The Role of Intermarriage in the Acculturation of Selected Urban American Indian Women

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RÉSUMÉ

Les histoires personnelles de dix-sept amérindiennes, rési-
dentes de la région métropolitaine de New York, servent à
élucider les relations entre les mariages inter-ethniques et
l'acculturation. Les données ont été recueillis à l'aide de trois
techniques: des entrevues où s'expriment les sentiments et les
attitudes, l'observation par participation du comportement, et
un questionnaire sur la démographie et le statut socio-écono-
mique. Les données obtenues ont permis de répartir les indi-
vidus selon trois niveaux d'acculturation. Les résultats sou-
tiennent l'hypothèse que les mariages inter-ethniques peuvent
être utilisés comme mesure indépendante du degré d'accul-
turation.

INTRODUCTION

Anthropological studies of American Indian peoples, which
are based upon firsthand observations of process and change within
urban areas, are increasing in number. These studies investigate
the phenomenon of acculturation to gain further insight into the
problems encountered by the incoming migrant as he/she enters a
new cultural and personal milieu. Generally, researchers measure
acculturation by utilizing such socio-economic factors as level of
education, occupation, standard of living, and social integration.
However, there is another factor that has not been systematically
investigated — intermarriage as a means or an end in the ac-
culturative process.

A survey of the literature suggests that although an awareness of this factor has long existed, few anthropologists have explicitly dealt with intermarriage as an additional facet of acculturation that can be measured as an independent variable.[1] A number of models have been developed which indirectly involve this factor. For example, Spindler (1955) identifies different levels of acculturation as "native-oriented, transitionals, lower-status, and upper-status acculturated." In this typology, individuals are classified on the basis of selected sociocultural criteria. Similarly, Thomas (1958) classifies Indians as "conservative, generalized, rural white, and middle class." This model is based upon individual adherence to the differing world views and value orientations of the white and Indian societies.

However, a somewhat different line of inquiry is introduced by Vogt (1957) which suggests that amalgamation (biological miscegenation or intermarriage) would be one fairly good index of acculturation. He notes that intermarriage would probably lead to profoundly different behavior patterns in the acculturation continuum. Roy's (1961) formulation incorporates the index of amalgamation as one of three stages in the assimilation process.[2] The other two are acculturation (acquisition of white culture traits) and social integration (participation in white formal social institutions). These stages need not follow in this sequence and, in fact, may be interchangeable.

While Roy's study of the Spokane Reservation Indians includes amalgamation as an independent variable, it is not mainly concerned with it as a process having latent and manifest consequences. For example, if an Indian girl desires to identify with and be accepted by the dominant culture, then she will deliberately select a white husband. Intermarriage, then, can be a means to acculturation in that it provides new cultural models and reference groups. Thus, acculturation is a manifest consequence. However, the Indian girl may not want to give up her

[1] See Roy (1961) for a discussion of this point.
[2] Roy acknowledges the fact that he uses the term "assimilation" approximately as the term "acculturation" is used by anthropologists and he defines the term "acculturation" as the adoption of white culture traits. However, in my typology and discussion, the term "acculturation" is used as it generally appears in anthropological literature. Furthermore, amalgamation, miscegenation, and intermarriage are used almost synonymously.

own culture, but may select a white husband anyway. In this instance, intermarriage with a particular individual is the desired end in that she is not seeking new cultural models and reference groups. Hence, acculturation (if it takes place at all) would be a latent consequence of intermarriage. This latent consequence of marriage has proved to be an extremely effective, although inadvertent, force in absorbing Indians into the general population, judging by the number of white families who claim Indian ancestors.[3]

Urban Profile

Today in New York State there are approximately 26,000 Indians. Of these, about 10,000 reside in the New York metropolitan area.[4] The only known group to form a substantial enclave (of almost 1,000) are the Mohawks. They cluster together in the same general neighborhood of the Gowanus and Flatbush sections of Brooklyn. However, for most Indians who represent many of the different tribes from many different parts of the country, there are no functioning communities in New York City into which they could fit and where they could secure technical assistance, emotional support, and identification. Their reference groups are, therefore, usually limited to one or two individuals.

