

**From One Young Woman to Two Old Women:
How Cultural Continuity Is Illustrated Through Athabascan Values**

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My great grandmother died when she is over one hundred years old. No white hair. That is because she's trained right. Me, I had that training too. Spent two weeks away from camp. You have to take crowskin, pull out those crows feathers and weave in hair under that mooseskin cap. That's so your hair will stay black

— Julie Cruikshank, *Athapaskan Women: Lives and Legends*

Later, in our winter cabin, I wrote the story down. I was impressed with it because it not only taught me a lesson that I could use in my life, but also because it was a story about my people and my past – something about me that I could grasp and call mine

—Velma Wallis, *Two Old Women*

To borrow words from children's television presenters everywhere, do not attempt this at home without adult supervision. The woman in the first quote was fully trained and therefore able to carry out her task safely with minimal risk to herself and all those around her. That is to say, the woman in the above quote received formal instruction in adolescence to prepare her for her future life. In Alaska and Canada prior to the nineteenth century, Athabascan girls went through an intensive education system. With the onset of first menses girls went into seclusion for up to a year, living in a specially constructed shelter on their own, yet under the watchful eye of their mother. As Cruikshank (1979) explains they went to a "school." The "curriculum" consisted of very intense courses, explaining to the girls how they become women. The purpose of this "school" was wide-ranging. The girls had to learn how to contribute to the community; the duties expected of a wife and mother; how to become mentally and physically fit; how to

protect the community, herself and her future children; and how to become the ideal Athabascan woman (Libby 1952: 3). For the duration of seclusion, as the mother would visit and care for the girl, she would instruct her on Athabascan values and important protocols concerning womanhood. One of the ways mothers would teach their daughters was through the use of stories.

In contemporary Athabascan societies cultural values have endured. Nonetheless, circumstances surrounding instruction and methods used to teach cultural values have changed with each generation. Multi-generational oral stories have been published, such as Velma Wallis' two books, *Two Old Women* (2004) and *Bird Girl Follows the Sun* (1997), therefore adapting the transmission of values. The first legend published, *Two Old Women*, was told to Wallis by her mother. The story is based on two women, Ch'idzigaak and Sa' and their journey of survival in harsh Alaskan winter conditions. The two women had become complacent about their roles in society and were abandoned by the group. Choosing survival over death, the two women flourished while the rest of the band faced devastating hardship. On reuniting with the community the women once again became valued members. These stories hold important cultural lessons as the second quote illustrates, perhaps not explicit instructions on how to retain your hair color, yet cultural values all the same. As a result girls can now read for themselves the lessons which their mothers would have once told them during seclusion.

In the information which follows, cultural continuity in today's Northern Athabascan societies is illustrated. By comparing and contrasting Northern Athabascan people's puberty observances and seclusion with Velma Wallis' book *Two Old Women*, evidence of this continuity can be seen in the continuance of Northern Athabascan values such as self-sufficiency, hard work, and responsibility to village. By first examining the early ethnographic

scholarship and marking the changes over time, the transition of cultural continuity into contemporary society will be shown. In the last two sections, illustrations of how such values have endured into the present day, and discussions of the significance of the changes in puberty observance and teaching of traditional values have been shown. This information proves that continuity endures through the values that were taught to young women at the time of puberty seclusion and observances.

Early Ethnographic Scholarship

Northern Athabascan societies have proved an ideal case study for ethnographic research throughout the twentieth century. At the beginning of the 1900s, Lowie and Boas, leading anthropologists and ethnographers in the field of American Indians encouraged scholars to gather information from indigenous cultures. At that time, Boas believed North American tribes would vanish within twenty years (Hinsley 1981: 277). Unlike tribes from the lower 48, the northern societies remained isolated from western culture for a longer period of time. The isolation of the Northern Athabascan bands provided ethnographers of the second quarter of the century with a record of societal cultures prior to western religious influence.

