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Contemporary Identity and Social Experiences of Acadian Youth

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A thesis submitted to the Department of Child & Youth Study  
in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Masters of Arts (Child & Youth Study)

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## **DEDICATIONS**

I would like to dedicate this thesis to all Acadians in hope that they may be proud of their Acadian heritage, culture and distinctive language. This thesis would not have been possible had I not been greatly affected by my Acadian attributes. My wish for this thesis is that it will serve as a great learning tool for both Acadians and non-Acadians.

### Abstract

The present study obtained the perceptions of Acadian adolescents regarding the personal significance and meaning of their Acadian cultural affiliation, traits of and influences upon their contemporary Acadian lives, and their social relationships with both Acadians and non-Acadians. This study intended to explore the nature of their everyday cultural experiences and interactions in order to identify factors that more positively or adversely affect daily functioning, well-being, and on-going development as Acadian youth.

Utilizing a qualitative research approach, two focus groups were held. The first consisted of 4 males and 4 females between the ages of 13 – 15 years old, inclusive. The second was comprised of 3 males and 3 females between the ages of 16 – 18 years old, inclusive. Three individual interviews were also conducted. All participating youth were born and raised in the Municipality of Clare and were currently students of the local secondary school, *École Secondaire de Clare*.

Transcribed interviews (data) from these discussion sessions were analysed employing discovery-based, cross-comparative data analysis generally associated with grounded theory methodology. Results of the analysis were organized by four major descriptive categories specifically, *Forming Acadian Identity*, *Experiencing Acadian Identity*, *Maintaining Acadian Identity*, and *Acadian Resources*.

Findings of this study indicated a vital need among interviewed youth in the Clare community for enhanced cultural awareness, and development and maintenance of their forming Acadian identity. With an identified need by the youth for increased resources, opportunities and supports for cultural interaction and exchange in the local community,

and expressed mixed feelings of both pride and discomfort within their Acadian experience, recommendations are offered to facilitate the healthy development of contemporary cultural identity on the part of these Acadian youth.

### **Acknowledgments**

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Michael Fitzgerald whose expertise, understanding, and patience, added considerably to my graduate experience. I would also like to thank the other members of my committee, Dr. Deborah Norris and Harriet Field for their helpful suggestions and support.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The history of Acadian culture has been well documented (Cyr, 2004; Deveau, 1968; Deveau & Ross, 1982; Rumilly, 1955; Vernex, 1979). Foremost within that history are the circumstances and events of the Acadian expulsion, which occurred between 1755 and 1763, the effects of which have had a deep and lasting impact upon the Acadian people to the present day. Despite the devastating hardships suffered through relocation and social-cultural fragmentation, the more recent history of the Acadian people reflects positive developments that have revitalized Acadian pride and sense of community. Among these, elements of Acadian heritage (e.g., customs, traditions, and landmarks) have recently received increased government attention and support in terms of their preservation for both Acadian heritage and language, enhanced resources and responsibility for French schooling have been granted (Ross, 2001; Samson & Hughes, 1982), and Acadians themselves are evermore embracing and celebrating their culture through annual festivals and grand meetings such as *Congrès mondial acadien* (Acadian World Congress) marking the 400th anniversary of the Acadian deportation.

Notwithstanding the positive and welcome developments, the long history of struggle for the Acadian people to maintain their lifestyles, culture, and language continues as a current source of demoralization and challenge in such critical areas as Acadians' ongoing societal adaptation and adjustment, evolving sense of cultural identity, and their relationships with Acadians and non-Acadians

### **Purpose and aim of the study**

The purpose of the present study is to discover and explore the perceptions of Acadian adolescents regarding the personal significance and meaning of their Acadian cultural affiliation, traits of and influences upon their Acadian lives, and their daily relationships with both Acadians and non-Acadians. The study aims to discover from the youth the nature of their everyday cultural experiences and interactions in order to identify factors that more positively or adversely affect their daily functioning, well-being, and on-going development as Acadian youth. Findings of the study will be utilized to recommend responsive helping approaches and resources conducive to enhancing cultural pride and connection for Acadian youth as they interact and form personalized relationships with both Acadians and non-Acadians.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the significance or meaning of being “Acadian” to Acadian youth?
2. How does being “Acadian” play a role in the daily lives of Acadian youth?
3. Are there factors that Acadian youth identify as more supportive or less supportive of their Acadian identity?
4. What do Acadian youth identify as their current needs in terms of maintaining their cultural identity and enhancing their relationships with other Acadians and non-Acadians?
5. What supports and resources might Acadian youth identify as most useful to or needed by themselves in order to maintain their cultural identity and enhance their relationships with both fellow Acadians and non-Acadians?

### **Personal Interest**

Growing up as an Acadian girl in Clare, NS (*La Baie Sainte Marie*), my heritage has always played an integral part in my life. My Acadian identity was, and continues to be, a rich source of pride and connection to a particularly distinct cultural community. In terms of one of its key distinguishing features, language, I have often felt torn between standard French, English, and my native Acadian dialect. While I hold the Acadian language close to my heart, I have struggled with being misunderstood or even mocked by non-Acadians who might not fully understand its history and development. These experiences affected my confidence when speaking among people whom I feared might classify my dialect as “not good enough”, when compared to standard French, and I was not alone. During my adolescence, in particular, I would often talk with my friends about the offensiveness of these types of judgments and belittlements, although there was little formal support for us otherwise. Despite the sense of cultural pride each of us felt in our own way, there were often accompanying feelings of shame or embarrassment.

As language played a significant role in my own Acadian identity and everyday life experiences, my interest later developed to consider the experiences of today’s youth within my home community. What elements of being Acadian do they hold close to their hearts? How might they describe their everyday experiences as Acadian youth? Are there features of their daily experiences and cultural identity that are more problematic and challenging for these youth that would benefit from understanding and support?

Since researching about the hardships my culture has been forced to endure, as well as the odds against maintaining our way of life, I feel an increasing desire, even

responsibility, to preserve my Acadian identity. I am interested in having a better understanding of how today's youth conceptualize their own Acadian identity and how their experiences with both Acadians and non-Acadians play a role in their ongoing development, sense of personal well-being, and place within a unique cultural community. As an Acadian child and youth care worker, I wonder what initiatives might be undertaken to responsively address the needs that Acadian youth themselves identify as stemming from their cultural experiences. Finally, I would like to find the most effective approaches I can to support the healthy development of pride and connection within Acadian youth to their cultural identity and affiliation.

### **Definition of terms**

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions will be employed:

<b>Acadian</b>	Original 1604 French settlers of parts of the northeastern region of North America, comprising what is now the Canadian provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. ( <a href="http://www.encyclopedia.com/Acadian">www.encyclopedia.com/Acadian</a> ). Also: Acadie.
<b>Acadian youth</b>	Acadian adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18, inclusive, residing in the community of Clare, NS.
<b>Deportation</b>	Historical period where an estimated 6,000 Acadians were expelled from their home communities during the fall of 1755. The expulsion continued over the next eight years as small groups of Acadians were captured or gave themselves up to follow family and friends into exile. ( <b>Companion terms:</b> Expulsion, <i>Grand Dérangement</i> , <i>Déportation</i> ) ( <a href="http://www.whitepinepictures.com">www.whitepinepictures.com</a> )
<b>Cultural affiliation</b>	One's functional membership within and connection to his/her culture of origin.
<b>Francophone</b>	An individual whose first tongue and primary language of use is French.

**Well-being** Children's and youth's states of happiness, health, and felt success.  
(<http://www.yourdictionary.com>)

**Youth Animator** A youth support worker hired to organize activities and provide community based cultural resources for youth.



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

By far, the volume of writing on the Acadian people is historical in orientation, focusing on their original settlement, deportation, resettlement, and struggle over time to retain their cultural identity and protection under the law. Research that documents and describes elements of contemporary Acadian life, relatively small in quantity, has tended to concentrate on issues of language rights and access to French-speaking services. While some attention has been given to adolescents and gender-related issues within Acadian communities, the voices of Acadian youth have largely been under-represented in discussions of Acadian identity and culture.

