

Article

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by Mohan B. Kumar and Teresa Janz



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- . not available for any reference period
- .. not available for a specific reference period
- ... not applicable
- 0 true zero or a value rounded to zero
- 0^s value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded
- ^p preliminary
- ^r revised
- x suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*
- E use with caution
- F too unreliable to be published

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Introduction

Canada is a multicultural country. One rich source of our cultural heritage comes from Aboriginal Peoples.¹ While cultural diversity can bring challenges, when we attempt to understand our own and others' cultural backgrounds it can provide tremendous opportunities for both personal growth and 'positive social evolution'.² A better understanding of another person's culture can broaden our understanding of other ways of 'being' in the world, and help decrease the potential for misunderstandings.

But what does 'culture' mean? In a summary of some of the research on culture, Matsumoto and Juang describe how this term is used very broadly in everyday language and research, and can refer to activities and behaviours, history or heritage, and norms or organizational structures that govern behaviour.³ It may also touch many aspects of our lives including our food and clothing, individual and family activities, music and spirituality.

While there is no single agreed-upon definition of culture, one definition suggests culture is "a unique meaning and information system, shared by a group and transmitted across generations, that allows the group to meet basic needs of survival, pursue happiness and well-being, and derive meaning from life."⁴ However, this definition fails to recognize that for many Aboriginal individuals culture cannot be defined on its own, as a separate entity, but

instead culture is life itself—an all-encompassing concept.^{5,6} As a result, culture may have an impact on the health and well-being of Aboriginal individuals.

One way the link between culture and well-being has been investigated is through 'cultural continuity.' The transmission of cultural heritage from one generation to another along with the means by which transmission occurs constitute cultural continuity.⁷ Research on cultural continuity has indicated that culture is important because it can foster personal identity development and contribute to psychological health, preventing self-destructive and suicidal behaviours.^{8,9}

To date, cultural continuity research with respect to Aboriginal people has primarily focused on First Nations communities and has been described as the connection that individuals have with their own cultural past, and ideas of their potential future self.¹⁰ Several factors can contribute to cultural continuity, including Aboriginal language knowledge, land claims, self-government, availability of cultural facilities, and the provision of culturally appropriate education, health, police and fire services. First Nations communities that cultivate *cultural* continuity foster strong *personal* self-continuity in their youth, or the sense of personal persistence over time, which is protective against self-harm behaviours.^{11,12} However, little research on cultural continuity has been done for the Métis population.

While 'culture' means many things to many people, this report explores only a few elements as they relate to the Métis population—which includes an estimated 389,785 individuals who identified themselves as Métis in the 2006 Census. For this article, cultural elements are limited to questions that were asked on the 2006 Aboriginal Peoples Survey and Métis Supplement (See "What you should know about this study"). The goal of this article is to explore current cultural activities of the Métis population, and move toward a better understating of Métis-specific cultural continuity. More specifically, this includes discussions of participation in traditional activities (e.g., hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering wild plants), arts and crafts, and attendance at Métis-specific organizations and cultural events, as well as consumption of traditional foods, and spiritual and religious practices. Aboriginal language acquisition and use are also examined.

Fishing a common activity among Métis

Historically, Métis have been involved in traditional activities such as fishing, hunting and trapping.^{13,14} Métis also played a prominent role in the fur trade.¹⁵ To this day, many Métis continue to fish, hunt and trap.¹⁶

Fishing is a common traditional activity among the Métis. In 2006, about 40% of the adult Métis population had fished in the last 12 months. Most Métis fished for

What you should know about this study

About the Aboriginal Peoples Survey and Métis Supplement Questionnaire

The 2006 Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS) provides an extensive set of data about Métis, Inuit and off-reserve First Nations adults 15 years of age and over and children aged 6 to 14, living in urban, rural and northern locations across Canada. The Aboriginal Peoples Survey was conducted between October 2006 and March 2007. Personal interviews were conducted in Inuit communities, the Northwest Territories (except for Yellowknife) and in other remote areas, while telephone interviews were conducted elsewhere. The overall response rate for the Aboriginal Peoples Survey was 80.1%.

