179-180.

²⁶² Nancy K. McGrath-Hanna and others, "Diet and Mental Health in the Arctic: Is Diet an Important Risk Factor for Mental Health in Circumpolar Peoples?" *International Journal of Circumpolar Health* 62:3 (2003): 230.

²⁶³ Graves, 186.

returning home with meat for the family and community has been a part of men's cultural heritage for thousands of years, and a direct link to their primary identity as hunters and providers for the family and community.²⁶⁴ This identity and role of provider remains one of the important threads connecting Native men with their cultural past. Additionally, hunting perpetuates this identity and role into the future, displaying for younger generations a healthy vision of their future.

Seasonal employment, however, also has its drawbacks. Temporary jobs lack two important aspects of year-round employment: a steady annual income and greater job security. Seasonal employment opportunities in construction, fishing and crabbing typically result in employees earning large sums of money in short periods of time, which can lead to a false sense of financial security and can breed fiscal shortsightedness rather than long term financial planning or fiscal responsibility. As one adult male interviewee commented: "You could see how many people actually got training for immediate jobs but then again they still didn't have no real training in how to think long term. You could see what we call "white" or Western people have . . . long term thinking because they know to look long term for jobs. But since our people just had a subsistence type of life style" This fiscal instability can make it difficult for males to contribute consistently to their families' living expenses and may result in low self-esteem. An additional drawback of seasonal and/or temporary work is that often these jobs require men to leave their home villages, reducing the productive roles they could fill in their families and communities.

²⁶⁴ Jolles, 289.

Alaska Native males have sought to strike a balance between subsistence pursuits and wage labor. One adult male interviewee described two solutions to the tension between full-time employment and subsistence activities. The first example: “From what I have experienced or observed, is that men, who have taken on the 8-5 job find themselves hunting less because of the job requirements. Many times they support another hunter who doesn’t have a job. They’ll grub steak that hunter by (buying) ammunition, some gas, maybe some staples, and so that he gets a share back. So that way it enables this person who’s not working to hunt while the person with the 8-5 job is earning money. And this combination I’ve observed it quite a bit.” The second example addresses the importance of subsistence leave; he explained it this way: “. . . subsistence leave (is) where a person may not be penalized for taking off for a day or two because that’s the only way they’re going to get their share of the hunt is by participation. And in this case you’re looking at a year’s supply of food verses a few dollars more (per day).” Though these are solutions to a long standing problem, they recognize the underlying challenges contemporary Native men face regarding the need to balance time requirements for subsistence practices and employment. These two examples have proved quite successful in a number of communities. The same interviewee commented: “I introduced it (subsistence leave) to (two local governments); our travel organizations have adopted that and again have shared that with the Federation of Natives and many village corporations and regional corporations have incorporated subsistence leave. I ended up going around the state talking about it and introducing it and it works hand-in-hand along with the partnership. So it works in many areas.”

These examples of successful twenty-first century compromises contribute to supporting the traditional male identity of provider while also enabling Native men to contribute to their families' financial needs and thereby enhancing Native male's sense of purpose, direction, identity, and family and community stature.

Native male roles and the identity of provider have taken on various images throughout the transition years (1850-1980) and into the present era (1980-2010). The Western role and identity as family provider could be maintained by those Native men who held steady jobs. Remaining employed and supporting their families with an income sufficient to pay the bills and put food on the table retained men's status as providers, even though this Western role of provider did not conform with traditional values related to Native traditional knowledge, sense of community and male camaraderie. Research of the Canadian Inuit in the 1970s by anthropologist Ann McElroy found that no longer filling the role of hunter threatened the identity of some Inuit males. The hunter was considered to be an *inummarik*, 'a real person.' One man expressed to McElroy that he had taken a full time job and no longer felt like an *inummarik* because he did not provide wild foods for his family.²⁶⁵

The perceived status of hunter began to undergo significant change during the late transition years (1950-1980) and has continued to evolve during the present era. The status of the hunter role once offered prestige as the primary provider, but this image was not (nor is it today) congruent with Western concepts of prestige as primary provider.

²⁶⁵ Ann McElroy, "Canadian Arctic modernization and change in female Inuit role identification," *American Anthropologist* 2, no 4 (1975): 669.

Anthropologist Norman Chance writes, “In the modern world prestige and eligibility as a suitor were measured more by the young man’s wage-earning abilities than his skill as a hunter.”²⁶⁶ Interviewees for this research project affirm Chance’s observations: “In both cases I see a shift in their sense of identity and sense of purpose. Whereas the economically well-to-do person may have more self-esteem and a place in the community, the hunter faces a lower status, in the village, because they’re seen as not earning cash income . . . (because) they’re not as well dressed so their status is lower within the community and their self-esteem thus drops tremendously according to their ability.” Another Elder commented, “. . . if you see a man who is an active hunter in this society, he will be looked at as an unemployed person. There’s no two ways about it.”