#### *Historical influences and characteristics*

As Cyr (2004) outlines, after leaving France, the Acadians arrived in Nova Scotia in 1604 and, with great effort, successfully adapted to the land and its environment. They quickly developed livelihoods of fishing, hunting, and farming, and, by integrating elements of their former lives with newfound influences, developed variations in dialect and formed distinctive traditions around music, food, dance, family life, religion, and education (Jobb, 2005; Mahaffie, 2003; Vernex, 1979; Deveau, 1982). Upon expulsion from their homelands, however, the Acadian people were direly challenged to maintain their former lifestyles and customs, faced with surviving the hardships of deportation itself (Faragher, 2005; Plank, 2001). Historical accounts of Acadian family life depict traditional gender roles and responsibilities combined to ensure the safety, security, and

growth of the family unit. Family sizes were generally large and patriarchal, with men and older boys largely responsible for providing fish and game, protection, and heavy labor. Women and older girls generally cared for younger children, cooked, made clothing, and farmed and gardened food (Deveau, 1982).

The contemporary life of the Acadian family, however, tends to reflect broader changes of the past half-century in North America, in such areas as family composition and gender roles designations. Today, although marriage plays a considerable role in Acadian communities, there has been a significant increase in divorce rates, marriage separations and single parenthood. Families are also reported to be smaller than they have been in the past. (Statistics Canada, 2001) Nonetheless, “The main economic activity of Acadians is still in-shore and off-shore fishing. The decline of fish stocks and the drastic reduction of fishing quotas have dealt a severe blow to the industry. In the face of this uncertain future, new avenues such as fishing diversification, tourism, and small business are being explored”, and women are increasingly employed outside the home (Doiron & Cantin, 2004).

### ***Contemporary Acadian Life***

**Demographics and cultural organization.** According to Pelchat (2005):

Today, in the Maritime Provinces, which incorporate the traditional boundaries of Acadie, there are about 300,000 Acadians, people who claim French as their first language. Of these, 250,000 live in New Brunswick, Canada’s Acadian stronghold, the country’s only officially bilingual province. In Quebec, the 5,000 refugees who pored into the province largely between 1763 and 1775 and mixed with the

70,000 Canadiens may have as many as one million descendants today. Elsewhere, there are an estimated 200,000 Acadian descendants in Ontario and a further 400,000 in the northeastern United States. The largest population claiming Acadian descent, however, lives in Louisiana. Cajuns, some with Spanish and German descent who amalgamated with the Acadian community after deportation, number almost a million people.

(Pelchat, 2005, p.18)

While individual families and French-speaking communities are highly independent, the *Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse* (Acadian Federation of Nova Scotia) advocates with the provincial government for the preservation and promotion of the Acadian people and their communities. Today, there are many festivals and activities that highlight Acadian heritage and cultural pride. In 2004, Nova Scotia hosted the third *Congrès mondial acadien* (World Acadian Congress), where Acadians from all over the world had the opportunity to celebrate their past, present and future.

Community centers organize various cultural activities. In Clare, the Acadian Festival recently celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, making it the oldest existing Acadian festival in the world. (Comeau, 2005) The *Gala de la chanson* (« Gala of the song »), *Festival Acadien* and the *Grou Tyme* festivals are just some of the major events held each year. » ([www.acadie400.com](http://www.acadie400.com)) Despite such activities, however, a recent survey among Acadian youth between the ages of 12 and 18 (inclusive) highlighted only 41.9% of those questioned felt there are sufficient cultural activities in their communities, while 51.5% of the surveyed youth expressed a desire for increased opportunities to gather and share their Acadian culture (Comeau, 2005).

**Education.** Until 1982, Acadian schools did not receive funding by the Nova Scotia government although the right to education in the French language was enshrined in Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom (<http://laws.justice.gc.ca>). More recently, however, Acadians in Nova Scotia have been granted 19 unilingual French schools that are currently under the direction of the *Conseil Scolaire Acadien Provincial*. Notwithstanding, for many Acadian youth, the experience of attending English speaking schools has involved use of educational materials and exposure to stereotyping attitudes that negate or diminish their sense of cultural pride and inclusion in their education. As Samson and Hughes (1982) express, negative portrayals of minority peoples in educational curricula and resources may have a debilitating effect upon children and adolescents as they strive to develop positive self identities: “Concern over the portrayal of ethnic and other minorities in school texts is rooted in the recognition that the concepts that young people develop of themselves and others, and, indeed, their subsequent pattern of behavior, are, in part, derived from their school experience; especially from the images conveyed in the instructional materials they use.” (Samson & Hughes, 1982, p.4)

**Language.** “The population of Nova Scotia is quite homogeneous with respect to language. Of the province’s 897,510 residents, barely 65,075 have a mother tongue other than English. Francophones make up 4.1 percent of the population while slightly more than 28,000 Nova Scotians have a non-official language as a mother tongue.” (Statistics Canada, 2001) The language spoken by Acadians in Clare, Nova Scotia is distinct from both standard and Québec French, reflecting the influences of Native languages, English,

and words inherited from middle-western France in the 17th century (Basque, Barrieau & Côté, 1999). According to the 2001 Census, the total population in Clare was approximately 8,895 people. Six thousand, one hundred and five of these residents consider French as their first language. However, as many as 6,835 people understand both official languages due to outside influences. Encouragingly, Boudreau (1991) discovered that adolescents within New Brunswick feel strongly that their Acadian language is valuable and worth preserving. In this context, a group of young advocates have developed something of an underground Acadian culture through the internet known as *Acadie Urbaine* (Urban Acadia –[www.acadiourbaine.net](http://www.acadiourbaine.net)) Through this resource, Acadian youth may connect and share thoughts and information about matters of being Acadian, including the nature of their particular dialects.

**Health.** Most health services provided in French for Acadians in Nova Scotia are primarily offered within Acadian communities themselves. “Nova Scotia has very limited services in French due to the almost lack of policy and legislation on French language health services. Only the southwest region has a few positions designated bilingual. Other regions where Acadians form a large portion of the population have some bilingual staff, but these services are not guaranteed by law.” (Doiron & Cantin, 2004) The *Le réseau santé Nouvelle Écosse* has been formed, however, to advocate for accessible French services throughout Nova Scotia. Working cooperatively with the Department of Health, District Health Authorities, and Community Health Boards, the objective of *Réseau santé Nouvelle Écosse* is to raise awareness of the high need for French speaking health professionals in all francophone/Acadian regions of the province,

while developing strategies to recruit and retain health care professionals within. For example, although there is currently a 10-month French paramedic program available at Université Sainte-Anne in Church Point, NS, upon graduation these trained individuals often encounter work place policies and practices that do not require French-speaking staff on duty at all times as a resource and support to the public. Thus, this asset to their employment (speaking French) is underutilized and the public is underserved (Saulnier, 2004).

**Music.** Music, likewise, played a highly influential role in the everyday lives of the Acadian people, providing entertainment, comfort, and later inspiration as they endeavored to meet challenges of their mistreatment and forced relocation. While many old French songs were passed on orally and failed to survive, a key feature of the recent revitalization of Acadian culture has been the recovery and development of Acadian music through the efforts of young Acadian dancers and musicians (e.g., the band *Grand Dérangement*, *BLOU* and dancers *La Baie en Joie*) who research and perform traditional tunes and steps. Today, “some Nova Scotia Acadian performers are now well known outside the province and even outside of Canada, for example the musicians *BLOU* and *Grand Dérangement* and the visual artists Denise Comeau and François Gaudet.” (Doiron & Cantin, 2004) Furthermore, there seems to be a particular interest in music among Acadian youth residing in Clare. When asked what kind of workshops would be of most interest, as many as 24, 2% of these youth responded they would like to attend music workshops. (Comeau, 2005)

**Religion.** While religion (Roman Catholicism) played a fundamental role in the lives and identities of the Acadian people, contemporary Acadian youth have been found to be less strict in their adherence to traditional faith and generally find less place for religion in their daily lives (Dugas-LeBlanc, 1987; Deveau, 1982). Dugas-LeBlanc's study (1987) indicates that in Clare, Nova Scotia, 38.1% of adolescents went to church, "not often", 14.4% attended church once a month, and 47.5% at least once a week. When asked whether they volunteered for any church duties or activities (e.g., altar duty, scripture reading, choir membership), 86.3% answered they did not. Once the youth were asked if they were practicing their religion because they felt a sense of obligation, almost half the sample responded that they felt some form of obligation (unspecified) to follow their faith and attend church on a regular basis (Dugas-LeBlanc, 1987).