This study focuses on the Métis population 15 and older. The Métis population includes those who reported identifying as Métis (either as a single response or in combination with North American Indian and/or Inuit). Data in this study are for the off-reserve Métis population only except for those living in the three territories where the on-reserve population is included. Also not included are those living in institutions.

The APS survey was developed by Statistics Canada in partnership with the following national Aboriginal organizations: Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, Métis National Council, National Association of Friendship Centres, and the Native Women's Association of Canada. The following federal departments sponsored the 2006 APS: Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Health Canada, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and Canadian Heritage.

Métis supplement

The Métis supplement was designed specifically for the Métis population and it was given to people 15 years of age and older who identified themselves as Métis and/or who have Métis ancestry. The supplemental questionnaire was developed by Métis organizations in cooperation with Statistics Canada. This supplemental survey asks a wide variety of questions regarding family background, child welfare, social interaction, and health (for more information, please see the *Aboriginal Peoples Survey 2006 and Métis Supplement*, and *Aboriginal Peoples Survey, 2006: Concepts and Methods Guide*).

pleasure (87%) and/or for food (74%). Young Métis were more likely than their older counterparts to have fished. For example, 46% of 15- to 19-year-old Métis fished in the 12 months preceding the survey, compared to 24% of Métis 65 years and older (Chart 1). Métis women and Métis living in urban areas were less likely to have participated in this activity compared to men or those living in rural areas.

In 2006, 15% of all adult Métis had hunted in the previous 12 months and most stated that they hunted for food (89%) and/or for pleasure (64%). There were differences across regions and gender. About one-quarter of rural Métis hunted compared to 10% of urban Métis. About one in four Métis men had hunted compared to less than one in ten Métis women (data not shown).

While Métis in the past were extensively involved in trapping, in

2006 only 2% of Métis had trapped in the previous 12 months. There were no significant age differences among Métis who trapped in the last 12 months (Chart 1). Trapping was more likely to be carried out by Métis men and those living in rural areas. Among Métis who participated in trapping, their reasons included doing so for pleasure (52%), for food (45%), and for commercial purposes (39%).

Gathering wild plants

In 2006, nearly three in ten (29%) Métis indicated they had gathered wild plants (e.g., berries, wild rice or sweetgrass) in the previous 12 months. Those 65 and over (18%) were less likely to gather such vegetation compared to those younger (see Chart 1). Not surprisingly, Métis living in rural areas were more likely to have gathered wild vegetation compared to urban Métis (41% versus 25%). Métis men

and women were equally likely to state that they had gathered wild vegetation.

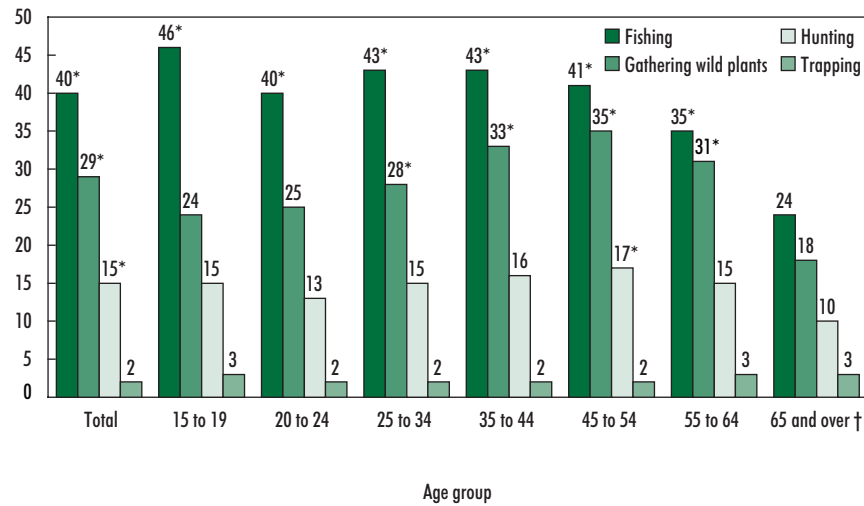
Métis living in rural areas more likely to consume traditional foods than those living in urban areas