The New York City Indians appear to differ somewhat demographically from Indians in other urban areas in three significant ways: the great distance between New York and most heavily populated Indian centers; the largest tribal group in this city, the Mohawks, tend to be skilled, highly paid, unionized employees in "high steel"; and New York may tend to attract the more educated, ambitious, or adventurous individuals. However, New

[3] The Bureau of the Census Estimates reported a thirty percent increase in Indian population in 1970 compared to 1960. This rate of increase is sharper than the available statistics on Indian birth rates, infant and adult mortality rates would indicate (Wax 1971:221-27). One way to account for this excessive rate of increase is that in the past few years Indians have been receiving a better press and are generally being viewed more favorably than in previous decades. Hence, many individuals of varying degrees of Indian blood have come forth, particularly in urban areas, and identified themselves as Indian.

[4] Preliminary Report to the Director of Indian Services for State of New York, *U.S. Census: Count of Persons by Race,* New York State Counties, 1971, Table 1 (Mimeographed).

York City Indians resemble other urban Indians in organizational membership. In general, Indians tend not to be "joiners" (Ablon, 1964).

A problem arises in urban studies of trying to discover who is an Indian, or who is what "kind" of Indian. Those at both extremes of the socio-economic scale may seek, for very different reasons, to avoid being identified as Indians except under special circumstances such as the distribution of a tribal estate (Wax 1971:157). The "visible" Indians in the city tend to be those in the stable working class and those who maintain active participation in Indian affairs on a formal or informal basis — that is, through voluntary associations or friendship networks. On the whole, Indians in New York City are best approached as aggregates of discrete individuals manifesting different life-styles, while at the same time attempting to preserve a particular ethnic identity as they perceive it.

For this study, eight of the seventeen informants were selected from members of various Indian voluntary associations, whose meetings were attended by this investigator during the years of 1969 to 1971. The balance were referred by either Indian or non-Indian acquaintances. All the informants selected were or had been married and all were at least one-half Indian who had been born and lived on reservations until at least early adolescence.

Method

This paper does not contest but rather seeks to expand upon Roy's findings that intermarriage is an independent, primary measure of assimilation. The data presented in this paper were gathered in the course of a more inclusive study conducted in 1971 to investigate persistence and change in culture subsequent to migration to the urban environment of the New York metropolitan area (Wagner 1972). Since this was an exploratory study based upon life histories, the number of cases was limited to seventeen women.[5]

[5] For an excellent discussion on the use of small samples, see Melvin Ember and Carol R. Ember (1971:594, footnote 4).

Using a molecular approach, various aspects of the acculturative process were traced through the use of a variety of data. The broad topics of investigation fell into three major dimensions, the cultural, the social, the personal. The main body of the data was obtained from expressive autobiographic interviews, which furnished materials in depth on value orientation and social roles, with particular attention given to items reflecting actual ties with parental family; reservation; views of the roles of wife, mother, and social participant; and attitudes and life style of the informant's parents and extended family. Data on role performance were obtained by participant-observation in Indian homes, formal and informal gatherings, and voluntary association meetings. A socio-cultural schedule for each of the seventeen women presented supplementary data on specific material values; items in this schedule elicited information relevant to both social and cultural changes occurring in the various groups. Such items included: education, occupation, place and type of residence, income, attitude toward material possessions, visits to Indian reservations, types of friendships (Indian and/or non-Indian), and organizational affiliations. Other items provided information regarding demographic features including "percent Indian blood," age of migration to the city, length of urban residence, type of husband (Indian or non-Indian), knowledge of tribal lore, and Indian language.

Information obtained from all these sources was used to place each informant into one of three categories of acculturation. The distinction of these groups was based upon the extent and kind of cultural integration and content.[6] The categories are: (1) Tradition-oriented (those who adhere to traditional values, including a de-emphasis of material possessions, and seek to preserve or revitalize their culture); (2) Transitional (those who identify with their ancestral group but evidence more of the values of the dominant culture than of their traditional culture); and (3) American middle-class (those whose cultural identification is with the dominant society but who identify themselves as Indian).

[6] The socio-cultural categories are an adaptation of those formulated by Spindler (1955) and Voget (1952).

Findings

On the basis of the expressive interviews and the responses to the prepared schedule a profile of each of the seventeen women was developed. Four of them were identified as tradition-oriented; they presented evidence of strong ties to their families, their particular reservations or tribes; their values were distinctly Indian; their social lives centered almost exclusively around other Indians; and their role-identification as wife, mother, and/or social participant was similar in basic respects to that of their parents, tribe, or to that of, in their view, all Indians.