Overall, Acadian history and traditional lifestyle, dramatically shaped and influenced by the Deportation, has been given, and continues to receive considerable research attention. The critical events surrounding the Acadian Expulsion, key components of Acadian culture, and the ongoing struggle of Acadians to maintain their language, communities, and cultural heritage, have been much discussed in terms of uniting features of Acadians to one another. Less addressed by the literature, yet vital to the lives of younger Acadians, has been the changing nature of contemporary Acadian society. While there are noted elements of such change, as highlighted in the major sections of the Literature Review (namely, education, language, traditions, festivals, health services, music, and religion), the voices of contemporary Acadian youth concerning their developing identities and roles within Acadian society have been considerably less represented or documented.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Sample

The overall sample of this study consisted of two focus groups along with 3 individual interviews. The first focus group was comprised of 4 males and 4 females between the ages of 13 – 15 years old, inclusive. The second group was comprised of 3 males and 3 females between the ages of 16 – 18 years old, inclusive. Furthermore, three individual interviews were conducted, respectively, with a 15 year old (male), 16 year old (female) and 17 year old (female) in order to enhance the rich, yet not overly abundant data. All participants were of Acadian descent and currently living in the Acadian community of Clare, within the province of Nova Scotia. All participants were also students at the local high school (*École Secondaire de Clare*) and most were connected with local community based youth programs involving such activities as sports, music, and dance.

These particular youth participants had been selected because of their direct experience living within a minority culture, as they are faced daily with personal and social challenges related to their Acadian heritage, language, and culture. With regard to language, all youth within the sample speak a particular dialect unique to their home community. This dialect represents one of the oldest existing French language variations in Canada, directly influenced by Native languages in Canada and words inherited from middle-western France in the 17th century (Basque, Barrieau & Côté, 1999).

Unfortunately, however, although this well preserved dialect is commonly used by the youth in their homes and community, it is largely unrecognized, misunderstood, or



dismissed by fellow Francophones and Anglophones alike.

### **Qualitative Method**

A qualitative approach was chosen as appropriate for this particular study, given the intention of the researcher to explore and discover the perspectives of Acadian youth regarding their cultural affiliation and identity, lived experiences, and everyday needs. As Marshall and Rossman (1989) describe, “the process of designing mainstream qualitative research entails immersion in the everyday life of the setting chosen for study, values participants’ perspectives on their worlds and seeks to discover those perspectives, views inquiry as an interactive process between the researcher and the participants.” (p.11) This qualitative research process is descriptive in nature and emphasizes on participants’ response as the main source of data. (Marshall and Rossman, 1989) Since the researcher elicited the everyday experiences and perspectives of the involved youth, a qualitative method provided for enhanced gathering of detailed self-accounts and elaborated views by the participants (Silverman, 2000).

Denzin & Lincoln (2003) outline that, “qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self.” (pp.6-7). In the present study, the researcher looked to gather, conceptually organize, and interpret the perspectives and lived experiences of Acadian youth in order to make their thoughts and world(s) *visible*. Further suggestions are made to insinuate that research in cultural studies help us to better understand and illustrate culture in

geographical and historical ways. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) Since this study served to draw upon the adolescents' daily cultural experiences, strongly based however in historical and geographic context, the researcher's personal membership in that cultural community lent knowledge and sensitivity of the personal challenging issues that were expressed by the youth.

The intentions of the researcher for this study are best described by Denzin & Lincoln (1994) as involving "the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning" (p.4). Within this study, a qualitative approach helped provide the researcher with the opportunity to facilitate and make sense or meaning of the individual perspectives of Acadian youth, conveyed through shared group discussion and personal interview formats.

### **Focus Group Interviews**

Focus group interviews were selected in this study as an appropriate and effective method for data gathering. As Krueger (1994) sets forth, "A focus group is typically composed of participants who are selected because they have certain characteristics in common that relate to the topic of the focus group" (p.6). In the present study, Acadian youth, who share generally related lifestyles and activities, were invited to discuss their experiences and attitudes in a comfortable setting with few boundaries.

According to Krueger (1994) focus groups typically have six characteristics:

(1) people, (2) assembled in a series of groups, (3) who possess certain characteristics, and (4) provide data, (5) of a qualitative nature, (6) in a focused discussion. (p.16)

In order to maximize the depth and richness of data obtained through such focused discussions, it is important to have a group that is small enough for everyone to have the opportunity to share their insights, yet sizable enough to provide a wide variety of discussion. (Krueger, 1994) As Morgan (1988) states, “The hallmark of focus groups is the *explicit use of the group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group*” (p.12). Providing a group atmosphere permitted the youth to interact and discuss thoughts, positive emotions and even negative concerns about certain subject matters. Furthermore, as suggested by Stewart & Shamdasani (1990), “Focus groups allow the researcher to interact directly with respondents. This provides opportunities for clarification of responses, for follow-up questions, and for the probing of responses” (p.16). Given the topic of this study and its number of participants, focus group discussions were anticipated to provide for elaborate responses enabling the researcher to best represent and describe the expressed perspectives of the youth participants.

According to Krueger (1994) “focus groups produce qualitative data that provide insights into the attitudes, perceptions, and opinions of participants. These results are solicited through open-ended questions and a procedure in which respondents are able to choose the manner in which they respond and also from observations of those respondents in a group discussion. The focus group presents a more natural environment than that of an individual interview because participants are influencing and influenced by others – just as they are in real life” (p.19).

### **Interviewing**

For the purpose of this study, individual qualitative interviews were deemed both appropriate and necessary as a follow-up to focus group interviews in order to enhance the richness of the overall data. Britten (2000) describes individual research interviews as conducive to drawing forth informants' points of view of their lived experience, emotions, and understandings of the world, while Walford (2001) considers the research interview as a way to allow people to express their views on particular issues and provides the researcher with means to generate a volume of data quickly. Taylor et al. (1984) describe the qualitative interview as *flexible* and *dynamic* due to the unstructured nature of the exchange between the researcher and the participant. This approach uncovers new ideas that were not anticipated by the researcher (Britten, 2000).

### **Rigor and Credibility**

Rigor and credibility are essential features of qualitative research. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) outline, naturalistic inquiry seeks to establish the "truth value" of the research by accurately retaining the conveyed meanings of the study participants and establishing a credible 'fit' between the data and the research findings and interpretations. Patton (1990) like wise emphasizes that qualitative researchers are committed to studying their data to check their interpretations, notes, categories, explanations and constructed meanings in order to discover, retain, and accurately reflect the views of the participants in the study. Within the present research, the use of prolonged engagement with the youth volunteers, audio-recorded discussions, concurrent note-taking, sharing of the data

(transcripts) with the participants for clarification and overall accuracy, and regular consultation with a co-analyst (thesis supervisor), was employed to optimize the accountability, confirmability, and dependability of the study and its findings. While, as Miller and Crabtree (1994) state, qualitative research portrays “local context and the human story, of which each individual and community story is a reflection, are primary goals of qualitative research, and not ‘generalizability’” (p.348), to the extent that rigor exists within a particular study, certain ‘transferability’ or replicability of findings may occur given a similar group in similar circumstances or unifying context. In all, Stringer and Dwyer (2005), summarize that the trustworthiness of action-oriented qualitative research, “...is verified through procedures establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, degrees of participation, and practical utility” (p.52).

### **Procedure and Data Gathering**

Once having obtained the approval of both her Thesis Committee and the University Research Ethics Board, the researcher undertook recruitment of potential participants for the study. The researcher, herself a native of the Acadian community from which the research sample was sought, initially distributed Information Letters (Appendix A) to parents and other adults (e.g., teachers, youth group leaders) who are active in organizing local youth groups around such interests as dance, sports and cultural community and educational activities. Permission was sought through these letters (and confirmed by follow-up phone calls) to speak with these leaders’ respective youth groups about the nature of the research and the possibility of the youth participating. At these meetings with youth, those interested in participating were given two letters of Informed

Consent (Appendix B) to be signed, one by themselves and one by their parents or legal guardian. Each Letter of Informed Consent was written in both English and French, since some parents appreciated or preferred the choice of language.