While many ethnographers in the region have discussed puberty observances (de Laguna 1972:518-523; McClellan 1975: 345, 259, 385), four ethnographers, who conducted interviews from the 1930s to the 1970s, are of particular interest in this study because they mention women's puberty observances in Athabascan societies. Cornelius Osgood worked with the Gwich'in in both Alaska and Canada in 1932 (Osgood 1970); Dorothy Libby worked over the summer of 1948 and 1949 in Southern Yukon Territory, Canada (Libby 1952); Anna Rooth worked in 1966 in Alaska (Rooth 1971) and Julie Cruikshank worked in Yukon Territory 1975 –

1976 (Cruikshank 1979). These ethnographers interviewed Athabascan women on both sides of the Alaska/ Canada border. Taken together, the interviews reveal changes which occurred for girls throughout the Twentieth Century as well as the similarities in puberty observances, and seclusion among Northern Athabascan groups. The ethnographic interviews with Northern Athabascan women all include information on puberty observances. Many of these authors fail to offer analysis of the information they gathered, however, they do offer detailed accounts of their interviews and findings, providing material for later analysis.

Cornelius Osgood appears to be one of the most referenced authors for Northern Athabascan peoples. Writing for Yale publications in Anthropology he has worked with many Northern Athabascan tribes on both sides of the border. Osgood's aim was to record as much information about Gwich'in Athabascans as possible. Of particular interest to this study are Osgood's 1936 records on puberty observances for Peel River, Crow River and Gwich'in (1970). While the information gathered is informative, his work is purely descriptive, and devoid of any interpretation. Of particular concern is his lack of female informants. It becomes clear in his comments on puberty seclusion that he has no female voice explaining the importance of the rituals. For example Osgood regarded puberty observances as "an extended period of taboos for girls" (Osgood 1970: 141) as opposed to contemporary researchers, such as Carol Markstrom, who refer to puberty observances as the essential educational training which prepares the girl for her role in life (Markstrom 2008). Osgood's work is nonetheless a useful starting point for recording commonalities in Athabascan culture.

The earliest study which focuses on Athabascan women's puberty rites is by Dorothy Libby. Libby researched *Girls' puberty observances among Northern Athabascans* for her 1952 Ph.D. dissertation. While Libby acknowledges regional variances among Northern Athabascan

tribe's puberty observances, she concludes that the purpose remains the same, to prepare girls for womanhood. Libby drew from the ethnographic work of researchers, such as Osgood and McClellan, and compared them to research she gathered from four villages, Teslin, Carcross, Klikshu, and Burwash Landing. She builds her arguments by exemplifying Teslin village as a case study for puberty observances. To her credit, her appendix holds a list of the differences which she found in puberty ceremonies across Northern Athabaskan tribes. Libby also used her appendix to list taboos for post pubescent girls. While her work is thorough, interviewing women to gain their perspective, Libby does not examine the changes which occurred in women's lives during this period and the adaptation of the ceremonies that occurred as a result.

Anna Rooth's and Julie Cruikshank's work on Athabaskan women includes interviews with women about puberty seclusion and observances. In comparison to the other authors Rooth decided to work in Alaska because she thought it to be "a blank spot" on the map (Rooth 1982: 1). The information Rooth gathered on Alaskan Athabaskan women provides the reader with a bridge between Alaskan and Canadian Athabaskan women's puberty rites and observances. While Rooth's interviews highlight the changes in seclusion, due to government run schools among other things, Rooth fails to show the continuance of puberty observances. In comparison, Cruikshank's work for the National Canadian Museum, illustrates the importance of the continuation of puberty observances through interviews with five Canadian Northern Athabaskan women. While Cruikshank intentionally left out her analysis because she wanted the women's voices to speak for themselves, her choice of stories illustrates the importance of values in the women's lives. Cruikshank does later develop her analysis in her three books *Life Lived Like a Story* (1990), *The Social Life of Stories* (1998) and *Do glaciers listen?: local knowledge, colonial encounters, and social imagination* (2005).