Consumption of traditional foods represents important ties to social and cultural aspects of life among Aboriginal people.^{17,18} Among Métis, traditional foods and related activities have conventionally engendered stronger ties to Métis culture and community.¹⁹ In the past, the sharing of wild meat and staple foods was commonplace in Métis communities.²⁰

In 2006, almost one in five Métis (17%) reported that they "often" consumed land-based animals (e.g. moose, caribou, bear, deer and buffalo), while 35% reported consuming such animals "a few times"

Chart 1 Fishing, the most common traditional activity among adult Métis in 2006

percentage of adult Métis (15 years and older)



† reference group

* statistically significant difference from reference group at $p < 0.05$ for the same activity

Source: Statistics Canada, Aboriginal Peoples Survey, 2006.

in the year preceding the survey (Table 1).

Métis men (21%) were more likely to eat land-based animals "often" compared with women (14%). Rural-dwelling Métis (29%) were more than twice as likely to regularly eat land-based animals compared to urban Métis (13%). This is in line with the finding that Métis in rural areas are more likely to hunt compared to urban Métis.

Métis living in the Northwest Territories, Yukon, and Newfoundland and Labrador were more likely to have consumed land-based animals "often" compared to their counterparts in other provinces (Table 1).

Overall, about one in five Métis stated that they often consumed fresh water fish. Frequent consumption of fresh water fish was higher among older age groups and those living in rural areas. Similarly, older Métis consumed salt water fish more often than their younger counterparts.

In 2006, about 4% of Métis stated that they often consumed game birds and a smaller percentage (2%) often

Table 1 Percentage of Métis who consume traditional foods "often", Métis population aged 15 and over, by province, 2006

	Land-based animals ¹	Fresh water fish	Salt water fish	Game birds	Small game	Berries or other wild vegetation	Bannock
	percentage						
Canada †	17	19	13	4	2	17	12
Newfoundland and Labrador	32*	28*	35*	15* ^E	12* ^E	21	6* ^E
Prince Edward Island	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Nova Scotia	10* ^E	13 ^E	40*	x	F	26*	x
New Brunswick	13 ^E	13 ^E	29*	x	x	28*	x
Quebec	16	28*	23*	9*	3* ^E	23*	4*
Ontario	16	23*	11	6	2 ^E	22*	5*
Manitoba	16	20	6*	4	2 ^E	12*	16*
Saskatchewan	24*	19	5*	4	3 ^E	16	25*
Alberta	17	14*	10*	2*	1* ^E	13*	18*
British Columbia	15	15*	22*	1* ^E	x	16	9*
Yukon	41*	32* ^E	14 ^E	x	x	23 ^E	23* ^E
Northwest Territories	44*	33*	4* ^E	12* ^E	6* ^E	22	31*

† reference group

* statistically significant difference from reference group at $p < 0.05$

1. Land-based animals such as moose, caribou, bear, deer, buffalo, etc.

Source: Statistics Canada, Aboriginal Peoples Survey, 2006.

consumed small game like rabbit or muskrat. Not surprisingly, those living in rural areas were more likely to have consumed these animals “often”. For example, about one in ten Métis living in rural areas often consumed game birds compared with 3% of those living in urban areas.

In the year prior to the survey, nearly one in five (17%) Métis had often consumed berries or other wild vegetation (e.g., wild rice), and about one in ten (12%) had often consumed bannock or fried bread (Table 1).