Following receipt of the Letters of Informed Consent via mail and pick up, the researcher organized focus group and individual interview meeting times that were convenient for the participating youth and arranged for a meeting room at a local community hall (chosen as a familiar and convenient setting). The researcher used the same procedure for both types of interviews in order to maintain consistency. The researcher endeavored to generate a comfortable environment for the youth focus group and individual interview meetings. Chairs were arranged in a circle and refreshments (i.e. water) were served beforehand and made available during the discussions. At the beginning of each focus group discussion as well as the individual interviews, youth were well informed of information related to matters of procedure scheduling (focus groups and individual interviews generally lasted about one hour). Most importantly, youth participants were reminded of their rights and the shared expectations of confidentiality within the overall study. It is important to note that two of the youth involved in this study participated in both the individual and focus group interviews, whereas another was recruited for the individual interview process alone. All youth participants were thanked for their interest and participation in the research. Each participant was encouraged to contribute their valued perspectives during discussions, as he or she felt comfortable in doing so.

### **Data Analysis**

In the proposed study, the focus group as well as the individual interview discussions were audio-recorded, and later transcribed verbatim in order to preserve the integrity and credibility of the data (Patton, 1990; Vaughn, Schub, & Sinagub, 1996; Glesne, 1999). By doing so, the researcher was able “to capture pauses, voice patterns, intensity of feeling, grammar, and thought processes of the respondents”(Gallant, 2003, p.39). Stewart & Shamdasani (1990) note, “some editing may increase readability, but it is important that the character of the respondents’ comments be maintained, even if at times they use poor grammar or appear to be confused. Because one use of focus group interviewing is to learn how respondents think and talk about a particular issue, too much editing and cleaning of the transcript is undesirable” (p.104).

Multiple copies of the data transcripts were saved electronically and an original hardcopy was kept untouched in order to keep the authenticity of the original data. Two copies were printed, one for the researcher and the other for her thesis supervisor and co-analyst.

Dey (1993) suggests, “there is no one kind of qualitative data analysis, but rather a variety of approaches, related to the different perspectives and purposes of researchers” (p.1). In order to analyze the data of the present study, the researcher noted recurring themes and issues expressed by the youth (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998), taking the time to organize the data with good care and judgment. (Dey, 1993; Patton, 1990; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990).

In the present study the researcher, along with her co-analyst, followed well established qualitative analysis procedures that involved the initial open (in vivo) coding

of the transcribed data, through the highlighting of key words and phrases that express the participants' views and points of emphasis. Constant cross-comparative analysis within and between transcripts served to organize and find a best "fit" for the data. Following the inductive generation of a wide variety of first level codes from the data, a second level of coding was undertaken. At this level, the data was further organized through the designation and clustering of increasingly descriptive thematic codes, grouped by their relatedness. A third level of coding was then undertaken to further collapse the data into more broadly conceptual codes that, in turn, were finally subsumed and contained in representative categories for purposes of interpretation and description in the research Results (see: Appendix D Selected Sample of Coding).

### **Ethical Considerations**

All participants of this study, including parent(s)/guardian(s) and youth, received a Letter of Information (Appendix A) prior to participating in the study, and had all their research-related questions answered in person or via telephone. Each person involved in the study also had full access to contact the researcher, her thesis supervisor, and the Chair of University Research Ethics Board (UREB).

Each youth was well informed of the confidentiality of this study. The subject matter reflected personal experiences that the participants may have felt more comfortable sharing with the group once they felt secure that shared information would remain among the group members. In the individual interviews, the youth were well informed that shared information would remain between themselves and the researcher. The researcher emphasized this throughout both the focus group and individual



interviews. It was also made clear by the researcher that all participants had the liberty to withdraw from the study without any risk of negative consequence. The study was voluntary, therefore no youth was obligated to stay.

The audiotapes obtained through the interviews were stored under lock and key until they had been fully transcribed and the research had completed. Given the nature of this study, the researcher anticipated a low level of risk or harm related with participants in the study. However, should any emotional or physical discomfort have occurred at any time during the focus group or individual interviews, the researcher made it clear she should be notified in order to provide immediate support.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

For this study, exploring the contemporary identity and social experiences of Acadian youth, the data was sought through focus groups and individual interviews. In the original conceptualization of the research, focus groups had been considered the main source of data collection, however, individual interviews were later deemed appropriate and necessary in order to enhance and strengthen the focus group data. Through detailed discussions, Acadian youth provided useful insight into their cultural connections, daily experiences, and attitudes toward maintaining and developing their Acadian identities.

As a result of the data analysis, the research findings summarize and highlight the four following representative categories extracted from the research data, and by which the discussion within the Results chapter is organized: *Forming Acadian Identity*, *Experiencing Acadian Identity*, *Maintaining Acadian Identity*, and *Acadian Resources*.

#### Forming Acadian Identity

##### *Characteristics/features of Acadian identity*

Participating youth associated key characteristics of Acadian identity with such distinctive features as Acadian history, traditional Acadian foods and music, and, above all, the Acadian language. Extended family ties, as well as large and regular family gatherings full of food and laughter, also featured prominently in the minds of the youth:

“More or less, we have our own tradition and we have a story behind our culture. We have our own specific French language. We don’t speak “proper French”, like Québec... we’re unique.”

“I always think about the way we talk and the way we live in Clare...we eat *rapure*, we speak weird, and we play the violin...”

We have lots of family reunions where all my family both sides get together ...we eat steak, clams, *rapure*, *fricot*, and stuff like that, that you don't find anywhere else.

Participating youth generally embraced their Acadian identity with pride, although most agreed they had neither developed significant cultural awareness nor given particular interest to their Acadian identity until their later childhood or early adolescence:

[A child] might know she's Acadian... and not realize what it means.

I think you realize [your identity] after a while... Like, if you travel, or if people come here and they've never seen that (traditional foods) before... that tells you something.

### ***Acadian Identity Awareness***

Youth noted both established and more recent major community events and gatherings (e.g., World Acadian Congress, 2004) as playing a crucial role in their earlier and continuing awareness of Acadian culture:

When you're younger you don't really know what but I mean we'd go to the Acadian festival and that told you something. The parade and stuff. Like at the time it didn't really mean anything....I mean I didn't really know what it was but it was there. You can't really explain it, sometimes you just know.”

For one youth, his mothers' participation in a well-known Acadian play helped him better understand the history of his people:

My mother was in the play *Évangéline* for quite a while and I saw it about ten times because she would bring us with her. That pretty much taught me everything."

### ***Cultural pride and connection***

Interviewed youth each cited the 2004 *Congrès mondial acadien* (World Acadian Congress) as having a strong and continuing impact on their positive sense of being Acadian. With the opening ceremonies to this renowned event having been hosted by their Municipality of Clare, Nova Scotia, youth shared their feelings of intensified pride and connection to their culture:

The *Congrès mondial acadien* (CMA) opened my eyes quite a bit. To have 10,000 extra people in a place of only 10,000... all here for one cause, that's big.

You could see people that were celebrating (CMA) being Acadian. It made me realize, you know, I'm proud of this and it not something to be embarrassed about.

When we had the Acadian Congress, it [Acadian identity] was more important. When we were at school we learned what our culture is and to be Acadian. Here it was actually something important, something we should appreciate.

Being Acadian means being part of a group, like a culture that's unique to you. You have a reason to have that culture because you worked so hard for it. You've been deported and you've come back, so you have a reason to be Acadian. You own that

## Experiencing Acadian Identity

### *Daily Acadian Affiliations*

Youth remarked about their daily sense of cultural affinity within their peer groups, families, and their broader Acadian community. For most of the youth, cultural affinity involved feeling regarded and valued through regular contact with other Acadian youth, primarily at school, yet also included supportive, ‘understanding’ relationships at home and within the community:

How close the people are. You come to school and you know everybody here, you know where the people live, who the people are.

The people that surround you, like going to school everyday with the people you know.

You’re closer to everybody...like everyone understands each other. People here understand what you’re like, but in a city there are too many people.

A particularly important and everyday source of cultural affinity and personal comfort for the youth related to their distinctive Acadian language and dialect:

You can relate more, you’re more at ease with the one that talks like you. Let’s say I am talking with an Acadian versus a non-Acadian... the Acadian and I stay in the same community, so we can better relate to things.

You’re more at ease with the one that talks like you.

