

# A PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION OF CASES OF REINCARNATION AMONG THE BEAVER AND GITKSAN INDIANS<sup>1</sup>

Antonia Mills  
*University of Virginia*

*Abstract:* The author describes belief in and cases of reincarnation among two different groups of Indians in northern British Columbia, Canada, the Beaver and the Gitksan, and gives illustrative examples in which a child is identified as a particular person returned. The differences in belief, e.g. belief in cross-sex reincarnation among the Beaver, and multiple reincarnation of one person among the Gitksan, are examples of cultural conditioning, although the author posits that belief in reincarnation is endemic in shamanic societies and concludes that while the cases do not demonstrate that reincarnation actually takes place, case oriented studies gather valuable data which needs to be assessed.

*Résumé:* Cet article discute du phénomène de réincarnation vu par deux groupes autochtones, les Castors et les Gitksans, du nord de la Colombie britannique, Canada. Les Castors croient qu'on peut changer de sexe entre réincarnations, alors que les Gitksans pensent qu'on peut se réincarner plusieurs fois simultanément, mais en gardant le même sexe. Bien que les différences de croyance soient bien entendues des exemples de conditionnement socio-culturel, l'auteur suggère que la réincarnation est endémique chez les cultures chamaniques. Il conclut que même si des cas particuliers dans ces deux cultures ne démontrent pas la véracité du phénomène de réincarnation, ces cas le suggèrent, et demandent un examen approfondi.

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During the summer of 1984 I did research on cases of reincarnation among the Beaver and Gitksan Indians of British Columbia, Canada, following the methods Dr. Ian Stevenson of the University of Virginia has developed (Stevenson 1974, 1975b).<sup>2</sup> My extensive field work with the Beaver Indians had shown that belief in human and animal reincarnation is an integral part of their world view (Mills 1986), and led me to posit a belief in reincarnation as one of the basic philosophical tenets of a widespread American Indian philosophy (Mills 1982, 1984).

When I tested my hypothesis about reincarnation by conducting a search of the literature available for a sample of ten North American Indian tribes from ten different culture areas during my Ph.D. research (1982), I found evidence of belief in human reincarnation among only half of these tribes, although all ten were reported to believe in reincarnation of animals. Since then I have found reference to belief in reincarnation in another of the societies included in my sample.<sup>3</sup>

Although belief in reincarnation received the least confirmation of the five beliefs tested, I did not consider the issue closed. It appeared that the relative lack of confirmation might well be due to a lack of thorough questioning on the part of the original investigators. Often, when there is mention of human reincarnation in the ethnographers' reports I scrutinized, it is not found among the material on religion, but sequestered away under "Birth Customs" relating to the native explanation of birthmarks. Stevenson, who has been studying cases suggestive of reincarnation in a number of cultures for over twenty years (1966, 1974, 1975a & b, 1977, 1980, 1983, 1985, 1986) has found that the information contained in the Human Relations Area Files (1972) on the subject of reincarnation is meagre (Stevenson 1984).

Once introduced to Stevenson's case-oriented study of reincarnation, I decided to employ it among the Beaver and Gitksan Indians to learn more about their belief in, and reported cases of, reincarnation. I spent July 1984 with the Beaver Indians with my time divided between two projects, and six days with the Gitksan, at the beginning of August 1984.

This paper summarizes the special characteristics of the twenty-three Beaver Indian cases and the thirty-five Gitksan cases in which a living individual is reputed to have been a particular person in his or her past life. Examples are given of some of the most noteworthy cases. The variation between the Beaver Indian belief in cross-sex reincarnation and the Gitksan belief in multiple simultaneous reincarnation of the same person is briefly discussed and compared to the range of related belief among the Australian aborigines. I posit that belief in reincarnation characterizes or characterized shamanic cultures in general and was maintained in many agricultural societies. The paper concludes with a brief discussion of the role of such case-oriented research within the discipline of anthropology.

### **Beaver Indian Belief in and Cases of Reincarnation**

The Beaver Indians are Northern Athapaskans who live in the Peace River area of northeastern British Columbia, Canada, where they hunted and gathered the local flora and fauna, pursuits they continue to follow in the context of a less nomadic, reserve-centered setting. They have retained a bilateral kinship system without lineages or clans. Beaver Indian material and spiritual culture has been described elsewhere (Brody 1982; Mills 1982, 1984, 1985,

1986; Ridington 1977; Ridington and Ridington 1970).

During the four weeks I spent with the Beaver Indians in 1984 they reported twenty-three cases or partial cases of reincarnation. A "partial case" will be defined here as a case where the "previous personality," to use Stevenson's term, is unknown. Two partial cases are described in the notes,<sup>4</sup> while Table 1 summarizes some of the characteristics of the Beaver cases of reincarnation.

Among the Beaver, all people are said to be the reincarnation of souls who have been on earth before. The mongoloid spot on the base of the spine of their babies was said by three of my informants to be caused by the entity being pushed out of heaven when it was time for it to be born back on earth. All but one Beaver child in my sample was born with a mongoloid spot.<sup>5</sup>

The Beaver say that in most cases no one knows who a person was in its previous life. This amnesia occurs when the soul of a deceased person has succeeded in reaching *yage*, which loosely translates as "heaven." There the discarnate person or soul is washed and chooses a new light body, although it remains recognizable by relatives who also arrive. While souls who reach *yage* are eventually reborn as newborn babies, their memories of their past life, of specific people and places, and of their likes and dislikes are rendered largely inaccessible by the transformation of being in heaven. However, whether one remembers a past life or not, the Beaver Indians believe everyone is reborn.

About five percent of the current Beaver population fits into the category of "special child." As one informant put it, "the ones that get born again [and are 'special children'] are those who don't really make it to heaven, who never get past that place where you have to grab hold of the cross." When such a soul is born as a "special child," it brings with it some of the knowledge, preferences and aversions, and personality it had manifested in its past life.

The Beaver Indians have two opposing attitudes with respect to reincarnation. On the one hand, to be reborn quickly makes one a "special child." Such children are indeed cherished, and actions reminiscent of the previous personality are encouraged, as described below. On the other hand, the Prophet Movement, which has had a major impact on the Beaver Indians for the last 160-180 years (Mills 1982; Ridington 1977), places a positive value on living one's life so that one can follow the trail to *yage* after death.

Those who die violently and/or when drunk are described as unable to find the path to *yage* or heaven, and are therefore obliged to be ghosts, hovering in a confused state near where they lived before death until they are eventually reborn.<sup>6</sup> However, as Table 1 (Column F) shows, fifty-three percent of the previous personalities in recognized cases of reincarnation did not die from violence. Column G of Table 1 shows that there is a wide range in the

age at death of the previous personality, with the median age being thirty years (see Stevenson 1986 for comparison with other cultures). The definition of violence and cause of death is not the same in Beaver and western society.<sup>7</sup> There is no negative stigma, but rather considerable prestige associated with being a "special child" and the reincarnation of someone who has been constrained to lead the lonely existence of a ghost.

There are a number of ways by which a child comes to be known as a "special child," that is, the reincarnation of someone who is deceased. Children are classed as special children either because (1) someone specifies to whom they want to be reborn; (2) someone has what Stevenson calls an "announcing dream,"<sup>8</sup> before the baby is born which indicates who it was in its previous life, or has visits from the ghost of the deceased; (3) a child is particularly precocious; (4) a child exhibits behaviour or memories appropriate to the previous personality; (5) a child has a birthmark or marks which may relate to wounds or scars on the previous personality; or (6) some combination or all of the above.

As there are too many cases to describe here, this section will focus on Beaver cases with birthmarks and cases of cross-sex reincarnation, before summarizing two of the most noteworthy Beaver cases. In the notes, two cases are described where the previous personality stated to whom he would return before his death.<sup>9</sup> Also described are instances of announcing dreams, visions and visits from the ghost of the dead.<sup>10</sup>

### **Birthmarks**

Besides dreams and visions, birthmarks are a common indication that someone has been reborn. In fourteen of the fifteen cases where I gathered complete information on birthmarks, "special children" had birthmarks. In some instances the birthmark serves to identify the previous personality of a newborn child in the absence of dreams and other indications. Birthmarks were present in two of the most interesting Beaver cases described below. Notes 4, 10, and 13 give other examples of birthmarks.

In most of the Beaver cases, however, the relation of birthmarks on the children to scars and wounds on the previous personality is obscure. I hope to obtain the medical records and autopsies of a number of the previous personalities to see if birthmarks on their alleged reincarnations correspond to anything recorded about the previous personality. In many instances the individuals and their parents were not sure if the personality had scars or lesions that corresponded to the birthmarks. Some birthmarks and congenital defects were explained as being the result of the revenge of offended animals such as an eagle (one case) or rabbits (two cases).

### Cross-Sex Reincarnation

In all three cases of cross-sex reincarnation in this study, the previous personality was male and the subject was female (Cases Number 4, 6, and 11). In two of the three cases where a child was reputed to be reborn to the same parents, the child was male in the previous life and returned as a female. An informant stated that the choice of sex was the option of the returning ghost (see Note 10, *Vision*, for parents' preference).

Case Number 15, marked by a plus and minus in Column K, Table 1, was born with both male and female genitalia, and the hospital removed the male genitals. I was not able to learn whether the Beaver explain this ambiguity by reference to indecision on the part of the previous female personality as to its future sex.

The only other Beaver case of cross-sex reincarnation was an aged man, who was 84 at the time of his death. He was the protagonist in Hugh Brody's *Maps and Dreams* (1982) where he is given the pseudonym Joseph Patsah. He is said to be reborn as the daughter of the previous personality's daughter. This identification is confirmed by the baby's great affection for Joseph Patsah's wife and youngest daughter. Indeed the baby is being raised by Joseph Patsah's wife who has not remarried. They saw nothing incongruous in dressing "him" in a frilly dress and stretch tights.