Continuity endures through the values that were taught to young women at the time of puberty seclusion and observances. Cruikshank however argues that in today's society continuity comes only from a women's role as a wife and mother (Cruikshank 1975: 12). While this is a complex area of study that has been little researched, Cruikshank's statement could be disagreed with. While certain practices such as seclusion are no longer followed, the continuity of values in Northern Athabaskan bands is still present. Cruikshank further explains that while for young mothers continuity exists, for young girls and older woman, "there is little day to day continuity with the past and little relationship with women of other generations" (Cruikshank 1975: 12). Again here there is a role still for older and younger generations even if the role has somewhat changed. Cruikshank states that the loss of continuity is due to the disappearance of puberty seclusion, which has a direct relation to older women, who have lost their role as a teacher (Cruikshank 1975: 12). What is explored in this paper is not the adaptation of the vehicle, but the continuity of the values. To date, there is essentially no research on modern day puberty observances in Northern Athabaskan groups. Carol A. Markstrom, who researched puberty ceremonies in North America (2008), emphasizes the positive reactions which her interviewees shared after experiencing Apache and Navajo puberty ceremonies. This leads me to question whether there is a correlation between the loss of puberty ceremonies in Northern Athabaskan bands and displacement issues that teenagers face in contemporary Indigenous society, an issue that needs further research.

Changes Over Time

While individually the interviews show the seclusion and puberty observances for specific bands at any given point in time, collectively the interviews show the transition of the

practices into the government school era. Through the development of urban areas in Alaska and Canada, and the incorporation of fixed communities, seclusion observances changed. Housing alone transformed the place of seclusion as girls no longer traveled miles from camp but drew closer and closer towards the family home. Finally, as government day and boarding schools were introduced for Indigenous peoples across the United States and Canada, the opportunity to leave for a period of time during first and subsequent menses ended.

As the earliest ethnographical record of seclusion, Osgood's work provides examples of the different elements of seclusion and puberty observances. While on seclusion, the girls "live for a period up to a year in a special shelter constructed for the purpose, sometimes a mile away from the regular camp" (Osgood 1970: 141). The physical seclusion of a girl from her family allowed girls to be educated in every principle of what they needed to become a woman. The regulation of girl's eating habits was a common theme in Athabascan seclusion, because of the power of a girl during her first menses. Osgood states that the girls had to avoid fresh meat (Osgood 1970: 141). If a girl ate fresh meat, her power would affect the supply of fresh meat the hunters could catch. Food taboo is one area of continuity throughout the interviews. The regulation of food extends further than what the girls could or could not eat. As one woman explains, "Little kids came. They gave me a dish of food. I take one bite, give it to the kids. I have to do that so I won't be stingy with food when I'm older. Also it teaches me not to be hungry. That's why we never eat breakfast yet today" (Cruikshank 1979: 17). This was one way to insure women were trained to put other people first when it came to food.

In his research, Osgood states that all the girls wore a hood. He describes the hood as being pointed, and states that it "hangs down in front almost to the waist so that the girl can only see the ground at her feet" (Osgood 1970: 141). This hood seems to be a common piece of

clothing for all the girls throughout seclusion. When girls undergo first menses, they are in their most powerful state. The covering up of the head is for the protection of the band as well as the girl. The hood is to both stop the girl being looked at and to stop the girl gazing on other people, so that no one will be harmed by the girl's power. The hood also serves the purpose of making the girls focus on their hands, as during this time of seclusion, girls learned to perfect the skill of sewing.

With the onset of her first menses, a girl was no longer considered a child. Thus, the skills and values she would be taught while in seclusion were the skills and values she would need as she emerged from seclusion in her new role, an adult member of her community. While in seclusion, the girl was to sew and prepare articles of clothing for her family and community. As one of Rooth's interviewees explains; "This woman she had a hood. Long hood way down this far (pointed down to her waist), so she can't look either way. She just look straight down on what she is doing. This woman she got to sew all the time, keep sewing all the time" (Rooth 1971: 180). Another lady explains; "They teach them sew. Sew for everyone. You're going to be good at sewing then" (Cruikshank 1979: 15). Many of the girls reported that they had to keep their hands busy at all times, Libby explains that this is so she would not become lazy in the future (Libby 1952: 104).