### *Living as a minority*

As the municipality of Clare is situated between two English-speaking communities, the preservation of the Acadian language and other features of Acadian culture is a rising concern among some of the youth in the community:

Sometimes you can feel Acadian, but sometimes no. Like at school or different places where the people speak English and it's not really Acadian. It's kind of hard being Acadian when you're surrounded by lots of Anglophones.

Considering we are a minority, there aren't too many people that speak Acadian from Clare.

In terms of their minority status within their region of the province, interviewed youth noted that the Provincial Youth Counsel (*CJP*) does offer workshops aimed at assisting their understanding of being part of a minority community, as well as strategies for both developing leadership skills and dealing with such matters as social stereotyping, bias, or discrimination in their daily experiences. Youth generally felt that these negative attitudes and behaviors related to their Acadian identity were relatively absent from their Clare community, yet so too were immediate opportunities for greater leadership roles:

Like you have that [discrimination], experiences like that, but down here it's not developed enough for you to apply them [strategies for combating racism].

You're gonna have to face some of the things she (workshop leader) talks about but I mean...she also teaches you leadership abilities but there aren't any places that you could use them... I guess if you ever need them (leadership abilities), they're there.

### ***Differences in Acadian language practice***

Differences in language practice among Acadian youth was also discussed. Youth noted that for some of their Acadian peers the regular use of Acadian French was their first choice, while for others, the insertion of English words or the speaking of English exclusively in certain settings or situations (e.g., in the school yard) was increasingly common and even preferred. Focus group youth, however, clearly conveyed their regret

that this distinctive feature of their cultural identity being diminished:

It's pretty common now actually, there are plenty of people that speak English.

...they speak English during recreation and stuff like that.”

There are a lot of people that are Acadian and French that speak English all day at school, because they don't think it's cool to speak French...it's the same thing with the music.

It's like people are embarrassed of what they are.

They're just not educated enough about their culture.

### ***Feeling misunderstood by non-Acadians***

Many youth, while emphasizing sources of pride and connection to their culture, including traditions, family, and community, spoke of their experiences of feeling misunderstood by non-Acadians. For some youth participants, this involved not only matters related to their cultural heritage and identity but also to their everyday parlance and communication:

You mostly notice that we're different when you leave our little bubble, people notice that we speak weird...it's not the same accent. People don't know what we are, our culture.

Ahh, well this one time I had gone to Québec and I was in a restaurant, and like, when I talked to them, it's not the same thing, they don't understand you, they don't understand you at all. Just that was like, yes we speak French but it's totally different.

Well, I've been to a lot of places where my parents and I were speaking Acadian and there were other French people that were like, “What language do you speak?”

As the youth outlined, such highlighted 'differences' in language and speech, especially between themselves and other French-speaking, non-Acadian individuals, often left them feeling self-conscious, 'less than' and judged by their fellow Francophones on the basis of their distinctive dialect. For some youth, their desire to be accepted and understood by other French-speakers meant employing more standard or enhanced French in their conversations with other Francophones, while other youth stated certain resentment over the seeming unwillingness of others to understand their Acadian language and expression. One youth offered, half jokingly, that if misunderstood by another for his French, he may simply retort that he fails to understand their own:

It's like, more or less, that we're inferior to them because we don't speak the top French. They don't understand, they don't see that it's a language it's just that they don't speak it, so to them it's not as important.

You have to use a French that is better, more appropriate so that they understand you. You won't get very far if you talk to people the way you talk around here.

The difference is that a non-Acadian is not from here, they won't understand what we're saying if we don't make an effort.

Well, for me personally, it doesn't make much difference. I can watch my Acadian, although you have to make an effort because you don't speak standard French or English.

I don't change the way I speak for anyone...but if someone French (non-Acadian) doesn't understand, I would say, "I don't understand what your saying!".



## Maintaining Acadian Identity

### *Acadian identity supports*

In addition to identifying sources of their Acadian pride, as well as barriers to their positive Acadian identity and maintenance of culture, focus group youth spoke of familiar community markers and shared Acadian activities (e.g., Acadian festivals, French signs) that serve to increase their awareness of who they are:

The signs of our companies are in French, and the road signs with the village names are too....we have the Acadian festival, the parade, the music they play on *CIFA* (local radio).

At school, all the teachers have Acadian plates that have their names on them... they're on the doors to their classrooms, too.

### *Acadian identity barriers/non-supports*

**School curricula and activities.** Despite such efforts to generate an atmosphere of pride in their Acadian community, youth tended to feel that much might yet be done, especially to engage children and youth through their education. As the youth expressed, while they value learning of their Acadian heritage and tradition, they would welcome more opportunities to become familiar with contemporary Acadian society, as well as reflect on their experiences as young Acadians:

We learn about the deportation and all that stuff ... a lot of old French Acadian expressions that it seems we're losing...

At school, we learn a lot of standard French. In French class we read this book and it was written in Acadian and it wasn't easy to read. Like we should be able to read that easily.

It (Acadian Identity) could be more reinforced in school...like something that speaks more about today, that describes how Acadians are today.

Youth also expressed a desire for more school-based events and activities that might draw Acadian students together in fun and common interest. They noted a difference between the amount and level of such school offerings from elementary to junior high and high school, and generally felt that schools could assume a much greater role in providing settings and activities conducive to social interaction among Acadian youth:

In elementary school you have plenty of activities, but when you get to high school, there's nothing...there are no more art classes, no more music class, just like sports and stuff like that.

If there was something to attract young people, like I don't know, more stuff for young people and if there was people, you know, that did well and they're Acadian, and they're speaking French, people like that could come to school.

The school itself could do more to make youth feel more a part of their society and a part of their culture.

### ***Lack of motivation among youth***

Youth participants additionally identified a lack of motivation on the part of certain of their peers to become involved in Acadian-oriented events or activities. Their comments cited the challenge, at times, of stimulating interest in others to participate with fellow Acadians, a type of behavior (substance abuse) they felt may deter youth

involvement in Acadian-related programs, and the migration of younger Acadians away from their Acadian community, each as factors influencing the inclination of Acadian youth to gather and share common identity and activity:

Well, for us it's like they won't do anything on site (of an activity), like if you ask them to do something they won't do it... you really have to encourage them.

Ya, but it's not everybody that does it either (smoke drugs). I mean it can affect them if they do. Some people that smoke up can be motivated, it doesn't affect them, but it can.

There's a big lack of everything, you know? Like the society of Clare is aging and young people are leaving because there is nothing here for them.

## Acadian Resources

### *Acadian identity resources*

Interviewed youth shared their awareness of any resources that they felt were accessible and addressed their needs and interests as Acadians. The Provincial Youth Counsel (CJP) (<http://www.jeunessene.ca>), whose mission is to enable both Acadian and Francophone youth within Nova Scotia to have fulfilling life experiences and opportunities through maximizing their linguistic and cultural identities, creating a source of pride among youth, and the providing for Acadian and Francophone youth to be able to function entirely in French in the province of Nova Scotia, was immediately cited as a known and valued asset.

It's (CJP) just to develop abilities. There are leadership workshops, sports workshops, music workshops. It's to meet other youth from Nova Scotia...to feel as though you belong to a group.

This summer, we went to Prince Edward Island with the CJP for the *Festival Jeunesse* (Youth Festival). There were people from Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia. There were a bunch of people [and] an activity called “The Amazing Race”. We went all over the province looking for game chips. It was very well organized and it was fun!

### **Activities/Resources for youth**

In addition to the CJP, youth made mention of regular and ongoing francophone activities, such as the Acadian games, as resources available to all in their community youth. [These games originated from New-Brunswick and are today an opportunity for Acadian youth from both Nova Scotia and New-Brunswick to compete in various sporting events. They compete provincially and the winners move on to the Final games, which consists of the three Maritime Provinces. The mission of the Acadian games is to promote and value the Acadian and francophone language and culture among Acadian youth in Nova Scotia by organizing cultural and sportive activities. ([www.jeuxdelacadie.org](http://www.jeuxdelacadie.org))].

Another familiar activity and resource for Acadian and francophone youth cited by the youth participants was *Les Jeux de la francophonie canadienne* (Canadian Francophone Games). Here, thousands of francophone athletes and artists between the ages of 13 and 18 (inclusive) come together from all Canadian provinces and territories. The goal is to help youth practice their talents in the sportive and artistic disciplines. The Francophone games spread a sense of cultural pride, confidence and leadership skills among both Acadian and Francophone youth. ([www.jeunessene.ca](http://www.jeunessene.ca)):

Well, this summer there was (as an Acadian activity) *Les Jeux de la francophonie*. That attracted Francophones our age from throughout Canada.