### Chuck and Amy: Two Beaver Indian Cases of Reincarnation

Rarely, a "special child" has memories from or speaks from the point of view of the previous personality. Chuck and Amy are cases of this type. Pseudonyms have been used here and throughout the article to mask the identity of the people in question.

*Chuck.* Baby boy Chuck (Case Number 12) was born with a large birthmark just below the hairline on his forehead. As no one had dreamed about the baby's identity before his birth, this birthmark gave people the first basis for equating him with a man who had apparently shot himself in the head. Since the previous personality was inebriated and away from the reserve at the time this happened, his relatives are not certain whether or not he intended to shoot himself.

Chuck reconfirmed the association established by his birthmark by calling the daughter of the previous personality by her Beaver Indian name, "Coca." Indeed, "Coca" was his first word, spoken when he was eleven months old. At the age of three, he had also formed a fast friendship with the previous personality's son, and called this eleven year old "Ba," or "Sonny."

Chuck also exhibits a strong will and precocity in the skills of the previous personality. The previous personality was noted for his skill as a horse wrangler, and was one of the favorite employees of a local big game outfitter.

Table 1  
Beaver Indian Cases of Reincarnation

Case #	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
1	+	+	+	?	+	-	50y	2y	?	+	-
2	+	-	?	?	-	-	2-3y	2y	n	+	-
3	+	+	+	?	?	+	16y	9m	-	-	-
4	+	-	-	-	-	-	8m	1y	n	+	+
5	+	+	-	+	+	+	30y	3y	-	-	-
6	+	-	?	?	-	-	8m	1y	n	?	+
7	+?	+	-	+	+?	+?	37y	5y	?	?	-
8	+	+?	-	+	n	-	70y	7m	+	-	-
9	?	?	?	?	n	-	2m	n	n	n	n
10	-	?	+	+	n	n	?	n	n	n	n
11	+	-	-	+	n	-	84y	23m	?	?	+
12	+	+	-	+	+	+	35y	9m	?	?	-
13	+	?	-	+	?	+	29y	17m	+	++	-
14	-	?	?	+	n	n	n	n	n	n	n
15	+	?	+	+	+	-	80y	5y	?	?	++
16	+	+	+	+	++	+	30y	11m	-	-	-
17	+	-	-	+	n	+	38/50y	5y	-	-	-
18	+	+	+	+	?	-	40y?	9m?	-	-	-
19	-	?	-	+							
20	+	+	+	+	n	+	30y	3m	-	-	-
21	+?	n	+	?	n						
22	-	+	-	?							
23	-	?	+	?							
Total:	17	8	8	13	6	8	*	**	2	4	3

Column A:	Previous Personality known	Key: +	means present
Column B:	Precocity	-	means absent
Column C:	Announcing Dream	n	means not applicable
Column D:	Birthmark		
Column E:	Action or Memory Reminiscent of Previous Personality		
Column F:	Violent Cause of Death		
Column G:	Previous Personality's Age at Time of Death		
Column H:	Interval Between death of Previous Personality & Birth of Subject		
Column I:	Previous Personality States Preference for Parents in Next Life		
Column J:	Parents Chose Previous Personality		
Column K:	Cross-Sex Reincarnation		

\*Age at death: three babies; one person in their teens; nine aged 29-50; and two aged 70 or over. Median = 30 years.

\*\*Interval between death of Previous Personality and birth of Subject: eight cases of less than a year; five cases of two to three years; three cases of three or more years. Median = 1 year.

At the age of three, Chuck was continually mounting his father's horse and riding as far as he could go before he was discovered and brought back home. The fame of his exploits, which included walking alone for miles, at the age of three, to round up the horses, spread to other reserves.

In observing Chuck, I was struck by the precocity of his behaviour, when I saw him wait until his father's horse was out of sight behind his grandparent's house so that he could mount it without being apprehended. His parents also saw him leading the horse towards his grandparents' stoop so that he could reach the stirrup. They commented on this achievement with proud amusement, and did not interfere. Out of sight of his parents and grandparents, he succeeded in mounting the horse. A neighbour saw him on the horse and alerted his mother, who took him off. He then awaited his chance to mount the horse again when it was out of sight. When he was taken off his father's horse for the second time during the course of one meal, he cried, was consoled, and then went off by himself to throw horse shoes at an adult-sized horse shoe toss.<sup>11</sup>

A week later, when I passed by Chuck's reserve a second time, there he was, mounting his father's horse again. Whereas other Beaver children are adept at horsemanship, Chuck's interest and determination were exceptional. At the same time, it was obvious that his parents were proud of his exploits and encouraged them. Never before had I seen a father leave his horse saddled, bridled, and so readily available for a youngster to ride. It will be interesting to see how this child progresses.

*Amy.* Another of the most interesting Beaver cases involves a young woman we will call Amy who has memories from a previous life (Case Number 5). At birth, the sizeable strawberry red birthmark on her left breast convinced her parents and the community that she was a "special child."

However, no one had any idea who she had been until at the age of four she said to her mother, as they rode a bus, "I sure hate Frank Alta. I never want to see his face again." These were strong words from a mild-mannered, if precocious four year old, especially since she had never seen Frank Alta, who had moved to another reserve following the death of his wife three years before Amy was born. On another occasion, Amy said, "I'd sure like some fish from Fish Lake. It has been a long time since I had any." Amy had not had any fish from Fish Lake during her lifetime.

These two statements suggested to Amy's parents that she had been Marie Alta, Frank's late wife. Marie and Frank had frequently camped at Fish Lake, where they caught and dried fish. Marie had died under ambiguous circumstances. One afternoon she and her husband returned from town, bringing with them a certain amount of liquor. That night, Marie burned to death when their house was destroyed by fire. Frank was found at his niece's house completely incapacitated from alcohol. People at the reserve suspected foul play on the part of Frank, but said nothing to the police.<sup>12</sup>

After little four-year-old Amy made these startling statements, she was taken by her parents to the late prophet. People frequently told me that not everyone dreams about who is coming back, and that the prophet is the one

whose dreams are to be listened to. The prophet confirmed that Amy La Pousse was Marie Alta, who had come back.

Amy's case is widely known among the Beaver. I first heard about it from her half-sister who lives at another reserve. When I interviewed Amy, aged twenty in 1984 and the mother of two "special children," she had forgotten many of the details of what she had said in her childhood. It is often difficult or impossible to interview people in seclusion. Amy's aunt, mentioned in Note 12, was present at our interview and filled in the gaps in Amy's memory: "Remember, you said. . . ." Amy had forgotten that Marie Alta's husband was Frank, but continued to feel a strong aversion to him. At the time of this study, Frank had recently visited Amy's reserve, where he had lived when married to Marie. Amy felt such a strong aversion to him that she avoided going to the house where he was staying during the duration of his visit, despite the fact that this was a home she visited daily. At the time of Frank's visit, Amy did not know why she felt such antipathy towards him.

Amy reported that she continues to have dreams about an old lady which she feels are related to being Marie Alta. Since the Beaver are characteristically reticent about describing "medicine experiences," I did not manage to gather more information about her dreams. Amy concurred with the opinion of her aunt, mentioned above, that her twin son and daughter, aged twenty-six months during the study, were the two babies Marie Alta had miscarried during her marriage to Frank Alta. There are various other interpretations of the previous identities of these twins, both of whom have birthmarks.<sup>13</sup>

### **Gitksan Belief in and Cases of Reincarnation**

The Gitksan, the Nishga of the Nass River, and the Tsimshian Indians who live along the Pacific coast and near the mouth of the Skeena River in British Columbia, Canada, comprise the Northwest Coast Tsimshian Indians. The matrilineal Gitksan live along the upper Skeena River where the abundance of salmon allowed settlement in villages similar to other Northwest Coast Indians. Their belief in reincarnation has been noted before (see Adams 1973:26-31).

One Gitksan elder said:

Our grandfathers believed in reincarnation. The old people knew the language of the reincarnated. When a new baby was born, those who knew that language would listen to the babies talk. They would offer them some of their property: ax, bow, arrow or a club. The baby would be happy to have some of his property again. They knew the language of the reincarnated. But since that time we have all become Christians. We have lost all that.



**Table 2**  
**Summary of Chronology of Features in Two Beaver Indian Cases of Reincarnation**  
**(Chuck and Amy)**

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**The Case of Chuck**

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1. **FEATURE:** Born with birthmark on his forehead on same location as self-inflicted gun shot wound on his previous personality.  
**INFORMANTS:** Chuck's mother; the previous personality's mother; and the previous personality's wife.  
**COMMENTS:** Autopsy of previous personality not yet checked.
2. **RECOGNITION:** Recognized previous personality's youngest daughter, called her by her familiar name, "Coca," when eleven months old.  
**INFORMANTS:** Chuck's father; Chuck's mother; and his father's sister.  
**COMMENTS:** This was Chuck's first word, said in recognition of Coca, and before he spoke the names of his siblings. Coca lives three miles away and hence was/is a less frequent associate than his siblings.
3. **RECOGNITION:** Recognized his previous personality's son whom he calls by Beaver term for "son."  
**INFORMANTS:** Father's sister; mother; previous personality's wife.  
**COMMENTS:** Chuck seeks out previous personality's son as companion, although the latter is eight years his senior.
4. **PRECOCIOUS BEHAVIOUR:** Chuck walked miles by himself to round up horses.  
**INFORMANTS:** Mother; father; father's sister; numerous other witnesses in his community.  
**COMMENTS:** Previous personality was a noted horse wrangler who rounded up horses for his own hunting and worked for a big game outfitter.
5. **PRECOCIOUS BEHAVIOUR:** Mounts and rides horse as often as he can.  
**INFORMANTS:** Mother, father, numerous other witnesses, personal observation.  
**COMMENTS:** His persistence and dedication were noteworthy. One distantly related informant said, "You know how the father doesn't hardly ever talk, and the mother is such a mouse, and look at Chuck, what a hellion he is."