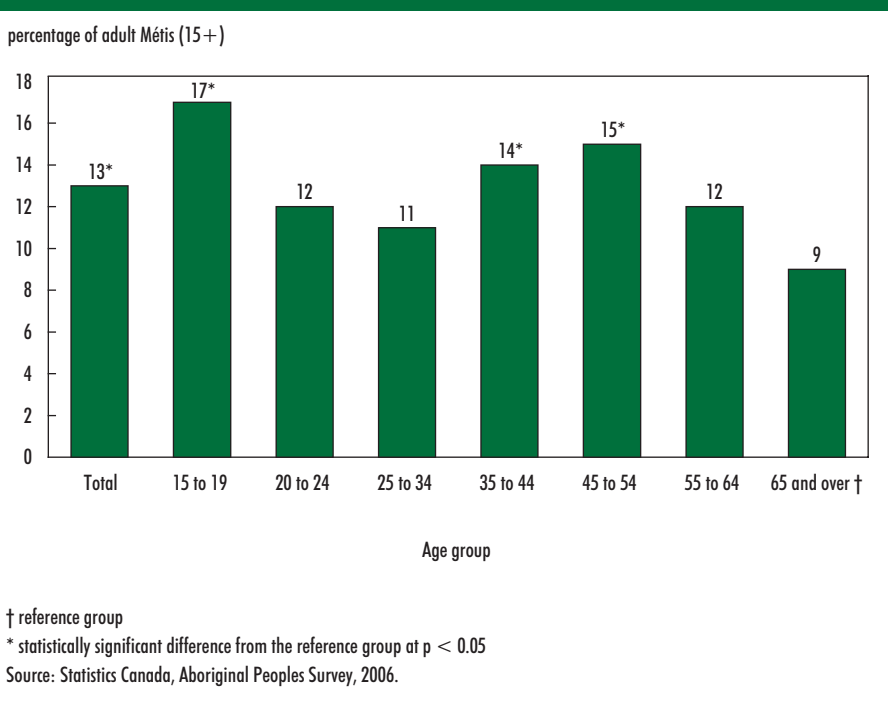
Young Métis more likely to be involved in traditional arts and crafts than older Métis

Arts and crafts have traditionally been a part of cultural and economic activities undertaken by Métis.²¹ These have included making clothing, needlework, toys,²² beadwork, quillwork and embroidery.²³

In 2006, 13% of all adult Métis (15 years and older) were involved in traditional art or craftwork. There were significant differences across the age groups. Younger Métis were more likely to be involved compared to older Métis. For instance, Métis between the ages of 15 and 19 years were more likely to be involved in creating traditional arts and crafts (17%) than those who were 65 years and older (9%) (Chart 2).

The most common types of art or craftwork reported by Métis included beadwork (33%), painting (18%) and leatherwork (14%). In general, Métis women were more likely to be involved in arts and crafts activities than Métis men (16% versus 10%). However, some of these activities are highly gendered so it is not surprising that there were significant gender differences in certain types of activities. Métis women were more likely to be involved in beadwork (44% versus 14%) and sewing (11% versus 5%) than men. On the other hand, men were more likely to carve (18% versus 4%) and do woodwork (12% versus 3%) than women. Gender-specific differences were not seen for leatherwork, pottery, weaving, sculpting, painting or embroidery.

Chart 2 One in eight adult Métis involved in traditional art or craftwork in 2006



Attendance at Métis cultural events more common in the Northwest Territories, Manitoba and Saskatchewan

Many Aboriginal people maintain connections with their spirituality, traditions and culture through participation in powwows, sweat lodges, social and political Aboriginal organizations, and other traditional activities. While there is some evidence of Métis practices to maintain cultural,^{24,25} social, and political ties^{26,27} through celebrations (Métis Nation Day, Chivaree, Louis Riel Day²⁸), little information is available for Métis across Canada today. To begin to address this knowledge gap, the following sections explore Métis participation in cultural, social and political organizations, including religious and spiritual practices.