At the other end of the scale, two of the seventeen women were identified as American middle class. These two, who were very different in their personal lives (one was a successful executive in a large corporation, divorced, and living in a tasteful, expensive Manhattan apartment; the other was a suburban housewife of moderate means), had only recently come forth and identified themselves as Indian. Their material values were representative of the dominant white culture. Their views of the role of wife and mother showed changes from those of their parents and Indian background, and their social relationships were entirely with whites.

Between these two extremes the remaining eleven women showed a wide variation in the characteristics studied.

The data demonstrated that the association existing between most of the socio-cultural items or activities — religious affiliation, knowledge of tribal lore and language, etc. — and the level of acculturation in these women is low. This lack of correlation can be understood when viewed in the historical perspective. What one must keep in mind, when speaking of Indians in cities, is that the flow of white traits had been uneven and was experienced under varying circumstances in the communities from which the individuals had come. Another factor to be considered is that the length and persistence of the acculturative processes impinging upon Indian communities will tend to eliminate certain aspects of their culture.

However, the data revealed a high association between frequency of an individual's contact with her Indian community and

her level of acculturation. Home visiting, more than the other items which have been influenced by the press of external forces on the Indian community, is based upon individual preference. The criterion of contact with the reservation is important, because it is independent of pressures for change and increasing involvement with the dominant culture. As such, it affords insight into the subjective evaluations and attitudes of the women.

Another important indicator of the extent of acculturation was the subject's choice of Indian and/or non-Indian relationships in social groups or on an individual intimate friendship basis. The decisive factor in determining patterns of social interactions appears to be that of identification with a reference group, either an actual one or one aspired to, as a point of reference behavior. The choice of companionship on the formal and informal levels reveals an individual's preferences and aspirations in regard to participation in the dominant society. In this study, the tradition-oriented women tend to associate with and actively seek out other Indians. The tendency, then, is toward ingroup relationships, which seem to give positive reinforcement to their ethnicity. At the other extreme, the most acculturated women have not sought membership in Indian organizations nor do they socialize with other Indians aside from their immediate kin.

The results of the study also indicate that degree of "blood" is not a significant factor in acculturation. Furthermore, a glance at Table 1 of the distribution of types of husbands (Indian or

TABLE 1

Type of Husband in Relation to Degree of Wife's Indian "Blood"

	Wife			
	Fullblood	*¾ or More*	*½*	*Total*
Indian husband	1	5		6
White husband	5	3	3	11
Total	6	8	3	17

white) throughout the groupings reveals that there is no close correspondence between degree of blood and intermarriage.

Intermarriage

Before examining the data on intermarriage among the women in this study, it seems appropriate to discuss briefly the incidence of Indian-white amalgamation. No systematic investigation encompassing all tribes has yet been undertaken, but generalizations based upon studies of specific reservations can be made. From indirect evidence, it appears that amalgamation dates back to the first contacts with whites (Shapiro, 1942). In the eastern states where frequent contacts occurred earlier in history and where Indians lived in small aggregations, intermarriage became more common than elsewhere. The Indian tribes that have preserved the greatest degree of "full-bloodedness" are found in the Southwest and parts of the Northwest (Eggan, 1966). Here opportunities for mixed marriages have been relatively restricted; these communities are larger and relatively more self-contained.

There are various social factors which serve to generate and support the incidence of intermarriage. One element is the presence of a white model in the family — a parent or grandparent — who is important in cultural transmission (Bruner, 1956). Perhaps, then, an Indian girl who knows she is part white would be favorably disposed toward white ways and a white husband.

Intermarriage, however, is not in itself a sufficient condition for replication of this pattern of behavior in the issue of such a marriage. It does, on one hand, create the possibility that cultural elements of the dominant society will be transmitted, but on the other, the actuality of transmission depends upon the overt effort of the white parent. Burner (1956:617) observes that some of the white men who married Indian women may well have preferred to assimilate to Indian ways and accordingly made no attempt to socialize their children to white ways.