On the other hand, when Native men are unable to provide meat for their families their sense of self-esteem is threatened. Two adult male interviewees affirmed this concern: “My observation in the way men view themselves in relation to family and community has changed dramatically As they strive to be recognized as hunters, one of the things that they run into is that in our society we have a hierarchy . . . according to our ability. So a hunter who is successful is regarded quite highly and those who are not, and those who become more and more dependant on other hunters, their self esteem has gone down. I see . . . the family’s view of these men has also gone down significantly.” The second Native male commented, “. . . when they don’t get an animal like in fall hunting season, then there would be nothing in the freezer and that would really effect how they feel about them being a provider, and then again they would be more or less

²⁶⁶ Chance, *The Eskimo of North Alaska*, 50.

relying on another community member, whether it be their cousin, brother, sister or somebody else for them to give them a portion . . . when you have to stretch the moose that thin it really affects the man's psyche or their way of thinking of their selves.”

In many situations, meaningful and challenging male oriented employment opportunities in the village require training and/or education in the larger hub communities, thus requiring males to leave their home villages for various lengths of time, and taking them from their responsibilities at home. Challenges related to training include cost and access to information about what training is necessary, what jobs are available and how to apply for employment or training.

As was noted in Chapter Four, research by Dorothy Jones showed that Alaska Native women derived much of their sense of identity from their roles as mothers and caregivers, whereas job satisfaction and status contributed more to males' identity. Jones points out that Alaska Native women, whether in rural or urban communities, generally maintained a “positive feminine identity,” regardless of their job status, whereas many Native men correlated their role of hunter with their cultural identity and therefore urban Native men lack opportunities to “realize their masculine ideal.”²⁶⁷ Therefore, women in the present era who have remained in their communities, and are in the working sector, tend to find more suitable employment opportunities, which relieves them of having to move to a larger hub community for higher education or training. Positions in clerical work, tribal and village council entities, stores and schools appeal to women and many skills related to these jobs can be learned through on-the-job training or can be developed

²⁶⁷ Jones, 15.

through long-distance education services. These are often year-round positions, except for school employment that leave summers off for fishing and traveling to camp, traditional activities still enjoyed by many. These positions often allow for flexibility when mothers need to bring young children to work or need to leave for short periods and tend to children. Many of these are full time positions resulting in a steady income, which in turn helps to support budgeting and financial planning for the future. An interviewee commented that such full-time year-round employment fosters long-term thinking in women: “. . . just seeing how the ladies are being more stable and more of a long-term thinker.” Positions in schools are ideal as the work hours coincide with the children’s school day hours and therefore allow mothers to be at home in the morning, see their children off to school and be home in the afternoon when the children come home from school. Many school jobs involve working with children, the role a mother knows best.

Increasingly in the present era, many young Native women have earned college degrees or vocational training degrees/certificates that have led to higher paying and steady employment opportunities, which, as noted above, often results in women becoming the primary breadwinners in their families. While the benefits of steady employment are obvious, a shift in traditional gender roles and displacement of the male role as the primary provider has been destabilizing.

Interviewees affirmed that in their observation, women increasingly are working outside the home and displacing males as the primary income earners in their households. One Elder referred to the trend as “role reversal,” explaining: “. . . we’ve had a role reversal . . . the men are staying at home, they’re cooking for their kids, the women are

on the job making money. The men are not getting educated while the women are achieving college degrees.” Another noted that, “(women) are pushing themselves to get more training and then becoming the bread winners.” An Elder woman estimated that about 50% of the women work more than their spouses. One Native man said, “there’s been a complete turnover in terms of gender roles today . . . and I believe they are done to meet with the change of times . . . it is (the) Native woman that is the primary wage earner in many of the communities.”

Women who once stayed home, raised the children and helped support their husbands’ hunting endeavors, now often are at their places of employment and therefore absent from the home, leaving their traditionally “women’s work” to the man of the household. Many of the interviewees for this project affirmed this trend. One Native Elder observed: “some of the men are having to swallow their pride a little bit and then start becoming the homemakers If your wife is working then you’ll have to be home taking care of the home just to keep the fire going and keeping your kids in line whether it be taking care of their diapers or taking care of the kids going to school and coming from school.” Another explained, “because there’s no jobs for men . . . some of them maintain the hunting routine; others have been relegated to caring for the home, cooking – and a role reversal has taken place in many of our communities.” A young woman related that this was a common practice with her extended family: “(D)ads do stay at home with the kids and mom is at work. I see quite a few of my cousins go through that, cause either they get laid off from their job and their wife still has her job and then their

kids are at home with him and go to school and come back home. They're the one (the men) that picks 'em up from school."