Libby does not account for the complex set of skills the girl is required to learn. The girl would undergo an intense system of training in order to learn the intricate skills of sewing. This would require the girl to be sewing from morning till night. In the harsh winter climate, clothes form an important part of survival. As one woman explains; "I heard about young girl becoming woman. When they got to be woman, put them away, teach them to live. Learn to sew, learn to work. They learn the ways of life—how to survive" (Cruikshank 1979: 19). When a girl learns

to sew, she is not sewing just for decoration, she is sewing the clothes that will keep her and her family alive during the cold dark winter, a skill that requires rigorous training. For a detailed account of the importance of sewing in Arctic and Subarctic cultures read Betty Kobayashi Issenman's book *Sinews of Survival* (1997).

Through the development of urban areas in Alaska and Canada and the increase in fixed communities, the skills a girl would need to become a woman in her community changed, and as a direct result, so did seclusion. As Frances Wilson, who would have undergone seclusion in the 1930s explains,

When I first got my period I told my mother. For five days I had to be put in bed and had a curtain around the bed... If one had to go out one must put a shawl of wool thrown all over you, so you couldn't see around... For the first whole year you had to stay for yourself... you could not touch any of the boys' things. If you did, that would bring bad luck to them in their fishing or hunting. (Rooth 1971: 51)

Frances Wilson's example demonstrates how the family had changed the distance of seclusion. In forty-six years the families had adapted the place of seclusion from being a mile away from the home to being secluded in the home. It is also worth noting here that the pointed hood, which Osgood describes in his 1936 study, has now developed into a shawl.

The greatest change for girls undergoing puberty observances and seclusion came from the introduction of government schooling. The following quote from Miss Hendrichs, a teacher from Eagle, illustrates how girls were encouraged not to take time off from school for the sake of seclusion. This account would have taken place around 1926.

When I first went to the village [Eagle] I found that it was a custom that when the girls come to maturity they were put into little skin tent or some kind of a little enclosure back of the village. And she was kept there for about two weeks when she first came into maturity. (Rooth 1971: 285)

Miss Hendrichs explains that Laura was kept from school. Miss Hendrichs visited Laura's mother and asked for her to be sent back. After some effort, Laura's mother agreed, but there was one proviso, Laura must go to and from school the back way.

After third day I said, "You want to go home right down the street?" She said, she had better not and I said. "I walk down with you." And I walked down the street with her – this first time... [as] I went by there I noticed a number of faces in the windows... the next day I walked down with Laura, I found that the chief had put a big canvass in front of his windows and in front of his door [laughter]. They did not want to see that girl... when the next incident come and the next girl [come to mature] she did not stop from coming to school. But she must hurry right home and not be seen out around the village. But it just gradually wore off, you know, and they kind of forgot about it. (Rooth 1971: 285)

This example indicates the efforts people made to enforce puberty observances. Whereas the hood from Osgood's example was later replaced by a shawl, it is now people in the village who are blocking the girl from their view.

As compulsory schooling was introduced the act of seclusion stopped, yet girls still knew and practiced regulations concerning first menses. One of the women Cruikshank interviewed did not undergo seclusion, as she was in residential school at the time. However, the girl's mother had taken time to prepare her for the event. She explains; "I learned the laws before I

start to school. My mother explain things to me... I'm in school these days so I don't go away like that, but my mother told me things I shouldn't do that first time, so I try to keep to the law" (Cruikshank 1979: 15-16). These quotes illustrate the adaptations both the girls and their families made to puberty observances. The fact that observances were adapted demonstrates the importance these values had in the lives of the women. To bring the discussion to the present, although research would indicate that puberty seclusion has stopped, the Athabascan cultural values which were taught to girls are still evident in today's societies.

