



Stronger Together: Helping each other to strengthen and sustain Indigenous youth identity and cultural knowledge

The Impact of Participation in a Canoe Journey on the Ethnic Identity of First Nations Young Men
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A relationship with the natural world for First Nations peoples has been characterized as more than merely feeling connected to the land, but rather that the land is an essential component of their identity (Wilson, 2003). Discussing the physical land and water in relation to identity exemplifies the complex understanding of health and well-being for First Nations peoples. In terms of mental health promotion for Aboriginal youth, in a report on best practices, Williams and Mumtaz (2007) suggested that programming should be focused on both individual and community healing. The focus on cultural assets and building of ethnic identity are two of the foundations of the Carrier-Sekani Family Services Canoe Journey Program. Ethnic Identity is the self-concept that comes from knowing one is a member of a specific ethnic or cultural group, and the value and emotional significance attached to this group membership (Tajfel, 1981). Identity development is central to the adolescence period of life (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980). During this process of development, some environments are more suitable for fostering ethnic identity development than others.

The current study explored participants' perceptions of their ethnic identity after they had participated in CSFS's Canoe Journey in the summer of 2013. The Journey is a five day program during which participants live off the land the entire time. Each day, the group travels on Lake Babine in traditional canoes, followed by setting up wilderness camping and cooking facilities. Lessons from Elders in traditional ways of life (e.g., hunting, storytelling) are woven throughout the program. Individual interviews took place with 11 participants when the Canoe Journey was completed; 12 participants completed quantitative surveys. The participants were all young First Nations men (ages 13-