This naturally creates a shift in how Native men view their family and community role and their own identity. One interviewee explained: "My observation in the way men view themselves in relation to family and community has changed dramatically. I see . . . the family's view of these men has also gone down significantly. I'd say the worst case scenario is that they've turned to alcohol or drugs and this further reduce(s) the family's relationship to that person. Eventually, family violence sets in as the recognition of this person diminishes and it's sort of a vicious cycle . . . they have a hard time adjusting to role reversal." Another noted the impact on male's self-esteem: ". . . men are struggling in self-esteem, worth . . . how much am I worth? . . . their ability to provide . . . and their traditional role for men to be the leader has declined and I think men have struggled a lot more (in) finding self worth, hope and . . . seeing how much of a provider they'll be. How much worth they're gonna have in the future."

For some Native families this shift in gender role traditions is affecting men and women as individuals and as marriage partners while also affecting family cohesion. Role changes for women often result in stresses and strains at home between partners. One Elder said he believed this stress has contributed to domestic violence.

They're (men) relegated to these still menial jobs, but according to the American structure these are less paying jobs, so it does cause friction in the role of the bread winner. And this as it turns out over time, as women realize that they're bringing in more money, taking care of utilities and stuff like that - the electricity, buying the gas and then the hunters go out hunting, but they view the hunting as less of an occupation and so (the women) become domineering . . . and this has led to a breakdown of families, from my observation . . . (and has led to) domestic violence . . .

The men start staying at home, they start getting into drinking and to drugs and no longer care to maintain their family. Their status has been lowered, so along with that comes abuse and from abuse to violence . . . some men are sitting at home getting drunk and wondering if their spouse is messing around with somebody. The spouse comes home to find a drunk husband and nothing has been done around the home. Now she has to do another job, what he was supposed to have done. And so family situations break down. The ones that are suffering are the children. And at this point there is a high rate of divorce, and many women find themselves in single (parent) situations.

A middle aged male also said he felt that such role-reversal stress contributed to alcohol and drug abuse and even more tragic consequences. “(W)e see the ladies would be getting more jobs or opportunities and more training opportunities and that would be a cause for animosity . . . and then again it would be seen how each individual would be dealing with these changes or challenges . . . and it could be really negative . . . when people who actually don’t know how to deal with changes or with challenges then we see some people ending their own lives, so it could be drastic too.”

As the role of breadwinner has become more predominant for Native women, many have become leaders in their communities. “They’re the engine that drives the communities” declared one male Elder. “(W)e have a (female) mayor of a borough government, which is normally delegated to males; we have city counsel members that are now women, who used to be only men; even in our tribal government there used to be only men and women were not allowed in these political positions, but some of them are now. Women are becoming more of the religious leaders . . . in the economic sense, the president of our regional corporation is a woman. The president of our college is a woman.” One middle-aged male noted other leadership roles women have been taking on. “(S)ome of them (women) are going as far as taking over the tribal administrators,

city administrator, which would be higher up in the payroll ranks . . . but then again leadership roles too, they would also be becoming the traditional chiefs or even the mayors in some situations, and then even on the school boards, school teachers, and further up, some of them are even becoming principals . . .” Another male interviewee affirmed this trend. “(It’s) mostly the woman in many cases who has . . . the jobs as teachers, teachers aid and working in the Native corporation, the IRA council and the city councils. You’ll find mostly the ladies working in there . . .” One Native Elder commented that even in the role of hunter, women have taken on strong leadership positions.

Women are stepping up to the plate; they’re filling more and more of the leadership role that the men (used to) have taken. Now we have women whaling captains even . . . and they play a prominent role. And the women have also created the women’s whaling captain’s wives association. They’re sponsoring traditional activities, how to make thread, how to sew clothing, how to help the men prepare for whaling – a partnership type of a thing. And that’s a positive influence; it’s a much stronger influence in our community . . . but now, not only as the bread winners, but now as hunting leaders. So women are progressing further . . . if you’ve acquired that status of a whaling captain you’re respected by the entire community.

Thus, wage work and educational opportunities for Native men and women in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have dramatically affected their roles in their families and communities. As many Native males are making an effort to find a balance between wage work and subsistence hunting and fishing, many Native women are finding themselves attending post-secondary education. These educational efforts often lead to high paying, year-round employment resulting in women being the primary breadwinners in their families and even leaders in their communities. This is a significant role reversal for Native men and women. The disparity between men’s and women’s

work styles has contributed to changes in gender role identity and “bicultural gender role strain.”²⁶⁸ This change in roles has also affected the sense of purpose, direction and identity for many Native men and women, which in turn affects the sense of purpose, direction and identity of Native youth as they look toward adult role models for guidance and support into their early years of young adulthood.