Cultural Continuity in Contemporary Society

Cultural continuity exists in today's Northern Athabascan societies through Athabascan values, which the girls were previously taught during puberty seclusion. However, the channel for transmission of these values has changed from oral to written. At the 1985 Denakkanaaga Elders and Youth Conference, Athabascan elders sat together to determine a list of Athabascan values which they felt had survived the test of time. The list has been published in the form of a poster by Alaska Native Knowledge Network and is widely respected by Athabascan people. The list of values can be seen in Appendix 1.

As many Native Athabascans choose to live in urban areas, such as Fairbanks and Anchorage, the importance of cultural values portrayed in published stories, such as Velma Wallis' book *Two Old Women*, becomes paramount to continuity. Wallis wrote *Two Old Women* based on a story her mother used to tell her. The story unfolds around two main characters, Ch'idzigyaak and Sa'. These characters, the two old women, had become complacent about their role in the band. While the women had become burdensome, only taking from the group and not contributing anything back in return, the band had also stopped respecting the women as

a wealth of knowledge. While the group was preparing to move to their winter camp in search of food, they made the difficult decision to leave the two women behind to die. The women, however, did not die, but instead thrived as they re-connected with their skills and used their experiences to their advantage. By the end of the book we see the women and the band reunited. This time around, the women contribute to the success of the band, and the band values the knowledge of the women.

We do not know whether Wallis underwent puberty observances herself or not. However, Rachel Ramsey, who wrote “Salvage Ethnography and Gender Politics in *Two Old Women: Velma Wallis's Retelling of a Gwich'in Oral Story*,” states that “It seems probable and even likely that Wallis would be aware of these [puberty] customs” (Ramsey 1999: 8). While the text does not deal directly with puberty observances, the journey of the two women mirrors certain aspects of puberty seclusion. Seth Myers, who wrote his master’s thesis on Wallis, explores the idea that Wallis’ mother would have adapted the story for her daughter. Myers explains; “The teller and the listener by their physical proximity have many clues with which to create the meaning of the story mutually and manipulate that meaning through continual cues. Thus, a roll of the eyes and Wallis’ mother may change tack, however subtly” (Myers 2006: 26). It becomes probable then, that this story which was told to Wallis by her mother when they were both trapping in the wilderness, was told to explain values which Wallis would have gained from puberty seclusion.

Enduring Values

There are many similarities between the values taught to the girls who underwent seclusion and puberty observances, and the values portrayed through the story *Two Old Women*.

Evident values which develop out of both are self-sufficiency, hard work, and responsibility to village. Although these may appear contrasting values, to Athabaskan peoples they can mean the difference between life and death. Phyllis Fast, author of *Northern Athabaskan Survival: Women, community, and the future* (2002), explains the concept.

For the Gwich'in trust means knowing that the other knows survival skills and social responsibilities with respect to physical survival. Gwich'in author Velma Wallis's 1993 novel *Two Old Women* is a contemporary written statement about the complex ideal of combined trust and interdependency. (Fast 2002: 37)

Fast's explanation of the need for stringent rules as a form of survival, illustrates the importance of values in Athabaskan society.

While these values may become apparent to Athabaskan readers of Wallis' work, Genie Babb (1997) argues that Western readers may simply filter out the values for the sake of the story. It therefore becomes evident that Wallis' text can be interpreted many different ways. The multi-layering that occurs in order for the different readership to engage with the text is one element of storytelling which would have been prevalent in the stories which mothers would have told their children. The same stories would be told to all members of society, irrespective of age. As the children matured they would begin to understand the different layers to the stories, thus gaining new information. In the same way, the daughters would learn new values from these stories, told during this time of seclusion, just as Wallis would have learned values from the story her mother told her (Libby 1952: 105). With this in mind one can start to see similarities in the values girls were taught by their mothers, and the values Wallis' mother would have been teaching her by telling this story.

While self-sufficiency and hard work can be seen through puberty observances such as sewing, in *Two Old Women* these values can be found when the women start to fight for survival. Throughout the book, the two women come to term with the agonizing truth that the reason they were left behind was because they had outlived their usefulness.