In 2006, about one-quarter (26%) of all Métis in Canada reported attending a Métis event (cultural event, festival pilgrimage, or Métis artist performance) in the previous 12 months. One in five (18%) Métis

had attended a Métis event five or more years ago. In contrast, about 30% of all Métis in Canada had never attended a Métis event. Attendance was higher in some jurisdictions. Just over 40% of all Métis living in the Northwest Territories had attended a Métis cultural event in the last 12 months compared to about 35% in Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

Those age 35 and older more likely to be members of Métis organizations

In 2006, (17%) of Métis aged 15 and older indicated that they were members of Métis cultural, social or political organizations. Métis adults were more likely to be members if they were 35 years of age and older (20%) compared to those between 15 and 34 years of age (12%). Likewise, Métis living in rural areas were more likely to be members of Métis organizations compared to urban Métis (data not shown). Among members, 27% regularly participated in activities or meetings for these organizations (Chart 3). Those aged

25 to 34 were the least likely of all the age groups to regularly participate (15%).

Many Métis adults very or moderately spiritual or religious

People may also participate in spiritual or religious activities in order to feel connected to their community. Spirituality and religiosity are a large part of maintaining optimal holistic health and well-being among many Métis.²⁹ Many Métis have combined traditional Aboriginal spiritualism and Roman Catholicism.³⁰ For example, about one in five Métis (21%) consider themselves to be “very” spiritual or religious and another (43%) consider themselves to be “moderately” spiritual or religious. At the other end of the scale, about one in five Métis do not consider themselves to be very spiritual or religious, and another one in ten indicated they were not at all spiritual or religious.

The spiritual and religious practices of Métis are diverse. For example, some Métis maintain their religious

or spiritual well-being through prayer (36%), attending church (30%), meditation (20%), talking with elders (15%), participating in pilgrimages (5%), or attending sweat lodges 4%. Just over 20% of all Métis used some “other” means of maintaining religious/spiritual well-being.

Cree the predominant Aboriginal language spoken among Métis

Aboriginal language knowledge has been used as one measure of cultural continuity. The Métis people from the Prairies have traditionally spoken many First Nation languages and the distinct language, Michif, which is a composite language derived from French and Cree.^{31,32} The use of these languages is said to help foster the relationship between Métis and the land, water and food.³³

According to the 2006 Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS), 10% of Métis aged 15 years and older spoke an Aboriginal language. All Métis who spoke an Aboriginal language also

spoke at least one official language: 88% spoke English, 1% French, and 11% both English and French.

While only a minority of Métis in 2006 spoke an Aboriginal language, many viewed learning, re-learning and keeping their Aboriginal language as important. In 2006, 48% of Métis adults indicated that learning, re-learning or keeping their Aboriginal language was “very” or “somewhat” important to them. Many Métis (39%) also indicated that it was “very” or “fairly” important for their children to learn an Aboriginal language.

Among the Métis who spoke an Aboriginal language, Cree was most predominantly spoken at 64%, followed by Ojibway (10%) and Michif (7%).

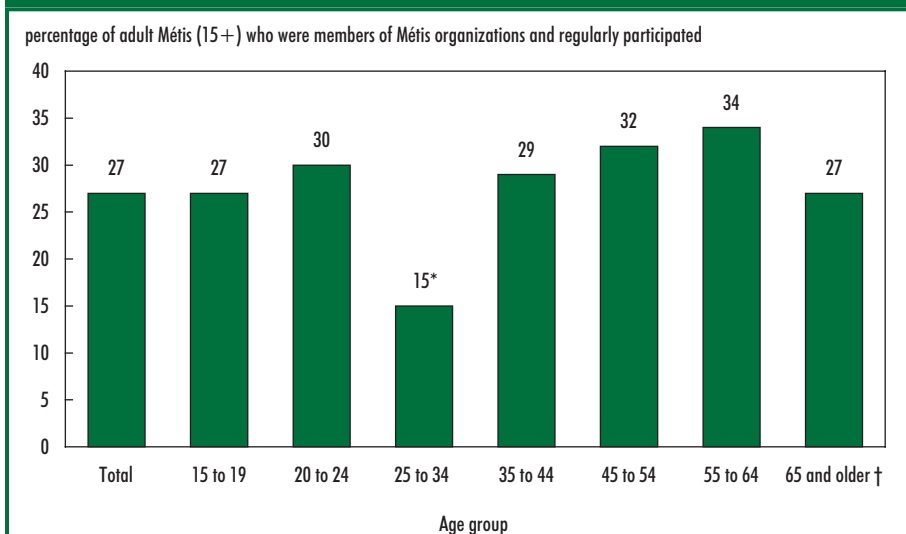
Nearly one-quarter of Métis in Saskatchewan speak Aboriginal languages