Technology and Sports

Technological influences from other cultures have impacted Alaska Native cultures since the early days of contact. In most situations early influences benefited Native peoples, improving their quality of life without altering traditional gender roles or interfering with traditional senses of purpose, direction and identity. More modern technological advancements have also influenced Native peoples, families and communities and continue to do so today. The more recent technological advances, however, appear to have influenced Native cultures in both positive and negative ways; in some cases these advancements have impacted the roles, sense of purpose, direction and identity for Native men, women and youth. Additionally, the increasing influence of high school sports during the present era has had both positive and negative effects on Native peoples and their cultures.

Advances in technology have brought much of the outside world to rural Alaska, enhancing education and providing easier access to training and employment opportunities. New technology has also provided easier access to job training and employment opportunities. Advanced communication systems enable family members to

²⁶⁸ Auerbach and Silverstein, 71.

stay connected in an era when family members increasingly live in separate communities, in the larger hub cities and/or the Lower-48. A broad array of entertainment technologies has expanded leisure activities; movies, video games, DVDs, and iPods are sources of entertainment in many rural communities.

Competitive sports became increasingly popular in rural villages once high schools were established in rural communities. Competitive sports such as basketball, engage youth and adults in physical activity when they might otherwise be more sedentary. Sports and related activities also offer youth opportunities to travel to other villages, they enhance students commitment to academics (often requirements for sports team membership include maintaining a satisfactory GPA) and provide structured time after the school day. Whole communities attend basketball games, which contributes to community cohesiveness and fosters self-esteem in the team members.

Advances in technology and its incorporation into family and community life have also negatively affected gender roles and sense of purpose, direction and identity in Native men, women and youth. Time spent engaged with modern technologies and/or in competitive sports has impacted the relationships between Native youth and elders and the roles Native males and females play in their families and communities. (This phenomenon of how modern technology²⁶⁹ and sports²⁷⁰ is influencing multiple generations has also influenced non-Native cultures and people, however these broader impacts of technology are beyond the scope of this thesis). Time spent playing computer

²⁶⁹ Michael Kimmel, *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008), 145-146.

²⁷⁰ Kimmel, 124.

games, watching videos and/or television, communicating via email and texting from cell phones reflects a sharp change in the interests of Native youth; the interests and pursuits of many lie within a Western framework. Such activities monopolize young people's interests and time, leaving them little or no time or interest for former traditional pursuits with their parents and elders, activities that would ground them in their indigenous culture. Neither do most of these contemporary pursuits (i.e. television, computer games and sports) prepare youngsters for a productive future in either the traditional or Western world.

Interviewees shared their observations of the influence technology and sports are having in their villages. One 25-year-old female interviewee noted: “. . . for my (younger) sister's age group the Western influence is even more; like they are such an MTV generation, even in the village.” A 27-year-old male suggested that technology has made kids lazy: “Like I said, kids are lazy now. And a lot of it has to do with the onset of technology, computers, TV – they'd rather stay in their rooms, play video games or play on the Internet and do nothing in their lives but to do that.” A number of Native men and women of all ages commented on how technology and sports distract youth from traditional activities. One said, “the coming of technology . . . they'd rather stay home and watch TV or their favorite show, like maybe, um, American Idol is on tonight, so that afternoon I don't want to go hunting 'cause I don't want to miss my favorite show . . . Or maybe somebody else in a different village is going to be on-line at such and such a time and I really like them and I want to stay home and chat with that person.” Another commented, “there's not many people back home that want to go out (and) hunt and fish

for their parents or anything, because these young boys are into basketball and snow machines. They don't really want to go out and hunt and fish for their parents and grandparents . . . young boys would most likely stay in town . . . Most of those that are involved with basketball, they think basketball is more interesting." A middle aged man noted, "I've seen that their main interests are basketball, which isn't really something that's part of our cultural heritage . . . they're not really concerned about looking into the future – at least the ones that I've seen." A middle aged woman commented, "Well, for the men, what I saw when I was growing up, my dad he would take the boys, take 'em out . . . hunting, and so my brothers they can hunt . . . but his sons - he'd rather sit in front of the darn video game." A female Elder said, "Today everybody's watching TV. They don't go out and hunt anymore. The young boys . . . TV, basketball, they travel village to village for the basketball, and then when they're home they have to watch the football game, baseball whatever – they hardly go out hunt anymore" To this female Elder, young girls appear to be equally disinterested in traditional pursuits: "same way with the girls – they don't do like we do."

One Native male Elder explained how the Western images being broadcast in rural villages contribute to unrealistic expectations. He noted with dismay the attraction of video games and their distracting effects on Native youth.

TV is not bringing reality to the village level. So they're in a dream state, they're playing games, now when you're into Nintendo games and all these games and you spend your whole day, and that's how they're socializing, smoking pot, drinking, raising Cain and playing games . . . but they do not realize that this kind of influence is degenerating them further from their traditional culture. And it's also creating a handicap in that person's ability to function in the American mainstream . . . so this generation, the latest generation has a difficult time acquiring a job

because of these types of handicaps. So they don't have a sense of identity except within their peer group.

