DEFINITIONS OF IDENTITY

18TH CENTURY: IMMANUEL KANT

Every person’s Self was actually composed of two aspects: a transcendental subject or ego which is the ground of all knowledge and perception, and an empirical ego which is what we observe when we introspect, or the thing we impute to other people, with qualities, attributes, etc.

1910 WILLIAM JAMES

Identity as a social self. We come to know ourselves through our interactions with others.

GEORGE HERBERT MEAD

Two stages in the development of the self involve the “organization of the particular attitudes of other individuals towards himself and toward one another in the specific social acts in which he participates with them [and the] organization of the social attitudes of the generalized other or the social group as a whole to which he belongs”.

ERIK ERIKSON

An optimal sense of identity is experienced merely as a sense of psychosocial well-being. Its most obvious concomitants are a feeling of being at home in one’s body, a sense of ‘knowing where one is going’, and an inner assuredness of anticipated recognition from those who count… Identity is a dynamic fitting together of parts of the personality with the realities of the social world so that a person has a sense both of internal coherence and meaningful relatedness to the real world.

RUTHELEN JOSSELSON

Identity is the stable, consistent, and reliable sense of who one is and what one stands for in the world. It integrates one’s meaning to oneself and one’s meaning to others; it provides a match between what one regards as central to oneself and how one is viewed by significant others in one’s life. Identity is also a way of preserving the continuity of the self, linking the past and the present…at the same time that our identity if fundamentally interwoven with others’ to gain meaning, contrasting ourselves with others heightens our sense of what is uniquely individual.

ALAN WATERMAN

Identity involves the following aspects:
- a clear sense of self-definition
- the presence of commitments regarding goals, values, and beliefs 
- the existence of activity directed toward the implementation of commitments.
- the consideration of a range of identity alternatives.
- the extent of self-acceptance
- a sense of personal uniqueness and
- confidence in one’s personal future.

CHARLES TAYLOR

We know who we are by knowing where we stand. Ones identity is defined by moral commitments.

PAUL RICOEUR

Narrative identity: We make sense of our identity by the stories we tell of our lives. We are the subjects in other’s stories and others are the subjects in our stories.

ANDREW WEIGERT, J. SMITH TEITGE, AND DENNIS TEITGE

The self is viewed as emergent, as a ‘selfing’ process, whereby an individual both shapes and is shaped by the situational and cultural contexts within which social interaction takes place.

JOANE NAGEL

Ethnic identity lies at the intersection of individual ethnic self-definition (who I am) and collective ethnic attribution (who they say I am). Ethnic identity is, then, dialectic between internal identification and external ascription.

AMY SCHULZ

Historical factors shape ‘both the process and the content or meaning of collective and self identities’

DEIRDRE JORDAN

Forming an identity is dependent on the individual to objectify a symbolic universe where they can locate meaning for themselves and others, and where self-sameness and continuity is verified.

NATIVE IDENTITY

1850 Indian Protection Act
1869 Indian refined and narrowed.
1876 Legislation continued to narrow the definition.
1951 Indian Register
1985 Bill-C31

Individual identity is always being negotiated in relation to collective identity, and in the face of an external, colonizing society.

- Self-perception is a key component of identity.
- Indigenous identity is connected to a sense of peoplehood inseparably linked to sacred traditions, traditional homelands, and a shared history as indigenous people. Being part of a larger group is critical to identity.
- Re-connection to land.
- Storytelling is a foundation for strong Native identity.
- Spirituality a fundamental feature of identity.