**The Case of Amy**

1. **FEATURE:** Born with a sizable red birthmark on her left breast.  
**INFORMANTS:** Sister, personal observation.  
**COMMENTS:** Relation to previous personality obscure: she had TB and some suspect she was stabbed before she died in a fire.
2. **STATEMENT:** Amy said, "I sure hate Frank Alta. I never want to see his face again," when four years old.  
**INFORMANTS:** Amy's half-sister; her father's sister.  
**COMMENTS:** Amy had not met Frank Alta who moved to another reserve before her birth. The antagonism is attributed to the previous personality's death in ambiguous circumstances.
3. **STATEMENT:** Amy said, "I would sure like to eat fish from Fish Lake. It is a long time since I had any."  
**INFORMANTS:** Amy's half-sister; her father's sister.  
**COMMENTS:** Previous personality and her husband, Frank Alta, frequently

fished at Fish Lake. Amy had not been there or eaten fish from there since her birth.

4. **PRECOCIOUS BEHAVIOUR:** Amy was precocious in assuming housewifely tasks of cooking and washing dishes.

INFORMANTS: Amy; personal observation in 1971.

COMMENTS: Amy wanted to perform these tasks when so young her mother was afraid she would burn herself on the stove, etc. and tried, unsuccessfully, to prevent her.

5. **AVERSION:** Amy continues to avoid Frank Alta.

INFORMANTS: Amy.

COMMENTS: Amy has forgotten her earlier statements, and had forgotten that Frank Alta was the previous personality's wife, but continues to feel an aversion to Frank Alta and, at twenty years of age, still sees an old lady in her dreams which she thinks is related to the previous personality.

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Nevertheless, we were able to gather partial information on thirty-five cases of reincarnation among the Gitksan in the course of six days. Table 3 lists the particulars of the thirty-five Gitksan cases.

My impression during my brief stay was that I had only begun to learn about all the known Gitksan cases. Many more cases were alluded to, which I did not have time to investigate, whereas my more extended research among the Beaver had, I felt, touched on a large proportion of the cases known there. If true this suggests that a far greater percentage of the Gitksan population know who they were in their previous reincarnation than is the case among the Beaver.

I was fortunate to interview Jean Slade, an elderly lady of eighty-seven, since deceased, who had been cited as the dreamer who had identified the previous personality in several cases. She confirmed those cases, but said that her memory of them was vague, and then proceeded to identify the previous personality of one after another of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren as they came into the room. When such a person dies, a huge store of information about people who have died and who are potential candidates for reincarnation dies with them. In fact, I suspected that the paucity of cases cited at one of the Beaver reserves might be due to the absence of any old women remaining there. However, I was told that Jean Slade was not the only person "who knows the language of the reincarnated," and that such complete knowledge is widespread throughout the culture. "Even the dogs and cats have names," and are seen as returning life after life to the same family (Don Ryan 1984).

Although much has undoubtedly been lost or changed by becoming Christian, as the Gitksan elder quoted above said, Christianity has not supplanted the Gitksan belief in reincarnation. One informant said, "I heard one

Table 3  
Gitksan Cases of Reincarnation

Case #	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
1.	+	?	?	?	+	+	?				-	famo	-
2.	+	n	+	+	n	n	?				-	momomobr	+
3.	+				+	+	?				-		
4.	+				+		?				-	momofasidada	+
5.	+						?				-		
6.	+										-		
7.	+				+	+					-		
8.	+		+					long			-		+
9.	+										-		
10.	+							10y			-	momosi	+
11.	+				+						-	mosifawi	+
12.											-		
13.	+										-		
14.	+		+	+							-		+
15.	+					+	25				-		
16.	+	+-	+			+	25	11m			-	momosi	+
17.	+					+	25	13m			-		-
18.	+		+			-	78	5m			-		+
19.	+	+	+	+	+	-	78	3m	+		-	momomo	+
20.	+		+			-	78			+	-		+
21.	+			+				4y			-	mosi	+
22.	+										-		
23.	+										-		
24.	+										-		
25.	+		+		+-						-		
26.	+		+								-	momomobr	+
27.	+										-		
28.	+		+								-		-
29.				+							-		
30.											-		
31.			+								-		
32.				+							-	momo	+
33.	+		-	+	-	-					-		
34.			+						+		-		
35.	+		+	+	+						-	momomosi	+
Total:	29	2	13	8	8	1/2			2	1	0		14/17

Key: + means present; - means absent; n means not applicable  
Column A: Previous Personality known  
Column B: Precocity  
Column C: Announcing Dream  
Column D: Birthmark  
Column E: Action or Memory Appropriate to Previous Personality  
Column F: Violent Cause of Death  
Column G: Previous Personality's Age at Death  
Column H: Interval Between Death of Previous Personality and Subject's Birth  
Column I: Previous Personality Stated Preference for Parents  
Column J: Parents Chose Previous Personality  
Column K: Cross-Sex Reincarnation

Column L: Relation of Subject to Previous Personality

Column M: Subject a Member of the House of the Previous Personality

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evangelist say that if you're really good, God will send you back to this world." No Gitksan ever suggested the Beaver alternative of staying in heaven as preferable to the alternative of being reborn (see Note 19).

The Gitksan not only value being reborn, but also value being reborn simultaneously in several people. One informant said, "Whoever is a good spirit will come back five times," while others mentioned four times. Another informant said, "I heard my grandfather came back in many places. I was pleased to hear that, because he had suffered quite a bit before he passed away." Jean, the old lady mentioned above, said, "A good person comes back seven times." Laughing, she added, "I'm going to come back ten times."

In one instance, different informants suggested different "come backs" of the same late individual, and were apparently unaware of the other person's concept of who was equated with whom. This situation parallels some of the Beaver Indian cases.<sup>14</sup>

However, in the majority of cases of multiple reincarnations, both the previous personality's relatives and the subjects themselves were aware of the other multiple "come backs." In some cases, informants expressed a sense of rivalry over this claim, and due to their own or the previous personality's alleged antipathy to the parents, doubted that the previous personality would have chosen to come back where he or she was supposed to have done so. "You will hear all sorts of counter claims when you talk to—," people sometimes said. Nevertheless, these same individuals usually acknowledged that the previous personality was reincarnated in all of the specified individuals.

In all Gitksan cases of reincarnation in this study, both the previous personality and the subject are of the same sex. Although Marie-Françoise Guédon cited a case where one man and his late grandmother were said to be reincarnations of the same individual (Guédon 1984), I was not able to interview the man in question. When I asked one Gitksan lady about this case, she said that she had never heard of anyone returning in the opposite sex.

Whereas there were virtually no cases of cross-sex reincarnation among the Gitksan in this study, reincarnation in the same house or clan was cited as desirable. In all but three of the thirty-five Gitksan cases, the subject is in the same house and clan as the alleged previous personality. Since the Gitksan are matrilineal, it is considered appropriate for individuals to come back in the same matrilineage, where they can potentially inherit the names held by the people they were presumed to reincarnate. One informant said, "Have to

be same family. Take the Indian names.’’ As a person’s name or names are passed on to adults immediately upon the person’s death, the succession of names related to reincarnation remains unclear. This is not something about which information was gathered in 1984, and is a subject for future research.

As is the case with the Beaver, the Gitksan consider dreams, visits from the disembodied or ghostly previous personality, birthmarks, and/or memory or behaviour appropriate to the previous personality as the means of knowing who has been reincarnated as whom. I will summarize one dream and birthmark case before turning to two lengthy instances of multiple reincarnation of the same person.

### **A Dream and Birth Mark Case (Case Number 2)**

Jean Slade, the grandmother of a young woman who was taking the Native Indian Teacher’s Education Program of the University of British Columbia (NITEP) in Prince Rupert, British Columbia, dreamed of an elderly man named Clarence Mack who had recently died. This man appeared in Jean Slade’s dream and said, ‘‘I don’t want to live in Prince Rupert.’’ From this, Jean knew that her granddaughter in Prince Rupert was carrying the child who was to be ‘‘reincarnated from’’ Clarence Mack.

When the baby boy was born in Prince Rupert in 1983, he had a birthmark in the form of an indentation at an angle on his left temple. I was told by the mother and her grandmother that Clarence Mack had a larger indentation in his forehead in the same place. The grandmother, Jean Slade, thought the mark was from an injury Clarence Mack had sustained in his youth, from falling on a fence inside a smokehouse. However, when I interviewed Clarence Mack’s widow, she said that Clarence had been born with this striking birthmark, which looked like a scar covering a serious indentation in the skull. She said Clarence had this birthmark because he was the reincarnation of a man who had died when he slipped and gashed his head on rocks while fishing in the river. Anyone who has seen the Gitksan and Carrier fishing in the turbulent narrows of the local rivers will understand how such an accident can happen.