Both of these behavior patterns were reported by women in this study in regard to a white grandparent or parent, though, as Table 2 illustrates, in all three cases where the father was white, the children married whites. Several informants described their

TABLE 2

Relationship of Parental Marital Status to Informants' Marital Status

Parent Status	No.	Father's Ethnic Origin*	No.	Informant's Status	No.	Husband's Ethnic Origin	No.
Married	12	Indian	9	Married	5	Indian	3
						White	2
				Divorced	4	Indian	2
						White	2
		White	3	Married	1	White	1
				Remarried	1	White	1
				Divorced	1	White	1
Divorced	5	Indian	5	Married	5	Indian	1
						White	4

* All mothers were Indians.

non-Indian husband's attitudes as "like an Indian" or said, "he in very Indian."[7] Thus these women have expressed the fact that their husbands accept (to some degree at least) and some even participate in Indian ways, rather than impose their dominant culture upon the family unit.

Of the seventeen informants in this study, six had been married to Indians and eleven to white men. As shown in Table 3, all four members of the tradition-oriented group had Indian husbands. In the transitional group, there are two cases of inter-tribal marriages, and nine mixed marriages. In the American middle-class category, both members experienced mixed marriages.

The questions, "Did your parents express any particular preference in regard to your going out with Indian or non-Indian

[7] When several informants have used the expression "very Indian" or "like an Indian" in referring to a non-Indian, they explained that this person was characterized by all or some of the following traits: restrained in emotional bearing, nonmanipulation of others, concern for others in their group, generosity, and straitghforwardness in personal dealings.

TABLE 3

Types of Husband in Relation to Social Category

| | Wife | | | |
	Tradition-Oriented	*Transitional*	*American Middle-Class*	*Total*
Indian husband	4	2		6
White husband		9	2	11
Total	4	11	2	17

boys?" and "Do you have any special feeling as to whom your children date?" elicited quite informative responses. Answers not only disclosed parental biases and those of the women, but also the types of accommodation to western ways and values of both generations.

One tradition-oriented informant revealed her anti-white bias when she stated that, "Somehow I wasn't attracted to anybody but an Indian when I went out with boys." But in speaking about her chilren's dating with non-Indians she said she felt "...awful. The moment they did this my heart was broken. But I didn't interfere — you should never choose for other people." Then, in a more cheerful mood, she related that her youngest son was married to "a sweet young Indian girl."

Another tradition-oriented woman admitted to having finally overcome her objections to her white son-in-law, whom her daughter had met at an Indian affair. She related that, "He used to follow the Indians around. He has always been interested. He's up to date on everything with the Indians and their art work."

The comments of a young woman in the transitional category, who is married to a white man, summarize the various factors that may influence mate selection:

> It probably depends on what she is going to do with her life. If she is going to stay at home, she will be more comfortable with Indians.

It's where you are and what you are involved with and as to what you do that determine who you date. When I was in high school the only boys that I dated were Indians, and they were the only ones I felt comfortable with. Then, when I went to nursing school in Wisconsin there weren't any Indian boys to date, so I dated non-Indians. If I had stayed home [Oklahoma] or gone to California, I would have married an Indian, because I would have dated Indians.

A strong feeling that there should be more Indian endogamy was expressed by four women in the transitional category who had married white men. Three of these women were "fullbloods," two of whose marriages had ended in divorce. The third woman, who is happily married, described her husband as being "like an Indian" and never thinks of him as otherwise. Her attitude toward dating and marriage have changed now that she has children: "As a matter of fact I would encourage my children to marry other Indians to try to build up our Indian blood and hold on to our heritage. There aren't many fullbloods left."

Nonetheless, the presence of a white model in the home has had some influence upon the family. Two of her sons had heard this part of the discussion and the younger boy commented, "I'll marry who I want." The older son stated that he had no special preference, but that, "...after all, mom, look who you married!"

The attitudes toward dating expressed by one fullblooded Indian married to a white man and her standard of living would have classified her as American middle-class. However, the factors of frequency of reservation visits, participation in Indian activities, and deliberate transmission of her tribal heritage to her child tend to keep her in the transitional group:

I never found an Indian boy who was up to what I wanted. It didn't mean that I didn't have crushes on them; I did. They were the really true Indian boys who... didn't want to have any part in the white man's way of life.

I didn't want to be that way. I wanted to be both ways...