Time spent on such arguably meaningless pursuits does not prepare youth for adult responsibilities in either culture. The effects of hours spent playing video games can be much more devastating than unemployment. "In this past year, the X-box mentality has led to one person shooting another. And they expected that person to get up. So it has gone from . . . one extreme to another." Competitiveness in video game playing may not be limited to the game itself, but as one male Elder noted, may be influencing the ways young Native males are seal hunting.

When the hunter is out seal hunting and he shoots a seal, one of the things I'm observing is those persons with a high powered boat will try to come over and harpoon that person's seal and take it away from them. And they're claiming that 'he who harpoons (it) first, gets to keep the seal.' They're violating the traditional rules. This is not customary. There's groups of boats (and young men) hunting in a line and driving one seal, trying to catch one seal and you're hearing five-six shots at one animal and if it gets hit, they all speed at that one animal to see who's going to harpoon it first. And if one misses, the other one tries. And they think this is traditional. But . . . from the hunters perspective they're treating it as a gaming sport . . . It's the X-Box mentality. And this is what I'm observing . . . So, these video games are really having a tremendous impact within the younger people. This generation has no sense of identity. My observation is that these groups of people that are beginning to hunt in this manner are considering these as the traditional hunting practices. But they're very much *not* a part of our social structure.

This Elder clarified that the circumstances he described were not common occurrences, but that he had witnessed such behaviors and attributed them to youths' distorted notions of hunting traditions resulting from their excessive preoccupation with video games.

Thus, these advances in technology come at a cost; youth are spending less time with adults and/or elders in traditional activities, or simply not spending time interacting and building relationship with others. One Iñupiaq young man commented: “Yeah, if the Alaska Native peoples of today can realize their culture is slowly deteriorating with modernized stuff and forgetting to hunt and fish and . . . forgetting to provide for their families . . . it would be nice if people who are forgetting to do this . . . would realize that their culture is slowly going away A community with most of its people who stay home and watch TV tends to be more lazy and depends on the store versus (a) community who has games and game nights and potlucks tend to be more happy, more outgoing.” A middle aged Iñupiaq male expressed his concerns about the relationships Native youth and elders share today: “My biggest concern is the loss of that deep rooted knowledge. I think . . . that really defines us as who we are and . . . the youth and the elders have to have that really intimate bridge between the two so that the deep rooted knowledge that the elders have is passed on to our future culture bearers.”

As many Native males and females of all ages have commented, the excessive use of modern technology has been for the most part a detriment to Native youth, the development of their roles in the family and community and their sense of purpose and direction for the future. Though playing sports is often a constructive use of time, it deters youth from spending time with adults and elders and learning traditional knowledge. Additionally, the decreased time spent together has produced a generation gap between youth and elders, which perpetuates the fast pace of culture change and is

detrimental to the passing of accumulated knowledge between generations, while it also reduces important emotional connections.

Thus, the significant advancements in technology and its incorporation into Alaska Native rural life in the past thirty years have impacted individuals, families and communities in a multitude of ways, to their benefit and to their detriment. It will be imperative in the coming decades for individuals, families and communities to make conscious choices about how and to what degree technology is incorporated into their lives, enabling technology to enhance their lives and not detract from the importance of interpersonal relationships. Technology can be a tool for the support of education and information, but must not displace the sharing of traditional knowledge and the valuable time spent between adults and/or elders and youth. Being able to draw upon the strengths of Western and Alaska Native cultures is paramount for living successfully in today's world.

Role Models and Important Influences

Published research on Alaska Native youth and interviews for this research project affirm that many youth are struggling with how to prepare for the future; with a lack of direction many do not take an interest in cultural practices or prepare in high school for future opportunities that lie within or outside their communities. Aaron Doyle, in his MA thesis addressing this phenomenon called the pattern “drifting.”²⁷¹ The lack of adult role models who demonstrate an interest in and represent the value of cultural pursuits makes it difficult for many youth to develop culturally based interests and skills.

²⁷¹ Doyle, 14.

The presence of adult male role models in the developmental process of young males was essential to their maturing into responsible, capable providers, adults who were confident, capable and strong. This mentoring is still necessary, but many communities lack sufficient adult male role models; at times this scarcity results in a generation gap between Native elders and youth. Male interview participants commented on the importance of male mentors in their culture in the past and how youth today are struggling in their absence: “. . . we had more immediate contact with our fathers, our older brothers or older cousins or uncles; we had more intimate relationships with them just because it was a lot more communal setting. It has changed slightly because . . . there might be less connection or really less guidance . . . for the younger generation of males, so some of them have (fallen) through the cracks It was just a natural thing for our older generation to go ahead and help a young man learn some of the skills You learn(ed) these by spending time with the mentors in our day.” Another man observed: “Men aren’t as involved as they were fifty to a hundred years ago. Men were there training young men . . . it’s just the way it was. Men trained young men to hunt and to have the skills to make the tools, to do everything that was needed to survive. And they were the leaders in their families and in their villages . . . but roles have changed and it affects youth, men and women today. I mean ‘cause you don’t have that something to follow And (men) don’t provide that role model position, they don’t fill that so it has affected young men being able to become men, to become a real man, not just statistically, but actually, become a man.” Another man explained, “they’re (men) not

passing on their useful skills but then they're also not really helping teach the younger men how to actually think like men."