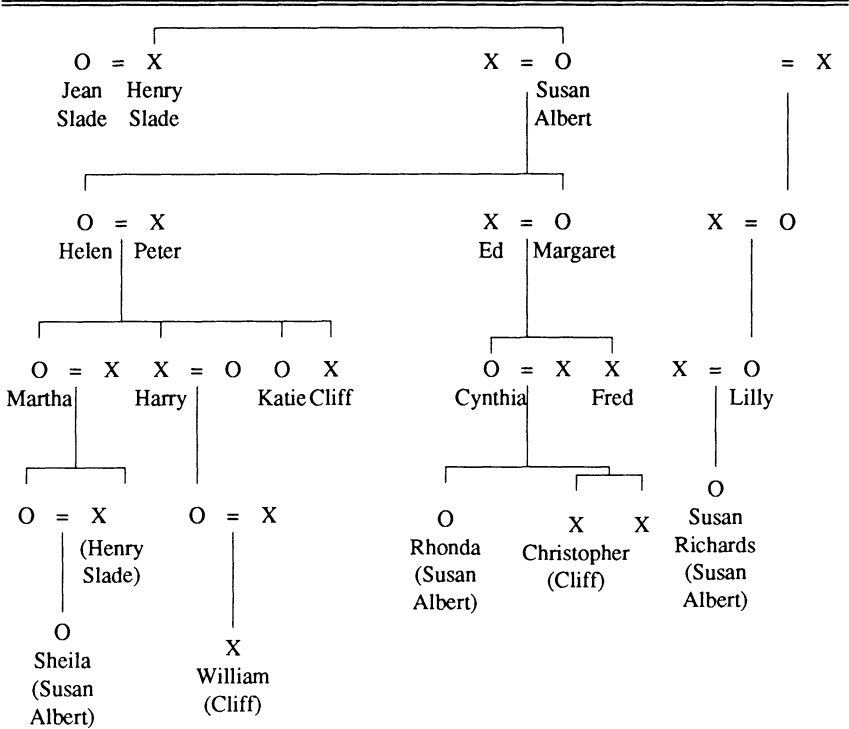
Another interesting case with some similar features (Case Number 35) involved the previous personality falling into the water, and the ‘‘come back’’ having related birthmarks and some aspects of behaviour appropriate to the previous personality.

### **Cases of Multiple Reincarnations of One Person**

*Susan Albert: (Case Numbers 18, 19 & 20):* According to her daughter, Margaret, Susan Albert was a Gitksan ‘‘princess,’’ who felt that it was time to go (see Figure 1). ‘‘Whenever she got up to give her testimony [in church], she always asked the Lord if he would take her and this is what [happened]. She

had a stroke and she never regained consciousness. She was seventy-six or seventy-eight.”

**Figure 1**  
**Relevant Members of Susan Albert and Cliff’s Family Tree.**



Key: O is female; X is male. (Name) is the name of the Previous Personality

Note: The genealogy has been simplified; therefore Cynthia’s older siblings do not appear. Martha’s son is included as he is said to be the reincarnation of Jean Slade’s husband (case Number 28). The third reincarnation of Cliff does not appear as he is not as closely related.

Margaret reported that, “During the years, Mother [Susan Albert] always claimed she wanted Cynthia [Margaret’s daughter and Susan Albert’s granddaughter] to be her mother when she came back. . . . ‘I want to be born beautiful, clever and not poor anymore. And I’m going to have blond hair,’ Mother said.”

When Susan Albert died, both her granddaughter Cynthia, and one of her great-granddaughters (Susan Albert’s other daughter’s daughter’s daughter) were pregnant. Cynthia’s cousin Katie had thought that Cynthia was going to have a boy until she dreamed of Susan Albert. She then told Cynthia

that she was was going to have a girl who would be the reincarnation of Susan Albert.

Susan Albert's daughter Margaret flew to Vancouver to attend the birth of her daughter's first child (case Number 19). On the eve of the baby's birth Margaret dreamed of her mother so vividly that she said, "Mother, what are you doing in Vancouver?" From the dream Margaret knew her mother was returning, and she said to her son-in-law, "Don't count on a boy. Mother was here."

The baby girl, Rhonda Mead, was born a blond, though this is less surprising because her father is a non-Indian, as is her maternal grandfather. Rhonda also met Susan Albert's other specifications: in 1984 Rhonda was eleven, and her mother stated that she gets certificates for outstanding academic achievement in school. Since Rhonda's father had a steady job at the Vancouver airport, Rhonda was comfortably situated. In addition, Rhonda exhibited marked precocity and memories appropriate to her great-grandmother, Susan Albert.

The public health nurse who visited Cynthia and her newborn daughter Rhonda when she was three weeks old, noted that baby Rhonda was atypically advanced. The nurse said Cynthia should treat Rhonda like a five or six month old baby because she could pull herself up like a baby of that age. Before Rhonda was eight months old, she was able to walk and to talk. Her mother noted several times that she was talking before she had teeth. "And then she got her teeth all at once, like they were her [Susan Albert's] teeth."

When Rhonda was about fifteen months old, she was taken to Hazelton, British Columbia to visit her grandparents. Rhonda then insisted that her uncle relinquish the easy chair in which he was sitting, saying, "That's my chair." Her mother Cynthia said, "She just screamed bloody murder if anybody sat in her chair. She just used to squirm and push Fred away." The chair was indeed one of two that had belonged to Susan Albert, and which her daughter Margaret had brought over to her own house after Susan's death.

When it was time to eat, Rhonda refused until she was brought a chair which had been sitting near the bathroom with things piled on it. Her grandmother reported that Rhonda "threw everything off of it and brought it in and sat down and she wouldn't let anyone else. She says, 'That's my chair.'"

The grandfather added that although Rhonda could barely see over the edge of the table while sitting on the chair, she insisted, "That's my chair." This was the other chair which Margaret had brought from Susan Albert's house.

On the same trip, Rhonda went around her grandmother's house stuffing clothes piled for laundry into shopping bags. Her grandfather noted that this was just like Susan Albert, who, "being short of closet space, kept unseasonal clothes in old flour sacks. There was a time when we were *reminded*

that Susan Albert was getting her way.”

On subsequent visits to her grandparents, Rhonda continued to chase her uncle out of “her chair.” Years later, Rhonda’s grandmother, Margaret, remarked to her son Fred that Rhonda was “becoming more mortal now, she’s not making such a fuss about the chair.” Fred replied, “That’s what you think. She’s still trying to pull me off her chair.”

On Rhonda’s second visit, her mother and grandparents were talking about prices and mentioned the figure “seven dollars.” Rhonda, who had not apparently been following the adults’ conversation until that point, said, “That’s my dog.” At one time Susan Albert had purchased a dog for seven dollars and “having a sense of humor,” as her son-in-law put it, had named the dog Seven Dollars. Since the dog had died before Susan Albert, he was not a frequent subject of conversation.

On another occasion, Rhonda’s mother, Cynthia, and her grandmother, Margaret, were looking through Margaret’s jewellery. Rhonda came up, picked up a bracelet which had belonged to Susan Albert and said, “That’s my bracelet.”

Given Rhonda’s precocity, her identification with Susan Albert’s belongings, and her fulfillment of Susan Albert’s request to be blond, smart, and well off, Rhonda’s birthmark was seen as a less important, if confirmatory indication of reincarnation. Rhonda has a birthmark on her right wrist which resembles a curving brown line. This is said to correspond to the tattoo of an S (for Susan) which Susan Albert had on the same part of her right arm. Rhonda also has a birthmark on her leg. Susan’s daughter Margaret did not know if her mother had a scar, tattoo or birthmark on her leg as the prototype of Rhonda’s birthmark.

In 1984, Rhonda did not remember saying any of these things. Her grandmother Margaret said, “After a certain age it [the awareness] leaves, but then the genes are still there so the idiom still comes out.” The grandmother said she didn’t know much about how or why the memories would fade, but added that the dreams she used to have, in which her mother, Susan Albert, appeared and warned her of anything serious that was about to happen to Rhonda, ceased as well.

At one point during the interview, I asked Rhonda’s mother, Cynthia, if Susan Albert chided her for smoking. Rhonda answered with a very emphatic “Yes”—i.e., answered for the late Susan Albert whom she is said to be, as her grandmother Margaret says, “reincarnated from.”

Rhonda is one of three girls who were eleven years old in 1984 and who are reputed to be reincarnations “from,” as they say, Susan Albert. One of the others is her cousin Sheila (case Number 18). Margaret’s brother-in-law, Peter, dreamed that Susan Albert was also coming as Sheila, the daughter of his own daughter, Martha (see Figure 1). When I asked Rhonda if she felt



close to Sheila or similar to Sheila, she did not indicate any special feeling of closeness. Both Rhonda's mother and grandmother said that Sheila was smart, but dark.

While Cynthia and her mother Margaret accept Sheila as being "reincarnated from" Susan Albert on the basis of Peter's dream, they are reluctant to accept Susan Richards as the third reincarnation of Susan Albert (case Number 20). Susan Richards is the daughter of Lilly, a woman raised by Margaret's half-sister. Both Cynthia and Margaret acknowledged that Lilly "claimed she dreamed of Mother [Susan Albert] before her child was born," and agreed that Lilly was paying Susan Albert an honour in naming her daughter, Susan Richards, after her. However, Cynthia and Margaret felt quite strongly that Susan Albert would not have wanted to come back in "that family" because the father of Susan Richards shouts at her in a way that Susan Albert would not have tolerated. Margaret also said that her mother would not be as homely as Susan Richards. In addition, Rhonda's mother gave a lengthy explanation of the rivalry between herself and Lilly in their teen-age years. Rhonda's mother and grandmother then sent me off with the warning, "You'll hear lots of counter claims. . . . Some people say Rhonda can't be Mother [Susan Albert] because she came back too soon. [Rhonda was born three months after Susan Albert's death]. But I heard Billy Graham say, 'Where Spirit wants to go, Spirit goes.'"

Although I was not able to meet the other two girls said to be reincarnations of Susan Albert, I interviewed Sheila's grandmother, Martha, who agreed that all three girls are reincarnated "from Susan Albert." Martha said, "My grandmother [Susan Albert] said, 'I'll come back lots of times. Maybe Chinese, maybe black, maybe as a dog,'" although she also said that Susan Albert had a well developed sense of humor. Martha did not refer to Susan Albert's request to be blond, but said that Margaret objected to Sheila's claim to be Susan Albert because Susan said she wanted to be well-off. "When she said that I just walked off."

Martha has no problem accepting Susan Richards as another reincarnation of Susan Albert. She says that Lilly and Susan Albert were close in the last years of the latter's life. Whether these girls have had any memories comparable to Rhonda's, were strikingly precocious, or have birthmarks, I do not yet know.

*Cliff: (Cases 15, 16, 17):* Another case of multiple reincarnation with some overlap in personnel serves to illustrate other features of Gitksan reincarnation. This case involves Cliff, Susan Albert's other daughter's son (see Figure 1).