Further events organized throughout the province for Acadian and Francophone youth, such as *La rencontre jeunesse provinciale* and *Le grand rassemblement jeunesse*, seemed also to have left a lasting impression in the lives of the youth participants:

The *grand rassemblement jeunesse* (big assembly for youth), at the closing ceremonies of the Acadian world congress...like we were in front, like in a mosh pit and everyone that you saw behind us, they were like, other Acadians...and the flashes, with the flags, and everyone was crying onstage, it was cool!

Finally, two Acadian films (*La Cabane* and *les Gossipeuses*), produced in and around Clare and popular among the people in the community, were identified as sources of pride and cultural identity. Most youth who had seen these films to be representative and fun reflections of the Clare community, including its distinctive dialect.

### ***Lack of resources***

Despite those resources cited above, concern over the lack of cultural resources and activities for Acadian youth was a recurring topic within the youth discussions. Youth generally noted a lack of everyday, culturally-based resources for themselves in the Clare community, such as music programming and activity, or a common meeting place (youth center) of their own furnishing that might draw their Acadian peers together

for fun and socializing:

Like, we want a place youth can go to have music workshops, concerts and things like that. Just among the grades 8 and 9, I think around at least 10 people would show up (for music workshops).

[We'd] have workshops on whatever at least once a week.

Well, anything youth would want in it, music, a stereo, couches...

Obviously a TV or two, an amp for my guitar.

Well, just like French Acadian stuff, and that's where everybody would hang out.

Yeah, then youth from around here will want to do more things.

### ***Suggestions for Acadian identity maintenance***

Faced with a perceived lack of culturally-based local resources for themselves as Acadian youth and desiring not only opportunities for shared activity with their Acadian peers, interviewed youth offered suggestions that they felt might assist in maintaining and enhancing their Acadian identity. Youth commented on the needed yet inadequate educational curriculum, such as it exists, that currently focuses on traditional features of Acadian ancestry, yet with little or no attention to the contemporary lives and experiences of Acadians generally, or Acadian children and youth specifically. While youth stated that they valued learning about time-preserved recipes and traditional Acadian music, they wondered as young Acadians, considering the prospect of perhaps living away from their home community or apart from any Francophone community, of the reality of being Acadian in a non-Acadian French context:

If you go to Moncton, everyone's Acadian in Moncton but in New York or something like that, that's different.

In their final and over- arching reflection on the meaning of being Acadian, within the context of traditional yet evolving cultural connections, and the prospect of perhaps leaving their home community (for employment or education), the youth conveyed a deep sense of cultural attachment and their feelings of cultural continuity:

We'll learn how to make *rapure* [and] we'll always eat dry fish and stuff like that ...our culture might change a bit personally [yet] when we come home from university, it will be the same thing as when you were down here... you'll be the same person.

Overall, interviewed youth indicated their abiding sense of cultural affinity, while expressing the need for supports, resources, and opportunities to explore and determine their self-determined contemporary Acadian identities.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this research will be beneficial for the better understanding of contemporary identity and social experiences of Acadian youth. Due to the lack of research concerning Acadian youth voices, this particular research was intended to provide further reference on this subject and hopefully insinuate additional research in this domain. Youth in this study were given the opportunity to express their feelings and perceptions about their social and contemporary experience living as an Acadian minority in the Clare community. The researchers' hopes are that this research study will help with the implementation of programs in the Clare community to reinforce and maintain Acadian identity among youth. The initial research questions are answered and further discussed in this chapter.

#### **1) What is the significance or meaning of being “Acadian” to Acadian youth?**

In describing the significance and meaning of being “Acadian”, interviewed youth proudly cited such prominent cultural features as their Acadian history, customs, music, traditional foods, distinctive flag, the Acadian language, and their close family and community ties as examples of their valued Acadian character and identity. Such references not only closely accord with previous accounts of embraced cultural features by Acadians (Maillet, 1980; Boudreau, 1998; Deveau, 1982; Chiasson, 2004), but also with expressions by youth in other cultural groups (e.g., Greek-Canadian; Indo-Canadian), of similar culturally associated symbols, markers, and practices which signify their ethnic distinctiveness (Fitzgerald and Rouvalis, 1995; Tomar and Kapoor, 2002).



Given that such pronounced and quickly recognizable cultural references are meaningful and enhancing to their positive identity as Acadian youth, continued support is essential for family, school, and community efforts that introduce, guide, and promote learning by Acadian children and youth, about key features of their history and tradition. In keeping with their expressed desire to understand and apply these valued cultural elements and contexts to their current lives as contemporary Acadians, however, there is also a need to provide Acadian youth with opportunities and resources to acquire, develop, and share knowledge and skill in such areas as Acadian culinary, music, and language, that, most regrettably, may be either lost or not retained, particularly by those who might eventually leave their Acadian community in Nova Scotia. In this regard, the interviewed youth conveyed a keen interest in retaining their distinctive Clare-Acadian dialect, while needing support to offset the self-consciousness they often experience in conversing with other Francophones or non-Acadians, both in their regional area and when away from home on various travels, visits, and excursions. While pride in their French heritage and language reflects the broader sentiments of the Acadian people (Boudreau, 2004; Landry & Allard, 2000; Landry, 2004), the aforementioned tensions and challenges experienced by these youth, as they endeavor to comfortably and confidently express themselves in their particular Acadian dialect, often leave them looking for support from understanding others. In this respect, the language-related issues and concerns raised by the interviewed youth, seem to less involve, from their emphasis, matters of competency or fluency in standard French, and more so emotional and cognitive struggles they experience with feeling less valued or respected by their Francophone counterparts. Clare youth might well benefit from increased empathy in this area, as well as opportunities to more

frequently appreciate and share their distinctive dialect with others in social and educational contexts. Youth themselves suggested raising awareness and educating more non-Acadian French people residing outside of Nova Scotia about the Acadian language spoken in Clare. Perhaps, most of all, however, youth expressed their need to be encouraged to feel proud of their linguistic distinctiveness and provided with practical guidance and support in dealing with matters of discrimination by others. Rather acutely, youth shared the pressures they experienced to meet the standards and expectations of others, the frustration and growing resentment they felt at being misunderstood and judged by others, and the hurtfulness they had developed as a consequence of being belittled or rejected by others. In this context, the interviewed youth reflected the many difficulties noted to be experienced by others living in cultural and linguistic minorities (Boudreau & Dubois, 1994; Hintenaus, 1997).

Finally, in their somewhat mixed responses to, perhaps, their most prominent association with their Acadian history and heritage, namely, the Acadian Expulsion of 1755 (Cyr, 2004; Deveau, 1968; Deveau & Ross, 1982; Rumilly, 1955; Theriault, 2005), youth reflected a most challenging dilemma they currently facing. That is, while on the one hand feeling a sense of deep pride, understanding, and cultural connection to the hardships, misfortunes, and resilience of their ancestors, the interviewed youth also conveyed their need to be understood and recognized as young, vital, and developing Acadians within a modern and contemporary context. They want to learn about and revere their past, while not being associated by a small number of more stereotypical and antiquated notions of “being Acadian”. As such, youth may well benefit from supports that allow them opportunities to further seek out, define, and convey their sense of what it

is like for them to be Acadian today.

## **2) How does being “Acadian” play a role in the daily lives of Acadian youth?**

Interviewed youth, having grown up in a small-shared Acadian community, conveyed their strong sense of relatedness and affinity with their fellow Acadians. For the youth, their daily sense of ‘being Acadian’ involved a wide array of valued features and involvements, including close family and community ties, their distinctive dialect, traditional music and foods, a deeply shared history of exile and struggle, festive gatherings, and tangible symbols (e.g., flag) of their common identity. In this way, participant youth reflected many similar sources of cultural pride and identity noted in earlier works depicting, and drawing from the views of, Acadians (Dugas-LeBlanc, 1998).