Male and female interviewees also noticed a generation gap occurring between older and younger Native males as the role of mentorship has changed. A middle aged male observed, "I see a generational gap happening when they're not finding a mentor who will help them learn these skills to actually go out there and harvest wood or large animals and take care of them properly like we had when my people were growing up There's that generation gap that's occurring right now and some of these kids who are not having people who they learn their skills first hand from" A young Iñupiaq woman similarly alluded to a generation gap "I think the connection between the adult men and the young men are kind of, you know . . . there's going to be a gap if they don't see there's a need for a role model . . . 'cause they did need each other, they don't need each other as much as they did then."

Owing partly to the shortage of adult male role models, many Alaska Native males are slow to mature into their adulthood roles. Male and female interviewees noted this pattern. A male commented: "So there's people that are still living as they are teenagers today who are already men . . . so sometimes people actually have to push their people out of the household to make them stand up on their own feet." Another said, "Less and less boys are becoming men. Lotta boys, young men aren't doing anything They don't take up that important role that they have to within the village. Like I said before they just stay home and do nothing. Lotta men stay home and do nothing The way I see it adolescence is extended in ages, it takes a lot longer for

boys to go out and become independent themselves and being able to offer something.” One middle aged woman shared how she viewed young males: “Some of them are lost; some of them don’t know which way to go, which way to turn. And so . . . young men they’re just hanging out in front of the TV playing their god darn video games.”

Because they are unprepared to support themselves, many young adult males remain in their parent’s homes. Male and female interview participants shared their observations of this phenomenon. A middle aged male relayed what he has observed. “Some of them just are not cutting the apron strings . . . still be living off the parents or grandparents thinking that, “Oh, it’s an okay lifestyle.” One young Iñupiaq woman commented, “So there’s a lot of people that do in their twenties . . . they do live a lot like the Caucasian people and stay at home and do like . . . stay in their parent’s basement, like they’d do in the Lower-48 I guess. But they’re just living in their parent’s house just like they’re a teenager.” One young male exclaimed, “I mean you still see some men that are in their 30s and 40s still living with their parents; still living with their mom or their dad or both!” A young female interviewee identified a common scenario involving young males who move back home after an unsuccessful attempt to live on their own. “(T)hey’re still living with their parents . . . they’re just not financially ready to move out yet, or they’re not mentally ready, they’re not ready for that responsibility. Or they’re ready for a few months and then they realize they can’t do it own their own so they go back to their parents.”

This situation does not appear to be true for many young Native females; more are planning for their futures, taking on the responsibility of adulthood, attending post-

secondary education, in other words many are clear about their roles and sense of purpose, direction and identity. Young women and adult men interviewees commented on many of the advancements young Native women are making in their lives today. “I mean all the younger ladies are more diligent and forward and they’re willing to sacrifice and go to school and forward their education and then they become marketable and then they’re able to work on their work in the work place . . .” explained a middle aged man. A young woman explained how the expectations for women have changed in a single generation; how young women are pushing themselves in school and young mothers are making choices for their future:

I think the positive change would be for the young girls, young women just being able to get out there and being able to explore more of Alaska if not the world, whereas before like when my mom was growing up it was like ‘no, you kind of need to stay home.’ . . . but now it seems like they’re pushing out a lot more young women like ‘okay, you can do this, go do this’ So it seems like the young women are seeing more opportunities open to them because they’re adapting better to Western culture It seem(s) like (young women) are making choices . . . trying to get through with high school and push themselves so they can go on with training So it seems like they’re pushing themselves to be more responsible and a lot of them are young mothers too It seems like they’re more focused on their education . . . not only after high school, but in high school. Like the guys are like ‘okay I need to do this because I need to get good grades so I can keep playing basketball,’ the girls are going like ‘I want to play basketball, but I also want to do other things.’

The importance of role models in the lives of young Alaska Native males and females is essential to the healthy choices they make. Formerly, role models guided young men and women, providing the foundation for the roles they would have in their future families and community. Contemporary Native youth need the same; they need healthy role models more today than ever before as they are bombarded with influences

from Western role models and other Western sources. It is imperative that Native adults and elders provide guidance and support that will nurture traditional Native customs and values while also guiding youth to make choices that will enable them to be productive members of their future families and communities.