In October 1974, Cliff set out to drive from Hazelton to Prince George, British Columbia and never arrived at his destination. He was missing for a number of months, and his desolate parents sent people as far as Ft. Nelson,

British Columbia, where he had worked, and to Vancouver to look for him. Cliff was twenty-five years old when he disappeared, and was the youngest child in his family.

Both Margaret and her husband had dreams of Cliff which indicated that he was no longer alive. Margaret said Cliff once came as a poltergeist, and threw off a picture that was sitting on the television. Margaret told Cliff that because she had an electric stove, she could not put any food in the fire, as is the Gitksan custom to appease a ghost, but she asked him to sit down and make himself at home. When Margaret and her husband told Cliff's mother, Helen, and her husband, Peter, about this event, they were still reluctant to believe that Cliff was dead. When I interviewed Helen, she said she had also heard Cliff coming into the house and checking on her in her bedroom, as he was wont to do, but there was no one there. Still she was reluctant to believe he was dead.

The following year in July, 1975, someone drove off the road and into the river on the way from Hazelton to Prince Rupert, British Columbia. During the search for the car involved in this accident, Cliff's car, with his remains inside, was found. He had apparently gone off the road and drowned in the river.

After that, Cliff's father, Peter, told his niece, Cynthia, that he had an image of two trees as he sat on the sofa in the same room with her. Cynthia was pregnant at the time. Peter said that she would have twins and that one of them would be Cliff. At that time, Cynthia did not know she was carrying twins. The following September, 1975, a little less than a year after Cliff's death, Cynthia gave birth to twin boys in Vancouver.

Just before the twins were born, Cynthia's parents, who were in Hazelton, British Columbia, had a very vivid dream in which Cliff was calling Margaret, "Grammie, Granny." Margaret's non-Indian husband, Ed, also heard this sound which woke them up. The sound was so real that Ed went to the door, but there was no one there. It seemed to Margaret and Ed that Cliff was present. Before his death, Cliff called Margaret "aunt" rather than "grandmother."

Only one of the twins, Christopher (case Number 16), is thought to be Cliff. The anomaly of twins is explained by Cliff's desire for a brother close to him in age. Cynthia explained, "You see Cliff always wanted a baby brother. . . . He had, you know, sisters, but he always wanted a brother about his age. Cliff's brother Ralph was old enough to be his father. He called him 'uncle.'"

After the twins were born, Peter's daughter Katie told Cynthia of a dream of Peter's in which Cliff had come to her as one of the twins. Katie reported, "He said, 'Cliff is with a good family.'" Shortly after that Peter died. His widow, Helen, said the strain of not knowing what had happened to

Cliff had broken his health.

When Margaret took her daughter Cynthia with Rhonda and the baby twins to consult Jean Slade, the latter “named the children off,” stating that Rhonda was Susan Albert, Christopher was Cliff and that Cliff’s twin was the late Leroy Albert (case Number 14).

Unlike his elder sister, Rhonda, Christopher, the twin who is said to be Cliff, has no memories appropriate to a past life. He is good at mathematics like Cliff, and adept at Cliff’s trade of carpentry, but his twin brother also shares these talents. He also has a lighter spot on each of his cheeks which is said to correspond to the same feature in Cliff. More strikingly, he has a brown birthmark in the groin area which corresponds to a similar birthmark on Cliff. While both his mother, Cynthia, and his grandmother, Margaret, were aware that Christopher had a birthmark, neither had had occasion to know that Cliff had one at the same spot. However, Margaret’s son, Fred, had noted the existence of the birthmark on his cousin Cliff.

Both Margaret and Cynthia accept the idea that Cliff has also come back as two other boys. “But of course they claim that the soul can have more than one person,” Margaret said. One of the other “reincarnations from” Cliff is Helen and Peter’s other son’s daughter’s son, William (case Number 17). The third reincarnation is Robert, the son of Alex and Elizabeth (case Number 15; see Figure 1).

I interviewed Elizabeth only long enough to confirm that she is of the opinion that her son Robert is a reincarnation of Cliff. In addition to Margaret and Cynthia, Cliff’s mother and his sister (the only sister that I interviewed) confirmed that Robert is Cliff returned. Independently, a local schoolteacher told me that Robert was born with fetal alcohol syndrome, and a Gitksan informant said that this bore a relation to the inebriated condition which, apparently, had had something to do with Cliff’s driving his car off the road.

Although I did not have an opportunity to meet William, the presumed third reincarnation of Cliff, I interviewed his great-grandmother and great-aunt about his case. In addition, I was given some information by Margaret and Cynthia. This is a case where the reincarnation belongs to a different clan than the previous personality. Cliff was a member of the Fireweed clan, while William belongs to his mother’s clan, the Wolf.

Margaret commented: “But when their [Helen and Peter’s] grandchild had her boy, which was in November [a year after Cliff’s death, and two months after the twins were born] . . . they said that was Cliff, too, that was reincarnated. With the old Indian customs you don’t usually go outside of your [clan], unless you had nowhere else to go. But then, it was accepted because Harry was upset at losing his brother . . . we’re all supposed to belong to the same family group in the same long house, years ago, and Wil-

liam isn't [in the same house and clan] as Cliff; but you see, they decided that to comfort Helen and them because they were so broken up. . . ."

William's great-grandmother did not comment on William being in the wrong clan, but instead emphasized the similarity between William and Cliff: "William acts like Cliff. Sometimes real friendly, sometimes angry like Cliff. Cliff used to give money to the old people and William does the same thing, gives money to old people."

William's great-aunt and Cliff's sister said, "Cliff, he would come back to William, because he was so close to Harry and his family. William really acts like Cliff. He was really smart. He was a Number One carpenter. Harry really spoils William. Poor William."

The Gitksan take reincarnation within the clan seriously enough that only three out of thirty-five cases mentioned in 1984 deviated from this pattern. Interestingly, in one case (Number One), where the parents were quite sure that their daughter was reincarnated from a certain lady, they did not make a public claim, because their own marriage was incorrect in that they were both from the same Frog Clan (note that two other girls are also said to be this same lady returned).

However, emotional closeness seems to affect Gitksan anticipation of rebirth as well as house affiliation. Margaret was skeptical about Jean Slade's equation of the other twin with a man named Leroy Albert. Although Leroy Albert came from the same house, he did not figure significantly in her life.

### Summary and Discussion

Despite having become nominally and/or practising Christians, both the Beaver and the Gitksan Indians of British Columbia, Canada firmly believe in reincarnation. However there are some differences in their beliefs. Although the Beaver believe that everyone reincarnates, they say that those souls that reach *yage* (heaven) do not clearly recall their past life on earth after they are reborn. They say that only those souls who choose and/or are chosen to reincarnate quickly after death, or who are unable to reach *yage*, retain distinct memories, personality traits, or birth marks which identify them as members of the category of "special child."

For the Gitksan, it appears that the same combination of the desires of the deceased and the desires of the remaining relatives to have the deceased return to them is seen as drawing an individual back to a particular family. However, they have a stronger desire to return quickly, without a respite in a place equivalent to *yage*, and to return in a number of different individuals. Therefore, it appears that a larger proportion of the population is said to reincarnate soon after death, and often in the form of more than one individual. The Beaver Indians, by contrast, did not cite any examples of multiple reincarnation of the same individual.

**Table 4**  
**Summary of Chronology of Features in Two Gitksan Cases of Reincarnation**

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**The Case of the Multiple Reincarnation of Susan Albert, Previous Personality of Rhonda, Sheila and Susan Richards**

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**Rhonda:**

1. ANNOUNCING DREAM: Susan Albert's daughter's daughter dreamed that her mother's sister's daughter was going to give birth to a reincarnation of Susan Albert.
2. ANNOUNCING DREAM: Previous personality's daughter dreams of her mother on eve of the birth of her daughter's daughter.
3. FEATURE: Rhonda is born a blond.  
 COMMENTS: Susan Albert was said to have stated that she wanted to be re-born, "blond, smart, and well-off."
4. FEATURE: Rhonda is born with a birthmark which corresponds to a tattoo on Susan Albert.  
 COMMENTS: Susan Albert had a tattoo of an "S" on her right wrist. At eleven years of age Rhonda has a birthmark on her right wrist which resembles an opened up S.
5. PRECOCITY: When Rhonda was three weeks old the public health nurse noted that she could hold herself up like a five or six month old child.
6. PRECOCITY: Rhonda walked and talked at eight months.  
 COMMENTS: Her mother noted that she talked before she had teeth, and then she got her teeth all at once, "like they were her [Susan Albert's] teeth."
7. RECOGNITION: Rhonda recognized Susan Albert's easy chair, said, "That's my chair," and repeatedly insisted on sitting in it, removing her mother's brother from it.
8. RECOGNITION: Rhonda recognized Susan Albert's dining room chair, again saying, "That's my chair," and insisted on sitting on the chair to eat.
9. RECOGNITION: Rhonda identified "Seven Dollars" as her dog.  
 COMMENTS: Susan Albert had had a dog named "Seven Dollars," which died before she did.
10. RECOGNITION: Rhonda identified a bracelet of Susan Albert's as being hers.
11. BEHAVIOUR: Rhonda, as a very little girl, stuffed clothes in sacks, as Susan Albert had.
12. FEATURE: Rhonda gets awards for academic achievement.  
 COMMENT: This is seen as fulfillment of Susan Albert's expressed wish to be reborn "Smart." (See Item 3).  
 NOTE: Two other girls are said to also be Susan Albert reborn [Neither Yet Interviewed]:

**Sheila**

Dark, smart and comfortably off.

**Susan Richards**

Her mother, Susan Albert's adopted daughter's daughter, dreamed repeatedly of Susan Albert when pregnant.

**The Case of Multiple Reincarnation of Cliff, Previous Personality of Christopher, William, and Robert**

**CHRISTOPHER:**

1. ANNOUNCING IMAGE: Cliff's father had an image of two trees while with Cynthia which he said meant that his son would be reborn as one of twins to her.