Notwithstanding these connections, the interviewed youth generally did not feel that their Acadian identity, as such, played a particularly prominent role in their day-to-day lives, especially when interacting with fellow Acadians. Rather, given that it was the familiar context in which they daily lived, the youth tended to view their being Acadian as a more embedded and natural element of themselves, less overt or readily distinguishable, except in terms of their French language and distinctive dialect. It was here that the interviewed youth were in unanimous agreement on their need for opportunities to take pride and comfortably communicate in their local and regional tongue, as an integral part of their Acadian identity. Reflecting their own concern over the erosion of the French language (as Landry and Allard, 2000, state: “...even family life is not always a French refuge. In 1996, the percentage of mixed marriages

(French/English) was 48% (O'Keefe, 1998) and consequently, the assimilation of the French language in these unions is very strong (Bédard, 1993; O'Keefe, 1998; Harrison & Marmen, 1994) unless parents choose to speak French to their children and furthermore school them in French. (Allard & Landry, 1997)", p. 4), as well as their self-consciousness feelings of being scrutinized and judged, by other Francophones and non-Francophones, alike, the youth conveyed their common need to be supported by others as they develop and assume their own sense of who they are as Acadian youth from their particular locale. In this context, the youth expressed that their interest in their Acadian identity was evolving, yet piqued at times by cultural celebrations and access to new expressions and representations of Acadia, through such mediums as contemporary music, art/posters, or drama and literature. Clearly, the interviewed youth were looking for opportunity and assistance to explore and develop their Acadian identities as a valued underlying, yet active and practiced, feature of their daily interactions with all others.

### **3) Are there factors that Acadian youth identify as more supportive or less supportive of their Acadian identity?**

As indicated above, interviewed youth both welcomed and found their Acadian identities enhanced by cultural celebrations, such as the annual Acadian Festival and other events in their local region. Notably, the World Acadian Congress of 2004 was cited as a major contributor to their Acadian pride and a galvanizing force with Acadian French communities throughout the Maritimes (Allain, 2005, *The Chronicle Herald*, *Le courier de la Nouvelle-Écosse*). While not on such a grand scale, the youth communicated their desire for more of these types of gatherings, particularly among

youth, to serve as gathering places for fun and cultural interaction/exchange. In this regard, the youth gave indication of their interest and willingness to help generate youth-focused activities of cultural context and significance. These might be facilitated, on a regional or inter-province basis, through such newly developed Francophone links as the internet site, [www.jeunessene.ca](http://www.jeunessene.ca), and/or through funded initiatives that allow Acadian youth to consult via teleconference discussions, planning and organizing meetings, and site visits in order to forge vital connections with other Acadian youth.

As mentioned, Acadian youth feel united by tradition and external signs or representations of Acadie (e.g., the Acadian flag), yet seem to be looking for references that respond to and articulate their developing sense of being young Acadians in the present day. Their local radio (playing contemporary Francophone songs) and numerous community activities, often having youth components (e.g., Festival Acadien, Deep Sea Fishing Tournament), were thus noted by the youth as Acadian identity supports, as they promote a sense of cultural awareness and inclusion.

On the other hand, participant youth cited barriers and impediments that they daily experienced which, they felt, served to undermine their forming of a more secure sense of themselves as contemporary Acadians. For these youth, the absence of educational curricula, or even discussion, within their schools related to the significance and experience of being Acadian in a modern context, the lack of access to Francophone music and culture through mainstream media outlets, and their limited opportunity to meet with fellow Acadian youth, locally and regionally, each constituted an impeding factor in their effort to explore and develop their cultural identity. In their welcoming and appreciation of cultural identity supports, and their frustration with sources contrary to

this objective, the youth gave strong indication of their keen personal interest in discovering and creating their Acadian identities, although wishing for more resources to support their doing so.

**4) What do Acadian youth identify as their current needs in terms of maintaining their cultural identity and enhancing their relationships with other Acadians and non-Acadians?**

As the findings of the study indicate, participant youth felt/feel a deepening and ongoing need to increase their own knowledge and awareness of their Acadian identity. Such a need to learn further about, explore, and form their own sense of cultural connection and meaning reflects similar adolescent developmental processes noted in youth who live within culturally-based households and communities (Fitzgerald and Rouvalis, 1995; Tomar and Kapoor, 2002). Most importantly, however, was the sense from the youth that they wanted and needed access to information not only about their rich cultural heritage, but of the lives of contemporary Acadians and Francophones to whom they could relate as representations of their own modern selves. In this regard, the interviewed youth looked first to their educators and school systems as sources of support and resource. In keeping with earlier research (Dugas-LeBlanc, 2000), they wondered if their school curricula might not be adapted to include more references, or even an entire course, devoted to Acadie, past, present, and future. Such curricula might include, in their view, specific coursework in the history and use of the Acadian language as found in the *The Acadian Language Dictionary* (Cormier, 1999) which may, in turn, help to offset the ‘linguistic insecurity’ that Landry (2004) reports afflicts many living and interacting in

minority language circumstances. This crucial need for more information about the origin and character of their language speaks directly to youths' desire to take pride in their native Acadian tongue and to also have their particular Acadian dialect respected and positively profiled within their everyday mainstream educational settings. Accordingly, additional inclusion, support and recognition of their regional language, might not only serve to enhance their personal and community sense of pride as they speak their Acadian tongue, but may also promote more positive awareness on the part of others, Francophone and non-Acadian alike.

**5) What supports and resources might Acadian youth identify as most useful to or needed by themselves in order to maintain their cultural identity and enhance their relationships with both fellow Acadians and non-Acadians?**

Results of this research reflected recent survey findings in the Clare community (Comeau, 2005; Comeau, 2005) that identified a relative lack of culturally related resources available to Acadian youth in their local region. In this regard, while the participating youth in the current study welcomed and appreciated larger, funded cultural organizations and festive gatherings, such as the *Conseil jeunesse provincial*, *Jeux de la francophonie canadienne*, and *Jeux de l'Acadie*, as opportunities for interaction and exchange between fellow Acadians, they are clearly looking for more everyday and accessible supports, activities, and outlets for expression, conducive to the development of their Acadian cultural identity. Of note, interviewed youth cited their desire for a youth center, which may foster both social and cultural activities, to be located in their community. Although one such center had previously existed and later closed for lack of

funding (Comeau, 2005), the youth were hopeful that renewed interest and resources might yet result in the creation of 'place of our own', where they could simply 'hang out', watch television, or otherwise socialize with their friends. In this regard, it is worth noting that a research study to assess the need for such a center, *Une enquête dans la vie parascolaire des jeunes francophones de la région de Clare Nouvelle-Écosse*, funded by *Société acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse* (Comeau, 2005; Comeau, 2006), did result in the hiring of two 'Youth Animators' in the Clare community to follow up on the survey findings and organize services/resources requested by the youth participants. These two youth animators, are currently assisting with the development of such youth-oriented and youth-directed activities including cooking, music, art, environmental workshops, etc. (Comeau & Robichaud, 2006) Given their special function and access to youth in Clare, the animators are well positioned to play an advocating and facilitating role in the promotion of strong cultural identity among the local youth. In doing so, imagination and effort will certainly be needed to engage and motivate the interests of youth in their traditional, yet evolving, cultural connections and meanings. The promotion and support of youth-generated planning and organizing groups, as one example, may assist in the creation of initiatives that are responsive to the needs expressed by youth, in this and other research studies.

Overall, the participant youth both desire and welcome supports and resources that allow them to positively learn about and embrace their Acadian heritage, while recognizing them as contemporary and developing individuals within their cultural context and providing them with everyday opportunities with fellow Acadian youth for cultural bonding, exchange, and expression of their Acadian identity.



## LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

1. The data collected in this study was rich in content yet not overly abundant in quantity. Younger participants, in particular, seemed somewhat hesitant to speak at any length in front of their peers, with the result being that in one focus group the voices of two of the youth predominate.
2. Given the rather small initial sample size and relative lack of data from the focus group sessions, individual interviews became increasingly necessary to enlarge and confirm the original data. While perhaps not necessarily a limitation of the research, the study might have, in a preliminary way, have scouted the prospect of securing larger focus group numbers for the research.
3. Given the nature of qualitative study, this research represents and reflects only the perceptions of the interviewed youth participants. While certain commonalities may exist with other like groups, this does not claim to represent the issues, concerns, or perceptions of other Acadian, Francophone, or culturally-related youth.
4. The majority of youth participants in this study belonged to some type of community organization, club, team, or group (e.g., sports team, dance troupe). These youth, being already involved in community activities, may have been more willing or interested to participate in such a research study as this. Accordingly, the voices of youth less involved or interested in community activities may not be as well represented in this research.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Recommendations for Future Research

1. Future Research may take a more targeted approach in recruiting youth that would otherwise not necessarily participate in this type of research. (i.e. youth who tend not to be involved in community events, teams or groups) While the researcher in the present study arranged to have posters put up at the local school and was successful in recruiting some youth that may not have been otherwise engaged in the study, promotion of the research inside the classrooms may be worth considering.
2. Future Research could focus more on individual interviews or survey data collection, especially for the younger youth participants. As noted in the Limitations of the Research, while the focus group interviews with the younger adolescents did provide valuable data, they may have more so reflected the views 1 or 2 of the more verbal participants. In this regard, a second or third focus group with older youth may have provided the researcher with additional data, given the greater overall knowledge, experience and maturity of these adolescents.
3. Future Research could extend the current study through eliciting the views of additional youth from other Acadian communities in the Atlantic Provinces. While 'being Acadian' may involve many points of commonality, the daily experiences, nature of cultural awareness, and perceptions of Acadian identity among these youth may vary considerably.
4. Future research might compare the perspectives of Acadian youth to those of older generations born and raised in Acadian communities. This process may assist in better

such matters as the use of the Acadian language as well as changing perceptions of cultural identity.

### **Recommendations for Acadian Youth**

1. Acadian youth should be encouraged and supported in their ongoing development of a strong and chosen sense of contemporary Acadian identity, through the provision of opportunities and resources conducive to the promotion of cultural awareness, cultural identity, and cultural expression. In this regard, with adult leadership (parents, teachers, youth animators) perhaps assisting in the facilitation of initial meeting and organizing groups for youth, the youth themselves are recommended to increasingly self-organize and self-direct their own youth discussion and planning meetings, aimed at drawing Acadian youth into shared, culturally-related learning and social experiences.
2. In order to facilitate initial youth involvement, it is recommended that the participating youth in the present study be contacted by youth animators or involved community members/organizations to gauge their interest and/or willingness to volunteer their time in such a way. Given that the research youth have already indicated their keen interest in these matters and, through their interview discussions, generated suggested activities and involvements for Acadian youth, they would be highly suited and valuable for their continued participation and contributions.
3. That these youth organizers endeavour to reach out to as many fellow youth as possible, in order to engage those youth perhaps not as readily or easily engaged in social or group activities, and to most fully represent the voices and needs of Acadian youth.

### **Recommendations for Parents/Families**

1. Parents/families are encouraged to continue to provide youth with culturally related supports and practices at home, in order to maintain and incorporate the everyday use of the Acadian language, and other traditions, customs, and features of the Acadian culture.
2. Parents/families are encouraged to support youth by facilitating access to community events, workshops or groups (e.g., *Prends ta place*, leadership weekend at Université Sainte-Anne, activities with *Conseil jeunesse* provincial, activities organized by the school/teachers). Chaperoning and transporting youth to cultural activities, perhaps in an organized partnership with the school and/or other parents, could ease this effort and lead to greater social contact between home and school, and within the community.
3. Parents/families are encouraged to play an active role in helping youth organize and plan activities (e. g., music workshops and concerts, guest speaker events, a youth centre), by assisting them in contacting and informing the people necessary to organize these type of events and/or services.
4. Parents/families are encouraged to discuss linguistic insecurities, frustrations or concerns with their children regarding the speaking of their Acadian dialect, particularly to non-Acadians. The sharing of possible similar experiences might not only serve as emotional support to the youth, but also as a resource for how to most effectively respond to forms of misunderstanding or prejudice on the part of others.

### **Recommendations for schools (teachers/school administration)**

1. Schools may play a vital role in supporting and promoting everyday cultural awareness and connections between youth. In this context, it is recommended that

schools review their curricula with mind to its provision of not only historical information about Acadian culture and heritage, but material that stimulates discussion of matters Acadian and Francophone in contemporary terms.

2. In accordance with the above, it is recommended that schools look to add courses regarding local Acadian language, and contemporary Acadian identity and culture into their curriculum. Schools could also invite guest speakers/workshop facilitators to guide and support youth in their exploration of their Acadian experience. Specific social and cultural issues, such as developing a secure cultural identity or responding to discrimination, could be acknowledged and raised for discussion.
3. That local schools (e.g., *Ecole secondaire de Clare*) continue to make their facilities readily accessible for youth cultural meetings and activities (e.g., *La caravan*, variety shows and music concerts, sporting, dance, and music events), and endeavour to further develop their library resources to include contemporary French music and both print and electronic materials related to modern French culture.

### **Recommendations for Municipality/Government**

1. That the Municipality of Clare could, through its public service announcements, and other publicly funded sources of information, play a leading role in supporting positive Acadian identity development among youth, as well as in encouraging youth to play an active role in the community.
2. The Municipality of Clare, with support from the provincial and federal governments, provide community finances for youth-initiated projects aimed at cultural understanding and enhancement, and such initiatives as the proposed youth centre.

### **Recommendation for Community Programs/ Services/ Supports**

1. That community programs/services/supports play a more active role in the recruitment of youth to engage in community and cultural events.
2. That community programs/services/supports continue to initiate partnerships with the parents/families of youth, and the youth themselves, in order to facilitate that such cultural events and activities, while broad-based, are responsive to the interests and needs of youth.

### **Recommendations for Child and Youth Care Workers (CYCW)**

1. That child and youth care workers (cycw) play an active role in helping to provide youth with the resources and support necessary for their development of strong cultural identities. In doing so, cycw's would look to form close, understanding relationships with the youth, endeavour to engage with as many, and the widest representation of, youth as possible, and assist as needed in the facilitation of youth-generated activities, over time through the forming of along with a positive and confident sense of self at home, in the community, at school and while encountering non-Acadian speakers.
2. That cycw's continue to educate themselves about, and have drawn to their attention by their own educators and professional organizations, issues related to difference, diversity, cultural meaning and identity, and youth rights.
3. That cycw's act to raise awareness on the needs of contemporary Acadian youth and advocate, both with youth and on their behalf, to parent, school, community, or government groups and representatives.

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## **APPENDIX A**

**Letter of Information to Youth (participants)**

**Letter of Information to Parent/Guardian**



## **APPENDIX B**

### **Letters of Informed Consent**

## **Appendix C**

### **Sample Focus Group and Interview Questions**

## **Appendix C**

### **Sample Focus Group and Interview Questions**

1. What significance or meaning does being 'Acadian' have for you?
2. How does being Acadian play a part in your daily living and interactions with others (e.g., home, school, community)?
3. Are there ways in which you are particularly aware of and experience being part of an Acadian culture?
4. When or how were you first aware of being an 'Acadian'?
5. How have your experiences or thoughts of being an Acadian changed over time?
6. Are there people or things (e.g., at home, school, in the community, or beyond) that you feel support you in terms of your being Acadian?
7. Are there people or things (e.g., at home, school, in the community, or beyond) that you feel are less supportive of you in terms of your being Acadian?
8. How do you generally feel viewed by non- Acadian or non-French speaking youth or other individuals?
9. Are there ways in which you feel your being Acadian plays a role in your social interactions with others (e.g., Acadians, non-Acadians)?
10. What do you feel are your most important needs in terms of maintaining and strengthening your Acadian identity?
11. What supports or resources might assist you in developing positive social relationships with both Acadians and non- Acadians?

## **Appendix D**

### **Selected Sample of Coding**

Selected Sample of Coding			
1 <sup>st</sup> Level	2 <sup>nd</sup> Level	3 <sup>rd</sup> Level	Category
Daily Acadian Identity Experiences			
Difference in Acadian language practice	Everyday Acadian Identity		
Feeling misunderstood by non-Acadians	Everyday experiences with non-Acadians		
Differences in French language understanding/comfort	Everyday relationships with non-Acadians		
Feeling affinity to Acadians	Everyday language issues	Daily Acadian Experiences	Experiencing Acadian Identity
Ambivalence about Acadian information	Everyday cultural difficulties		
Importance of bilingualism	Everyday minority difficulties		
Non-Acadians understanding the language	Everyday cultural minority supports		
Living as a minority			
Applying knowledge/tools to daily living			