‘We are like babies,’ Sa’ responded. The older woman looked up in surprise at such an admission. ‘We are like helpless babies.’... ‘We have learned much during our long lives. Yet there we were in our old age, thinking that we had done our share in life. So we stopped, just like that. No more working like we used to, even though our bodies are still healthy enough to do a little more than we expect of ourselves.’ (Wallis 2004: 26)

From the above quote, one can see that the women became lazy. They felt that they had earned their rest and need not give to the community. One can begin to see comparisons between the values in this story and the values which mothers teach their daughters during seclusion. A girl in seclusion is expected to keep busy all day and produce articles of clothing for the whole community.

In *Two Old Women*, Ch’idzigyaak and Sa’ realize they have only two choices. They can work hard and live or do nothing and die; they decide they would rather die trying. From this point in the book, the women struggled, doing what they must in order to survive the harsh winter. The following quotes, which illustrate the old women’s efforts to survive, echo the earlier quotes of the girl’s lives while in seclusion. “They spent all their waking hours collecting firewood from underneath the deep snow” (Wallis 2004: 67); “At nightfall, when their daily chores were completed, the women wove the rabbit fur into blankets and clothing, such as mittens and face coverings” (Wallis 2004: 70); “These tasks kept them so busy they were up

from early morning until late at night” (Wallis 2004: 83). While the women did what they must to survive, the reader will gain from their story the importance of hard work. Further, as the above quote from Fast states, the reader will also understand the importance of being able to look after oneself, in order to survive. Although in a modern setting, Athabascan readers would not have such an extreme experience surviving day to day, the values hold just as true in contemporary society. As Wallis herself explains, “This story told me that there is no limit to one’s ability” (Wallis 2004: xiii). Thus the reader relates the experiences of the women to modern day situations.

By the end of the book, the reader is reassured that hard work rewards itself, when a year later, which coincidentally happens to be the same length of seclusion for girls, the tribe comes back to look for the women. While the women have survived because of hard work, utilizing everything in their path and working from morning to night, the rest of the group have been struggling to survive the harsh winter. When scouts for the band at last find the women, they are surprised. “With astonishment, the men realized these two women not only had survived but also sat before them in good health while they, the strongest men of the band, were starved” (Wallis 2004: 113). Throughout the book, Wallis never once makes direct mention of the old women undergoing puberty observances or seclusion. Yet, one has to wonder, when Wallis writes, “The women long ago had been tutored in the skills and patience required” (Wallis 2004: 77), if this was perhaps what the old women had learned in their own puberty ceremonies.

Present day responsibility and respect for others

Among the girls who underwent seclusion and puberty observances, a key value which they were all taught was responsibility to others. When carried out, this value can be very

rewarding. However, as was the case for the old women in the beginning of the book, if ignored, serious repercussions could result. The climate in northern Canada and Alaska was and still is harsh. A community's survival depended on the contribution of every band member. Phyllis Fast spent a number of years in the Gwich'in village of Gwichyaa Zhee (Fort Yukon). She explains, "The Northern Athabaskan local economy is founded on a principle of sharing everything from food to other material goods with others in social circles that are crafted along traditional meaning codes" (Fast 2002: 90). This is a value that is still held true today in the Native villages.

The origins of community responsibility stem back to earlier times, when food was scarce. In order to insure the future success of hunting parties, the hunters were always the first to eat, followed by the children. The value of caring and sharing therefore fell to the women, who for the most part were in charge of preservation, storing and distribution of food. The mother's role in educating the child would ensure the future survival of the band. Girls have to be trained in the proper protocols of society, just as boys had to be trained to hunt for the tribe's food. This balance of roles provided for the tribes future. The method used by mothers to teach daughters may have varied regionally, but the message stayed the same in women's stories. Libby explains that mothers would teach girls to be, "industrious, kind, treat older people with respect and in other ways follow the customs" (Libby 1952: 107). The continuity of these values can be seen in Velma Wallis' work.