COMMENTS: Cliff was said to want to return as a twin because he always wanted a brother about his same age.

2. FEATURE: Christopher was born with a birth mark on the groin corresponding to one on Cliff at the same location.

3. FEATURE: Christopher has lighter patches on his cheeks, as did Cliff.

4. PHOBIA: Christopher initially had a fear of water which he has since overcome.

COMMENTS: Cliff died when the car he was driving went off the road and submerged in the river.

NOTE: Two other boys are said to be Cliff reborn [Neither Yet Interviewed]

**William:**

1. BEHAVIORAL FEATURE: Said to act like Cliff, e.g. alternately friendly and angry.

COMMENT: William is Cliff's brother's daughter's son, but not in the same lineage or house. He is said to have returned as he did because Cliff's brother missed him so and desired his return to his daughter.

**Robert:**

1. FEATURE: Born with fetal alcohol syndrome.

COMMENT: This is said to reflect Cliff's attraction to alcohol and state of inebriation at death.

Interviews with two Kwakiutl informants, a Coast Tsimshian from Hartley Bay, and several Coast Salish people which were conducted in November and December, 1984, produced numerous cases of multiple reincarnation for all these groups.<sup>15</sup>

The desire to reincarnate in multiple individuals appears to be a remarkable extension of the Northwest Coast concern with rank, wealth and property about which a great deal of anthropological literature has been written (see, for example, Adams 1973; Benedict 1934; Codere 1950; Rubel and Rosman 1983).

The Gitksan examples given in this paper indicate a certain degree of competitiveness in establishing the claim to be the reincarnation of a particular high status person, as well as a willingness to acknowledge that an individual can simultaneously reincarnate in a number of different people.<sup>16</sup> However, multiple reincarnation has also been noted for the Inuit (Stevenson 1969), and, farther afield, among the Igbo of Nigeria (Stevenson 1985, 1986).

In twelve percent of the Beaver cases the subject was reputed to have reincarnated in the opposite sex. The Gitksan cases did not include cross-sex reincarnation, and informants said cross-sex reincarnation does not happen.<sup>17</sup>

Stevenson has noted that cross-sex reincarnation is absent among the Haida and Tlingit cases he has gathered on the Northwest Coast of North America, and also among the Druse of Lebanon and the Alevi of Turkey. It occurs in three percent of the cases from India, twelve percent of the cases from Sri Lanka, thirteen percent of the cases in Thailand, fifteen percent of the cases from the United States, eighteen percent of the Igbo cases and thirty-three percent of the cases from Burma (Stevenson 1986). Slobodin (1970) has noted the presence of cross-sex reincarnation among the Kutchin and Goulet (1982) has recorded it among an unidentified Canadian Dene group. Bernard Saladin d'Anglure (1986) has recently developed a symbolic interpretation of cross-sex reincarnation among the Inuit.

I suspect that the absence of cross-sex reincarnation among the Gitksan is related to an emphasis on reincarnating in the same clan or lineage, which occurs in ninety-one percent of the cases. This is important if the presumed reincarnate is to assume the titles held by the predecessor, as the titles are the property of the house. Some, although by no means all, of the Gitksan titles are sex linked. I expect that the same emphasis on succession to hereditary titles accounts for the absence of cross-sex reincarnation among the Haida and Tlingit. However, the situation is complex. Among the matrilineal Haida, as Rubel and Rosman (1983) state, a man is a reincarnation of his father's father, whose name he inherits. For the Haida and other groups with only two clans, one's father's father is a member of one's own clan; thus bilateral reincarnation and reincarnation into the same clan are one and the same thing. The same principle applies for the patrilineal Northwest Coast groups such as the Kawkwilt. More research is necessary to see how the succession of titles relates to reincarnation in general and the absence of cross-sex reincarnation on the Northwest Coast of North America.<sup>18</sup>

### **Origin of the Belief in Reincarnation**

Here I would like to turn to the question of the origin and diffusion of the belief in reincarnation among the Beaver and Gitksan Indians.

Stevenson has reviewed the evidence of Asian contact on the Northwest Coast of North America prior to European incursions on the continent, and concludes that the concept of reincarnation may have been introduced from Asiatic and presumably Chinese Buddhist contacts (1974:222). While not doubting the contacts which Stevenson mentions, I suspect that the belief in reincarnation should be seen as being part of the prior shamanic religion on whose roots Hindu and Buddhist beliefs in reincarnation were also founded.

It seems to me that the experience of the shaman, who is trained to leave his or her body and travel in search of the wandering or captured soul of his patient, demonstrates to both the patient and the audience the permanence of the soul after it has left the body. Experiences related to reincarnation, such as

the appearance of deceased persons in human or in animal form (metempsychosis), and out-of-body experiences, are common among shamanic cultures (see for example, Hallowell 1955). All of these experiences presuppose the existence of a soul substance which survives physical death and which can reanimate another body.

If shamanic societies believe in reincarnation, one would expect that their oral traditions would be replete with instances of reincarnation. This is apparently not the case for the two peoples discussed in this paper, the Beaver and the Gitksan Indians of British Columbia, Canada.

The Beaver Indians have a story in which a discussion takes place about what should happen to humans after death. The discussion asks if people sprout again like wild rhubarb, which rises again each spring. No, the Beaver Indian trickster concludes, throwing a stone into the lake; the soul should sink like the stone in the lake, and not rise again. Nowhere in the rest of Beaver myths is there any specific mention of reincarnation, although there are instances where a monstrous foe reanimates itself after being apparently killed in a nightmare-like situation (Ridington 1977).

Is this the trickster tricking us again? It is important to bear in mind that the majority of Beaver myths are about a time in the world's history before the existence of humans as we or the Beaver know them. The protagonist in these Beaver myths is an immortal being who simply retires from the earth when he has completed his task of making the world safe for humans. The world had earlier become perilous because First Human populated it with dangerous monsters created through thought projection, in imitation of the creation of the useful animals thought into existence by a higher being. One of the things the myths do is establish a precedent or blueprint for travel out of the body and out of ordinary space and time. This is the essence of the vision quest and the shamanic experience among North American and other native peoples.

John Cove (1982, 1985) has noted that the Gitksan and Tsimshian oral tradition does not directly mention reincarnation. However, Seguin (1984, 1985) suggests that reincarnation may be the key to unlocking the symbolism of the Tsimshian potlatch, and cogently interprets some Tsimshian myths as being about reincarnation. In both Beaver and Tsimshian society reincarnation appears to be so deeply ingrained that it need have no explicit mention in their oral traditions and becomes the sub-stratum on which the oral tradition rests.<sup>19</sup>

My hypothesis is that no matter how much diffusion of the concept of reincarnation may have taken place between Chinese Buddhists and Northwest Coast peoples, belief in reincarnation is ancient, not only in America but among shamanic peoples throughout the world.



This hypothesis is supported by the documentation of the Australian aborigine and sub-Saharan African belief in reincarnation. Spencer and Gilen describe the variations in belief in reincarnation among the northern tribes in Australia (1966; 1904). Spencer states, "I am, myself, inclined to think that some such belief [in reincarnation] was once universal [among Australian aborigines] for the reason that it now exists in tribes so widely different from one another (1966:23)." The variation in particulars of the belief in Australia parallels some of the differences between the Beaver and Gitksan concepts, including the presence or absence of cross-sex reincarnation. Spencer says, "In some tribes such as the Dieri and Warramunga, the belief holds that the sex changes at each successive reincarnation," while in other tribes belief in cross-sex reincarnation is absent (1966:23-24). The depiction of the relation of spirit children to totems and spirit doubles to guardian spirits closely resembles North American Indian belief.<sup>20</sup>

Parrinder (1957) similarly notes the perseverance of belief in reincarnation in Africa in what we would differentiate as both hunter-gathering and agricultural societies. He points out that in the Indian sub-continent, the aboriginal Dravidians appear to have introduced the concept of reincarnation to the invading Aryans. The prevalence of belief in reincarnation among hunter-gathering societies generally, and the patterns of variation in the belief, are subjects which need further research, although Stevenson has made impressive inroads on the task (Pasricha and Stevenson 1986; Stevenson 1986).

Stevenson's research into cases of the reincarnation type differs from the usual anthropological description in that Stevenson, who is Carlson Professor of Psychiatry and Director of the Division of Personality Studies in the Department of Behavioral Medicine and Psychiatry at the University of Virginia, is interested in scientifically investigating the etiology of children who remember past lives, to see if there is any scientific evidence of the survival of the personality out of the body or after corporeal death. Anthropology, on the other hand, typically looks at the range of thought in terms of structural patterns or the effect of interlocking child rearing practices and cultural constructs.

There is no doubt that cultural belief provides a framework which influences both Beaver and Gitksan parents' attitudes towards what they see as evidence of reincarnation. When Jean Slade asks her great-granddaughter where James and Lucy are, knowing that these were the children of the lady whom she is convinced her great-granddaughter reincarnates, she is encouraging her great-granddaughter to identify with this woman. The case of Chuck, the three year old boy who was encouraged to ride his father's horse, has been discussed above. Nonetheless, the evidence deserves to be looked at carefully to discern what is cultural construction and what is evidence that

something remarkable is occurring. While none of the cases recorded in 1984 offer incontrovertible proof of the existence of reincarnation, the spontaneous statements of Amy and Rhonda are difficult to explain without recourse to very intense telepathic projection on the part of the surrounding relatives.

Stevenson similarly concludes that the numerous and carefully documented cases of children who remember past lives even in those societies where the previous personality is completely unknown to his relatives, do not prove the existence of reincarnation.<sup>21</sup> However, as he says (1975b), the growing body of cross-cultural cases deserves careful scrutiny.