Concluding Analysis and Recommendations

Since contact the roles of Alaska Native men, women, youth and elders have changed dramatically. As roles have changed, so have sense of purpose, direction and identity. Family and community stature is directly linked to the men's and women's roles and therefore this aspect of Native life has also experienced change. Today Alaska Natives must bridge the roles, values and knowledge of their indigenous culture with the social, economic and political realities of Western life. As Native youth mature and incorporate both cultures into their identities, having the support and direction of healthy adult role models who are able to impart a sense of purpose, direction and meaning in their early lives is critical for the future success of youth. The once direct, clear path to adulthood in Alaska Native cultures is now vastly complex, a mosaic of traditional teachings and Western influences making coming of age and the emergence into adulthood appear at times an insurmountable task.

It is likely that in the past Native men and women seldom thought consciously about role modeling for their children and others' children. Role modeling occurred naturally as men and women went about their daily life sustaining tasks in the presence of young people. Today, when adults and children spend most of each day away from each

other and when a variety of enticements and distractions tend to lead them away from each other, adults must choose consciously to model healthy, productive lifestyles for young people. Today, Alaska Native adults have to make a conscious choice and continual effort to guide and support their children as they navigate through a maze of cross-cultural influences. Though some Alaska Native males are doing quite well, many are struggling with the roles they are filling in their families and communities. Many experience a lack of meaningful purpose and direction, and ultimately an unclear identity. It is imperative that young males and females define their own sense of purpose, direction, identity, and eventually establish a solid footing in their future families and communities through the important roles and stature they develop, and the presence of visible strong, positive adult role models is essential to this process.

It was evident during the interview process that healthy role models had been essential ingredients in the life of each interviewee. They stressed the value of role models and for some even a single adult had had an important impact when they made choices for their future.

Interviewees also mentioned the influential role culture camps and mentorship programs in rural villages are having in the lives of contemporary youth. According to both male and female Elders, culture camps have become one of the most important efforts to help Native youth decide to lead healthy, productive lives. Some rural communities have developed mentorship programs that engage adult males with male adolescents. Experienced hunters mentor youth during large game hunts, sharing their knowledge about the wildlife, weather and topography. They tell stories and share their

traditional knowledge of the region with these young men. One woman Elder explained about a new mentorship program that involves young men going caribou hunting with older, experienced hunters. They return to the village with their game and the Elders in the village teach the young boys how to skin it, the importance of treating the animal properly and not to waste any of the meat or hide. This has been a very successful program, she assured me.

An Inupiaq male Elder also commented on the importance of mentorship programs designed to create future employment opportunities for adolescents. Job shadowing has become a common and popular component of high school life for many adolescent males and females in some of the larger hub communities where employment opportunities are abundant. This interviewee commented that many young people are taking on job shadowing opportunities and making clear decisions about their future well being.

Lastly, many interviewees, both males and females, young and elderly, mentioned the importance of adults verbalizing the expectations they have for their children, pushing youth to make decisions and plan for their future and setting boundaries during the adolescent years. Interviewees stressed that such *explicit* guidance was critical for youth to develop a clear sense of purpose and direction and to find a life way that will enable Native youth to thrive in an environment heavily influenced by Western culture and yet maintain the strong ties that link them to their unique cultural heritage.

In part, this research project found that a portion of the Alaska Native male population has maintained their cultural heritage; has clearly defined roles in their families and communities; has a strong sense of purpose, direction and identity; and maintains strong family and community stature. Furthermore, many of these men are hunters and are providing for their families and communities through subsistence hunting and fishing practices. Many of these men are role models for younger generations and have assumed the role of mentor, establishing important relationships with male youth that will enable them to mature into healthy, productive men in their future families and communities.

Therefore, future research may consider what important influences or protective factors (i.e., environmental, social, cultural) were in place for these adult men when they were younger and how did these factors contribute to their current strength and well-being? If we can understand the important influences that made the difference in the lives of these men as they matured, then we may better be able to recreate these situations for those young males who are struggling today and/or for the next generation of male youth who will soon be adolescents.

Conclusion

Alaska Native cultures have undergone extraordinary change since the first contact with Russians in the early 1700s. The pace of culture change became rapid in the twentieth century; the effects were overwhelming by mid-century. Early outside influences in the north were generally benign; interests were grounded in trade and whale harvests. Outside interests did not rest upon acculturation and assimilation of indigenous peoples. The introduction of foreign tools and weapons generally enhanced Native life and were easily absorbed into the culture. Alcohol and disease brought devastating effects over time, but these impacts resulted more from exposure than from government policies whose aim was to modify Native cultures. As the pace of culture change increased by the late nineteenth century, and assimilation and acculturation policies were imposed upon Native peoples, each generation of Alaska Natives experienced changes in traditional gender roles.