In 2006, the largest proportion of Métis adults who spoke an Aboriginal language was in Saskatchewan (24%), significantly more than the 16% in Alberta. In Manitoba and British Columbia, about the same proportion of Métis adults spoke an Aboriginal language (8% and 6% respectively).

There were also significant regional differences in the Aboriginal languages spoken by Métis across Canada (Chart 4). For example, almost all (87%) Alberta Métis who could speak an Aboriginal language spoke Cree, while in Saskatchewan and British Columbia more than six in ten spoke Cree. In Manitoba, there were no statistically significant differences in the likelihood of Métis speaking Cree (48%) or Ojibway (32%). In Ontario, the predominant language among those who could speak an Aboriginal language was Ojibway (46%) compared to 17% who spoke Cree.

In 2006, those living in urban and rural areas were equally likely to report that they could speak an Aboriginal language. However, Métis living in rural areas who spoke an Aboriginal language were more than twice as likely to report that they

Chart 3 About one-third of those who were members of Métis cultural, social or political organizations participated regularly¹ in meetings or activities in 2006



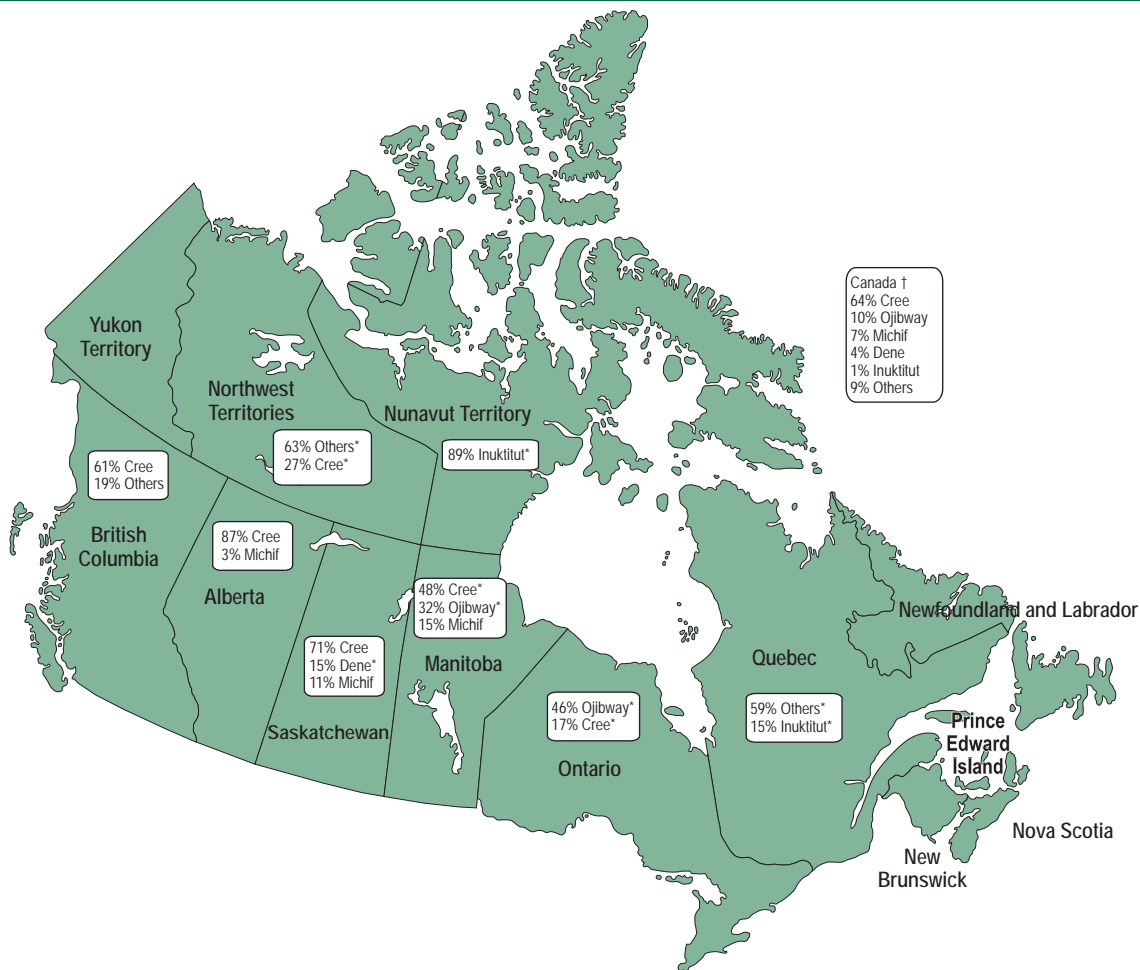
† reference group

* statistically significant difference from reference group at $p < 0.05$

1. Regular participation is defined as participating in meetings or activities “at least once a week”, “at least once a month” or “at least 3 or 4 times a year.”

Source: Statistics Canada, Aboriginal Peoples Survey, 2006.

Map Aboriginal languages reported by Métis who speak an Aboriginal language, Métis population of Canada aged 15 and over, 2006



† reference group

* statistically significant difference from reference group at $p < 0.05$

Notes: Percentages for Aboriginal languages are not presented for the Atlantic provinces or the Yukon Territory because the samples were too small.

Percentage may not add to 100 because some categories were suppressed to protect confidentiality.

Source: Statistics Canada, Aboriginal Peoples Survey, 2006.

spoke that language “very well” compared to those living in urban areas (32% versus 14%).

Older Métis more likely to speak an Aboriginal language, and likely to speak it well

In general, among Métis adults under the age of 65, around one in ten stated that they spoke an Aboriginal language. Métis over 65 years of age were more likely to speak an Aboriginal language (16%).