Stevenson's forthcoming multi-volume work on birthmarks and birth defects and their correspondence to wounds, lesions and scars on the previous personality, will present important evidence of the persistence and effect of the previous personality on the soma of the presumed reincarnate after the death of the physical body. The investigation of birthmarks may help us to understand the relation of individual and cultural patterns to genetic patterns. Perhaps thought and personality provide some of the template that determines which of the immense number of possible DNA combinations take place.

Anthropology has typically considered the investigation of the validity of such subjects to be outside its domain. As Aberle has pointed out, anthropology is largely an historical science which "can have few accomplishments as science in the Newtonian style" (Aberle 1987:551). While it is indeed true that the study of human societies does not lend itself to reversible experimentation, anthropology can employ the scientific method to examine the validity of the data its subjects in non-western societies present. By a shift in emphasis, anthropologists can explore the power of symbolic thought on the psyche and soma of human beings. The growing convergence of biological, psychological and anthropological investigations should facilitate the study of reported states, such as reincarnation. The colonial mentality that "we know better" is certainly out of date. It is exactly this kind of convergence that Schechner posits as the next step in the post-Turnerian anthropological adventure (Schechner in Turner 1986).

The advantages of such open-mindedness are immense. In this brief investigation I found that telling the Gitksan and Beaver that I was interested in gathering data on cases of reincarnation, so that it could be scientifically and critically examined by a western audience, produced an impressive outpouring of very interesting material. I look forward to the opportunity to study how reincarnation interfaces with Gitksan potlatches and the succession of names and the Gitksan sense of identity. From the Beaver I hope to learn if the intimate relation between an individual and his or her guardian spirits or *muyine* is believed to be maintained life after life, as the Australian aborigine material suggests.

An understanding of the concept of reincarnation will add immensely to our understanding of culture, community and experience of the self, as Seguin (1984, 1985) suggests. In continuing to examine the variety of human experience, anthropology has the opportunity to examine some of the profundities of the human condition. There is much to be learned.

While talking in 1984 to a Hartley Bay informant who had given remarkable detail on her Coast Salish husband's friendship with one of his mother's multiple reincarnations, I said, as I tried to imagine what it meant to have multiple reincarnations "from" the same person, "Reincarnation must give you a different sense of the self." She replied, "It gives us a different sense to be in tune with *Spirit*."

## Notes

1. An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the Canadian Ethnology Society conference in Toronto, May 1985. I am grateful to Ian Stevenson for his useful critique of the paper, not all of which I have incorporated.
2. I did field work with the Beaver Indians during the summer of 1964, from June, 1965, to August, 1966, during the summers of 1967 and 1968, during the winter of 1968-69, a month in the summer of 1969, a month in the winter of 1971-72, two weeks in the summer of 1976, and a month in the summer of 1984. I would like to acknowledge a N.I.M.H. Graduate Fellowship which funded the first three field trips, and a Canadian National Museum of Man Ethnographic Field Research Contract for field work with the Beaver Indians in the summer of 1984 and funding from the Division of Personality Studies of the Department of Behavioral Medicine and Psychiatry of the University of Virginia for field work with the Beaver and Gitksan in July and the beginning of August, 1984, and with the Kwakiutl and Coast Salish in November and December, 1984. During my study of the Gitksan, Richard Barrazuol, a graduate student in Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, worked as my assistant. I am grateful to the chiefs of the Doig, Blueberry, Halfway and Prophet River Reserves and the Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en Tribal Council for permission to carry out the studies, and especially to the Beaver and Gitksan people who so willingly contributed their knowledge.
3. The six North American Indian tribes in my sample of ten for which I found belief in reincarnation are the Copper Eskimo (Boas 1888; Freuchen 1961:207-208; Stefansson 1927:367); the Carrier [which include the Wet'suwet'en] (Jenness 1943:538-539, 549), the Blackfoot (Wissler 1912:28), the Winnebago (Radin 1913:303-313, 1923:313-16), the Yurok (Thompson 1916), and the Zuni (Tedlock 1975:270). The four for which I originally found no reference to belief in human reincarnation were the Shoshoni, the Nez Percé, the Iroquois and the Pomo (Mills 1984). Since then I have noted Hewitt's (1895:109) reference to belief in reincarnation among the Iroquois. Frazer (1935:199) noted belief in reincarnation among the Huron, based on *Rérelations des Jésuites*, (1636:130, Canadian reprint, Quebec, 1858). See also Trigger (1976, 1988). Other North American Indian tribes for whom belief in reincarnation I have noted include the Tlingit (Knapp and Childe 1896:160; de Laguna 1954:183-190; Krause 1956:192 citing Veniaminov 1840; Stevenson 1974:216-269), the Haida (Dawson 1880; Krause 1956; Swanton 1905; Stevenson 1975a), the Gitksan (Adams 1973:26-31), the Kwakiutl (Boas 1921:713, 1932:202, 1969a:17-18,51; 1969b:288; Goldman 1975:62), the Tsimshian (Seguin 1984:120-123, 1985), the Upper Tanana (McKenna 1959:160), the Kaska (Honigsmann 1954:137), the Kutchin (Osgood 1936:140; Slobodin 1970:67-78),

the Eyak (Birket-Smith and de Laguna 1938:171), the Tahltan (Emmons 1911), the Dene-Tha (Goulet 1982), the Twana (Elmendorf 1960:484, 512-521), the Chipewyan (Sharp 1986:257-259), the Arapaho (Hilger 1952:4-6), the Hopi (Murdock 1934:346), the Navaho (Haile 1943) the Chippewa (Hilger 1951:4), the Ojibwa (Hallowell 1955), the Delaware (Zeisberger 1885) and the Seminole, based on Brinton (1876:270). Further Inuit references include Balikci (1970), Birket-Smith (1959), Guemple (1988), Saladin d'Anglure (1986), and Stevenson (1969). Unpublished citations from anthropologists who have noted belief while working in the field concern the Sto:lo Interior Salish (Daly 1988), and the Swampy River Cree (Sullivan 1988).

4. Beaver Indian Partial Cases: In the category of "special children" whose previous personality is unknown is the case (Number 23) of a child whose birth was predicted by an old man who dreamed that his daughter's stepchild was pregnant before she was aware that she was. The old man's dream did not identify who the baby had been previously, but simply announced that the mother would have a baby girl, followed by another girl, then two boys, and no more children after that. This dream indeed came true.

In the other partial case (Number 10), a man dreamed that his cousin, a classificatory sister would have a special child. The child was born with numerous birthmarks, including one that swelled and ebbed periodically. The dreamer still calls this child the Beaver word for leader, and uses this word as her name. Neither he nor anyone else knows who she was in her past life.

5. Some informants voiced skepticism concerning the relationship between mongoloid spots and rebirth. One young woman said, "How can all the babies born with blue spots be born again? Look how many have blue spots." Another said, "that can't be," because her son, whose father is not all Indian, was born without a blue spot. The mother of another child, whose mongoloid spot was manifested not only in the usual way, but also in several symmetrical blue spots running up the spine, reported that the (Caucasian) doctor who delivered the baby said, "Somebody sure beat him up."
6. Returning as I did in the summer of 1984 after an absence of some years, one of the first things I was told was who had died and made it to heaven, and who was wandering around as a ghost. Ghosts are seen as being very lonely and sad. They are unable either to return to the world of the living, or make it to the land of the dead until they have sufficiently retraced the steps they have taken in their lives to merit re-birth or entry into *yage* ("heaven"). Ghosts are also feared because they are said to try to steal the souls of the living, particularly newborn babies, in an attempt to follow the soul to *yage*.
7. The question of cause of death is not as straightforward as it would appear. I have considered a violent death to be one in which the person died in an accident such as a car crash, or when death was the result of interpersonal violence such as fighting. It is important to recognize that Beaver Indians use different categories to understand such events. For example, a death which we would attribute to natural causes such as the death of an octogenarian from a stroke or heart attack might be explained by the Beaver as being the result of "bad medicine" directed at the victim by another person. Similarly, where a western observer might attribute death to alcohol-related behaviour, as in the case of a house burning down when its occupants were highly inebriated, the Beaver would blame interpersonal hostility, often on psychic levels, rather than inebriation. Just as explanations of the causes of deaths differ, so do Beaver evaluations of the individual. Someone addicted to alcohol is not held in the same contempt by the Beaver Indians as in non-Indian society.
8. Stevenson says, "I use the expression announcing dream to refer to a dream experienced by a pregnant woman, and sometimes by one of her close relatives or friends, in which, as it seems to the dreamer, a deceased person communicates his wish or intention to be reborn as the baby of the pregnant woman" (Stevenson 1975b:68).

9. In two out of twenty-three Beaver cases, the previous personality was reported to have specified to whom he wanted to be reborn before his death. In one case (Number 8), an old man stated to whom he wanted to be reborn. People generally agree that he was reborn to the parents he had chosen (although see Note 14), and that he would have been on the strength of his expressed wishes. His identity is further confirmed by a birthmark resembling a light scar which is visible on his birth picture. The birthmark had disappeared by the time I saw him, when he was eight months old. The scar-like birthmark corresponded to a scar on the forehead of the previous personality, which had been received in a fight, and bore no relation to the previous personality's cause of death.
10. *Dreams, visions and visits from the ghost*: When someone has a dream which identifies the coming child as someone who has died, the Beaver consider the dream valid. In one case (Number 15), the pregnant mother dreamed of a particular old lady who had been dead five years. Everyone accepts this child, now fifteen, as being the old lady reborn. Indeed, since the child's birth, her nickname has been the Beaver name of the previous personality. This individual was born with a number of abnormal characteristics but I was unable to learn whether they are thought to be related to the previous personality.

In another case (Number 20) an older woman whom I will call Ruth dreamed that a particular woman who had died was standing at the window and wanted to come in. Her daughter then became pregnant, and the case was further confirmed in the Beavers' eyes when the baby was born with bumps on the back of the head. The previous personality had been killed by being hit on the back of the head.