By the mid-twentieth century, the peak of rapid culture change, every generation had experienced changes in traditional gender roles; their sense of purpose, direction, identity and family and community stature had been altered by Western values and cultural norms. Changes in men's roles and therefore in their family and community stature were especially significant. The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries brought further change, though rarely were these changes new; they tended to be "enhancements" of those introduced in earlier decades. Nevertheless, culture change continued to affect the roles, sense of purpose, direction, identity, and family and community stature of Alaska Native men, women and youth.

The central research question asks, “How have traditional gender roles of Alaska Native people changed over time and with what effects on individuals’ sense of purpose, direction and identity, and on their family and community stature?” The accompanying argument suggests that over time gender roles for Alaska Native males and females changed dramatically and with those role changes, sense of purpose, direction, identity, and family and community stature were remarkably altered as well. These cultural changes, which also reflect value shifts, appear to have affected Alaska Native males more negatively; this may partially explain the destructive behaviors many Native males exhibit today. Furthermore, role changes have affected the role models for Native youth. The incorporation of Western cultural norms into Alaska Native cultures and the shortage of positive adult role models have created an environment in which many adolescents have difficulty navigating toward adulthood, with no clear vision of what their future holds, what skills they will need to thrive in adulthood or how they can acquire those skills.

The greatest challenge for many lies in being able to bridge the gap between Native and Western cultural norms. As male youth grow and mature into young adults, many flounder in the face of this opaque future. Unsure of their future roles and responsibilities, they are also unsure of their purpose and direction; therefore many remain mired in adolescence. Female youth have less difficulty planning for the future. Many adolescent females have strong role models who suggest by way of action and voiced expectations that high school academic success and post-secondary education and/or vocational training will offer them the independence and leadership roles

necessary for securing their desired roles and family and community stature. The natural role of motherhood also provides an unspoken and somewhat innate sense of purpose and direction while contributing to women's overall identity.

When men and women have clear roles in their families and communities, then they have a sense of purpose and direction. These roles also contribute to their sense of identity. Strong self-esteem is directly related to having a meaningful purpose and direction. A sense of purpose and direction contributes to family and community stature, which in turn reinforces purpose, direction and self-esteem. The fulfillment of valuable roles also contributes to a sense of belonging, which in turn relates to identity. These intra-cultural connections are essential for healthy growth, development and maturity for all young men and women; their decline is having detrimental effects on the lives of many Alaska Natives in the early twenty-first century.

As men's traditional roles and family and community stature have changed from those of primary family and community providers as hunters and leaders (roles requiring great strength, agility, competence and confidence) to unclear and undefined roles of intermittent wage workers, temporary child care providers, and seasonal hunters, many males appear to be left feeling inadequate, lost, and even hopeless. These feelings contribute to alcohol and drug abuse and domestic violence, and in the worst cases, suicide. As women's roles have changed from primary food preparers and clothing makers to family and community leaders and often primary providers, a shift in their roles and family and community stature has occurred. The role changes for men and

women individually and collectively have created bicultural gender role strain; intra-cultural stresses with which many Native males and females are struggling.

While the forgoing discourse and findings appear to present a rather bleak outlook for Alaska Native individuals, communities and cultures, the strength and resilience of the Alaska Natives interviewed for this project and of many other Alaska Natives offer insight as to the circumstances under which individual and community well being may improve. Strong, positive role models for male and female youth are essential for their growth and development as they define their future roles and prepare for their futures. Strong role models are the essential bridge that will contribute to health and revitalization of purpose, direction and identity in youth. The strong, productive males and females throughout rural Alaska represent the leadership necessary for youth to find meaningful purpose and direction in their lives. Men especially must take the roles of mentor and positive role model for their children and other children in the community; strong generations of men and women will show youngsters the way to a healthy productive future, secure in who they are and confident to lead a life engaged in both Western and Alaska Native cultures.

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February 17, 2009

To: Mary Ehrlander, PhD
 Principal Investigator

From: Bridget Stockdale, Research Integrity Administrator
 Office of Research Integrity

Re: IRB Modification Request

Thank you for submitting the modification request for the protocol identified below. It has been reviewed and approved by members of the IRB. On behalf of the IRB, I am pleased to inform you that your request has been granted.

Protocol #: 08-57

Title: *Changes in Traditional Gender Roles, Sense of Purpose, Direction and Identity for Alaska Native Men and Women: How the changes in traditional cultural roles of men and women are related to their current sense of purpose, direction and identity*

Modification: Addition of interview procedures. Submission of Introductory letter/Consent form, and Interview Script.

Level: Expedited

Received: January 16, 2009 (original)
 February 13, 2009 (final revisions)

Approved: February 17, 2009

Any modification or change to this protocol must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. Modification Request Forms are available on the IRB website (<http://www.uaf.edu/irb/Forms.htm>). Please contact the Office of Research Integrity if you have any questions regarding IRB policies or procedures.