Among younger Métis (15 to 19 years) who could speak an Aboriginal language, 18% reported

speaking it “very well” or “relatively well.” A significantly higher percentage of Métis 65 and older who could speak an Aboriginal language said they could speak “very well” or “relatively well” (67%).

Summary

Canada’s Aboriginal people have a rich and culturally diverse heritage. Examining some aspects of Métis culture can provide opportunities to better understand and gain an appreciation for the culture of a distinct group of people within the Aboriginal population.

This article explores potential Métis cultural continuity indicators like participation in traditional activities including hunting, fishing and trapping, and Aboriginal language knowledge.

Among traditional hunting and gathering methods, fishing was the most predominant activity. About 40% of Métis had fished during the year leading up to the survey and about 10% had hunted.

Métis also participated in other traditional activities, such as gathering wild vegetation, and creating traditional arts and crafts.

Beadwork and painting were the more popular traditional arts and crafts among Métis.

About one-quarter of the adult Métis population had attended a Métis cultural or social event and about 20% were members of Métis cultural, social or political organizations.

Across Canada, one in ten Métis spoke an Aboriginal language. The most commonly spoken Aboriginal language for Métis varied by region: in Alberta, Saskatchewan and British Columbia it was Cree; in Manitoba it was Cree and Ojibway; and in Ontario it was Ojibway.

The findings also highlight that any discussion of 'common' cultural activities has to occur in a context that considers the individual's background. For example, Métis who created traditional arts and crafts were more likely to be young, while older Métis were more likely to be members of Métis organizations and speak an Aboriginal language. In addition, a more in-depth exploration of arts and crafts indicated that some of these activities were gendered—with beadwork being common among women, and carving and woodwork common among men.



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1. There are three distinct groups of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, as defined by the 1982 Constitution Act. These are the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada. According to the 2006 Census, an estimated 389,785 people identified themselves as Métis, accounting for one-third (33%) of Aboriginal people.
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