After the violent death of one of Ruth's daughters, Ruth's elder classificatory sister at another reserve dreamed that when the murdered woman got to heaven, they sent her back. My informant said, "She's going to come to one of these women here, she say. That time soon lots of women were pregnant. The baby could come to any one, she say. [One baby born shortly after this was] sure small baby, but at birth she had one tooth. Everyone was sure surprised. They show that baby to grandma and she say 'That's the one, that's Marta Fox come back.'"

When I later met the mother and baby, the mother agreed that her baby, who has a sizable strawberry birthmark on her arm as well, was Marta Fox. However the next day she said she didn't think so, as her baby was born three months after the reputed previous personality's death. The mother was alluding to the new concept, learned from the white medical authorities, that the gestation time for a baby is nine months. Previously the Beaver Indians thought conception took place close to the time the mother felt the "quickening" or movement of the baby in the end of the first trimester of pregnancy.

In another instance where there was an announcing dream (Case Number 3), the stepfather of Meg dreamed that she would have a baby who was the reincarnation of Mike, a sixteen year old youth who was greatly cherished by everyone. He died when the truck in which he was riding went off the road into a body of water. He was the last child of his mother, who is a close friend and classificatory sister of Meg's. Many people told me about this case, but when I sought out Mike's mother, she had not heard that Mike is reputed to have returned to Meg. Her ignorance of the case is facilitated by the fact that she has moved from the Indian community where she previously lived into Ft. St. John, British Columbia. However, having learned that Vincent Marto had dreamed that Mike was coming to Meg, she accepted the idea that Meg's son is Mike returned and said, "They didn't tell me because of how I would feel."

*Ghosts*: There are several instances where parents felt quite certain of the identity of their unborn children, even without an announcing dream, because the ghost of the previous personality had been seen up until the mother became pregnant. One mother said, "They heard Bill's ghost walking around. Lena missed her brother terribly, too much she cried, but after I had Mark she didn't cry anymore." This is Case Number 13,

described in Note 9.

In yet another case (Number 21), a young father felt someone touch his foot, but there was no one there. He and everyone he spoke to was quite sure that it was the ghost of the young woman, mentioned above, who had been murdered, (the same young woman who had figured in the dream of the old lady at another reserve). Shortly after this his brother-in-law heard a baby crying in the house. When he went to see whose baby it was, there was no baby. One of my informants explained, "When a ghost is heard by a mother crying as a baby, it has suffered enough and is ready to come back as a baby. Then the mother-to-be may hear a baby crying. . . . From there, Rita start to be pregnant."

*Vision:* In this rather unique case, the father of the previous personality was a prophet who had a vision while wide awake (Case Number 1). The father, who has been dead for thirty years, was desolate when his middle-aged son died approximately fifty years ago. He fasted and cried on his son's grave for ten days until something came to him and said he shouldn't be carrying on like that, because such intense mourning was a thing of the devil (*dunemenachiday*), but that he could have his son back.

The prophet then stopped grieving, told the people of his vision, and was content. His wife had died and he married her younger sister. The first child the new wife had was a girl, and not his son returned. The next child was a boy whom everyone agrees is the previous one returned. He was given the same name as the previous personality and is said to look just the same, to have been remarkably precocious, and to be very clever. The gray hair which he began getting when he was eleven years old is seen as a sign that he is continuing the same life begun in the previous body.

11. Strong preferences and aversions in a child are frequently explained as the legacy of the previous personality. In one case (Number 14), the child was said to be the reincarnation of a woman who was murdered by her husband when he was drunk. The child is noted for having a strong aversion to people who are drinking and an unusually strong reaction to the sight of blood.
12. According to one informant, Marie Alta had had a premonition of death before her trip to town, and had suggested to her classificatory sister (mother's sister's daughter), who was widowed, that she marry Frank after her impending death. Marie did not know how she would die. Whereas her classificatory sister had agreed that it would be a good idea to marry Frank if Marie should die, when she saw how Marie died she no longer felt the same inclination. The whole community was shocked to lose Marie Alta, who was highly esteemed. After Marie's death, Frank Alta moved to another reserve, where he married the prophet's granddaughter. Amy is the daughter of the above mentioned widow's brother, who called Marie Alta "elder sister."
13. While everyone I spoke to concurred that Amy is Marie Alta returned, there was considerable disagreement over who her twins, twenty-six months old at the time of the study, had been in their previous lives. Although no one had dreamed of who they were, both were born with birth marks. Starla, the girl twin (Case Number 7), has a series of red spots in an area about the size of a quarter on the right side of her abdomen above the navel. Richard, the boy twin (Case Number 17), has a larger brown patch below his navel.

Starla is being raised by Amy's classificatory sister (mother's sister's daughter) at another reserve. Many people including Starla's stepmother think that Starla is Amy's mother returned, and note behavioral similarities. Amy's mother had died seven years earlier of exposure when inebriated. One person believed that Richard, the boy twin, was Amy's mother's brother who died only two days before his sister, while another thought that Richard was the reincarnation of his father's father who had shot himself some five years previously. Richard's striking habit of crying loudly was seen as related to his being his father's father reborn. Still another equation was made at Amy's home

reserve by Marie Alta's confidant (see Note 12). The confidant suspects that the twins are the two babies which Marie Alta miscarried during her marriage to Frank Alta. This identity was put forward within Amy's hearing, and Amy said she concurred.

Since many people cited Amy's step-grandmother as the source of the knowledge that the twins are the the mother's mother and the father's father, or the mother's mother's brother, I sought out the step grandmother's opinion. She said she did not know who they were although she said Starla was a "special child," i.e., a reincarnation of someone, and called Starla "a born adult." The only person she was sure of was their mother, Amy, "who was Marie Alta come back." She was sure of this because Charlie Yahey, the Beaver Indian prophet, had said so.

14. Among the Beaver and the Gitksan, there are some interesting instances of discrepancy between different peoples' equation of who had been who before. Sometimes these discrepancies seemed to be the result of hazy memory on the part of an informant; sometimes they reflected the different opinions of different informants; and sometimes they seemed to be the result of the incomplete circulation of information. For example, the half-sister of the mother of one Beaver baby (case Number 8) had not heard that her nephew was thought to be the reincarnation of her husband's father despite the fact that she lives in the same house as her half sister and the baby.
15. Margaret Seguin has not confirmed the existence of contemporary cases of multiple reincarnation among the Coast Tsimshian, although she cites current examples of reincarnation and notes the significance of the concept of multiple reincarnation for unlocking the symbolism of the potlatch (1984, 1985). Despite numerous years of field work with the Beaver Indians, I was not aware of the numerous specific cases until I concentrated on inquiring about the subject. The same situation may explain Seguin's statement that belief in multiple reincarnation is no longer active.
16. John Adams has suggested (in comments on my sequel paper on Gitksan, Wet'suwet'en and Beaver Indian reincarnation, delivered at the Fourth International Conference on Hunting and Gathering Societies, London School of Economics, September 1986) that the Gitksan belief in multiple reincarnation of the same person may be related to the fact that the population of the Gitksan is rapidly expanding after a period of serious decline. At the time I did not think this explained the phenomenon, as the Beaver and the Wet'suwet'en, who have experienced similar population drops and recent increases, do not believe in multiple reincarnation. However, I now recognize that since the Gitksan seem to expect a higher percentage of the population to be identifiable as a particular person reborn than do the Beaver or the Wet'suwet'en (the Bulkley River Carrier), the same kind of population flux could have this differential effect. Nonetheless my hunch is that belief in multiple reincarnation is not new among the Gitksan and other Northwest Coast people.
17. One innovative Gitksan leader, a year after having learned of the Beaver Indian belief in cross-sex reincarnation, said he would consider returning as a woman and in his father's clan, because he perceives a spiritual weakness in that clan, but said he would have to prepare his future parents to accept him back.
18. Stevenson (1986) relates the high incidence of male subjects of cases of the reincarnation type among the Igbo of Nigeria to the cultural deference given to males. Among the Beaver sixty-three percent of the subjects are female. This is a higher percentage of female subjects than in any of the cultures studied to date by Stevenson (op. cit.). Among the Gitksan fifty-one percent of the subjects are female. This ties with Sri Lanka, the culture with the highest proportion of female subjects among the cultures studied by Stevenson. Note that the unusually high incidence of male subjects among the Igbo is coupled with the second-highest incidence of cross-sex reincarnation (op.cit.). Perhaps the greatest measure of male dominance is in those male oriented societies which do not believe it an option for someone to be reborn as the opposite sex,

such as the Alevi of Turkey and the Druse of Lebanon.

19. Seguin suggests that the Tsimshian myths of the land of the dead and of reincarnation are contradictory, and an example of the Tsimshian tolerance of ambiguity. In the context of Gitksan and Beaver eschatology the two concepts are compatible: the land of the dead is inhabited by humans after death and before rebirth, although not all humans reach the land of the dead before reincarnating. For the Gitksan more research is necessary, but I suspect that they believe some aspect of the soul goes to the land of the dead while another aspect returns to the babies in whom they reincarnate.
20. An analysis of the relation between the variation in incidence of cross-sex reincarnation and male initiation rites, and matrilineal or patrilineal descent in Australia (and elsewhere) would produce some interesting data on the question of gender identity.
21. Stevenson has presented the percentage of cases in which the subject is related to the previous personality's family, is acquainted with the previous personality's family, or had no prior knowledge of the previous personality's family (1986). In general, there is a higher incidence of children with past life memories of someone unknown to their family in large scale societies where not everyone is related. Among the Beaver and Gitksan not only is there a cultural preference for and expectation of being reborn to close relatives, but the web of kinship tends also to include the whole society. The exceptions to this are the United States non-tribal cases, which, like the Tlingit, the Igbo and the Haida, are very largely with the "same family." The explanation may be that such cases are more likely to be identified, or solved, when the subject speaks as someone known to the family.

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