The father of a fullblooded Indian in the American middle-class category had placed two restrictions upon her in regard to dating — no Indians and no Mexicans. Her father insisted that she date only white boys in order to "get somewhere in this world." In addition, he had removed the family from the reservation.

The distribution of the places where the women first met their husbands also shows a wide variation. Ten of the seventeen informants met their husbands while living in an urban milieu. Five of these women stated that they had met their husbands, who were on military duty in the United States, at social functions. An intertribal marriage resulted from one such meeting at a U.S.O. dance. One woman met her husband at an all-Indian school. Other intertribal marriages resulted from meetings through either relatives or other Indian friends. Three women married fellow students (non-Indian) at the colleges they were attending.

Clearly, greater involvement with the larger society in the spheres of education and economics, which in turn affects relocation from Indian communities, presents a variety of opportunities for Indian-white contact. For example, in the case of several women from tradition-oriented homes with minimal socialization to white values, there was an expressed predisposition to marry into white society. The idea was conceived, according to these informants, while attending a mixed Indian-white school or after moving to an urban area free of discrimination against Indians.

Thus, various factors, operating singly or in combination, influence the selection of a husband: parents' biases and pressures may precondition the individual, presence of a white model in the family, temporal and spatial location, and chance encounters. For Indians today, two additional factors with seemingly contrasting influences are assuming increasing importance. Mass media depict visually and audibly what is desirable and available in the dominant culture. As a countervailing force, Pan-Indianism provides a social and cultural framework within which acculturating Indian groups can maintain their sense of identity and integrity while selectively accepting or rejecting white cultural elements and social relationships.

For the urban Indian, relationships with whites may be determined by such factors as personal preference to partake of the alternatives available in the larger society, and constraints molded by his or her cultural background. Since the choice ultimately rests with the individual, the fact of marriage to an Indian or non-Indian is a significant determinant of the degree of acculturation.

CONCLUSIONS

In the interplay of contrasting cultural values and social roles certain white American "cultural maximizers" and Indian "cultural modifiers" seem to be operating as sometimes oppositional, sometimes complementary, and sometimes neutral social forces.[8] Several maximizing forces have been identified which appear to have a major bearing upon the achievement of particular life styles, while specific modifying forces have been found to operate as countervailing influences. One potent maximizing agent was the presence of a white father or grandfather who funnelled core values of the dominant society into the home. Another maximizing agent was an Indian parent who deliberately chose to abandon his cultural heritage and socialized his children to "think white." Other maximizing agents were white school teachers and school-mates, and in many cases, white clergy. Finally, a white husband probably represented the most powerful maximizing agent, since a marital relationship involves intense and direct dyadic social experiences.

The most obvious and significant Indian cultural modifiers were extended family relations. Although urban and reservation families are separated spatially, they may be linked together in social, psychological, and economic cooperation. This network of relationships then serves as an agent of further socialization. Thus, contact with reservation kin may operate as a resistant or modifying force in an individual's adaptation in an urban milieu.

As an urban resident, the Indian woman is relatively independent and mobile, having much leeway in her personal choices and in individual association. The knowledge of an alternative seems to crystalize conflicts in certain areas: the choice of a spouse and the related question of the autonomy of the will of the married couple in the continuance of cultural traditions and also of identity. Several informants, who are married to white

[8] According to Henry (1968-31), the function of "cultural maximizers" is to maintain or push further the culture's greatness or integration. "Cultural modifiers" are those social structures, value orientations, or personal agents which resist change. In this connection, see Waddell's (n.d.) discussion of the Papago Indians.

men, actively strive to retain some cultural ties through contact with reservation kin, participation in pow-wows, and teaching their children tribal language and lore. White spouses of these women reportedly play wholeheartedly their role of "quasi-Indian."

Although far short of establishing the range of variation for idiosyncratic adaptations, there are some central tendencies about the relationship of urban living to Indian adaptation that can be established from the data. In this study, those women who fell into the tradition-oriented group had all married Indians. Those women who had married white men fell into the transitional or American middle-class categories, depending upon factors such as emphasis upon conspicuous consumption and amount of inter-action with their Indian community. Thus, from these findings, we may tentatively conclude that intermarriage, while related to the other items — material possessions, value orientations, and personal identification as an Indian — can be considered as an independent measure of acculturation.

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