When reading *Two Old Women*, the value of responsibility to the village is played out through the two women's involvement with the band when they reunite. Yet in sharing their wealth with the community, the women wanted assurance that the band would also adhere to cultural values. For example, the old women tell the group, "We will share with the People, but

they must not become greedy and try to take our food” (Wallis 2004: 120), and “We will give you food, and we hope The People will eat sparingly in knowledge of harder times to come” (Wallis 2004: 121). The women not only live by the values and set a good example to the reader, but the women insist on the band living by these same values. The sequence of events which unfolds in the book from that point on can be seen as a transformation, in which the women realize their responsibility to the band, and the reader can see the consequences if this value is ignored. As the next quote illustrates, with the women and the band reunited, the band realizes the knowledge that these women hold. “The people found themselves seeking out the company of the two women for advice and to learn new things. Now they realized that because the two women had lived so long, surely they knew a lot more than The People had believed” (Wallis 2004: 128).

Stepping away from the text, we can see these values carried through into Wallis’ life. Fast explains how Wallis regarded the opinion of the elders in her village, Gwichyaa Zhee. Fast states that Wallis “talked to many of the elders both before and after publication in order to inform them of her book, as well as to seek validation of the version she presented” (Fast 2002: 169). Thus, Wallis lives by the values she portrays in the book, respecting the elders and her community. We can see further evidence of respect for others and elders in Nee’Tsaii Gwich’in activist Sarah James. James, who is on the Gwich’in Steering Committee, is known nationwide for her concern over environmental issues. When Sarah James spoke at Gwichyaa Zhee, because she had no authority as an elder, she followed cultural protocol to gain respect with the community. Fast explains that James “first invoked the name of her grandmother, Sarah Tritt, and told the audience about the kind of education she got from her parents and her grandmother. Even with that she... qualified her phrase “the great change” by saying it came from a story”

(Fast 2002: 170). Thus, James respects the rules for addressing elders and behaves in the correct protocol to gain an audience with the community. Both of the above examples show the relevance that these Athabascan values have in today's society for Athabascan peoples.

Summary and Conclusion

By comparing and contrasting Northern Athabascan women's puberty observances and seclusion with Velma Wallis' book *Two Old Women*, evidence of cultural continuity can be seen in the continuance of Northern Athabascan values such as "Self-Sufficiency," "Hard Work" and "Responsibility to Village." By examining the early ethnographic scholarship and marking the changes over time, transition of cultural continuity in contemporary society has been shown. In the last two sections, illustrations have been made to show how such values have endured into present day. In demonstrating that the instruction and methods used to teach cultural values have changed with each generation, the importance lies in the persistence of values into contemporary societies. These values are what distinguish Athabascan women, especially in urban areas of Alaska and Canada, and in an ever increasing world of globalization, these values also provide Athabascan peoples with a distinctive cultural identity.

Although this paper has shown endurance of values over time, through their publication, there is little control over whether today's Athabascan girls read the material. As mentioned earlier, Cruickshank states that there is a physical loss of teacher and student roles in the very young and older women which has occurred due to the loss of puberty seclusion. As the examples of cultural continuity all come from women born 1960 or before, it has yet to be proved that the continuance of values will remain in those born in the 1970s and onwards. The generation born in the 1970s would have no recollection of their predecessor's involvement in

national movements for the recognition of American Indian Peoples (1969 Alcatraz occupation, 1973 siege of Wounded Knee). Further research is therefore needed to question whether there is a correlation between the loss of formally structured educational systems based on Athabascan values, such as the puberty observances and seclusion and displacement issues that teenagers face in contemporary Northern Athabascan bands, and whether today's Athabascan girls read texts such as Wallis' *Two Old Women* and gain values from them as set out in this paper.

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Appendix 1

Athabaskan Values

Self-sufficiency

Hard work

Care and provision for the family

Family relations

Unity

Humor

Honesty

Fairness

Love for children

Sharing

Caring

Village cooperation

Responsibility to village

Respect for Elders and others

Respect for knowledge

Wisdom from life experiences

Respect for the land

Respect for nature

Practice of traditions

Honoring Ancestors

Spirituality