



Beginning the Journey: Aboriginal Men Learning Fathering

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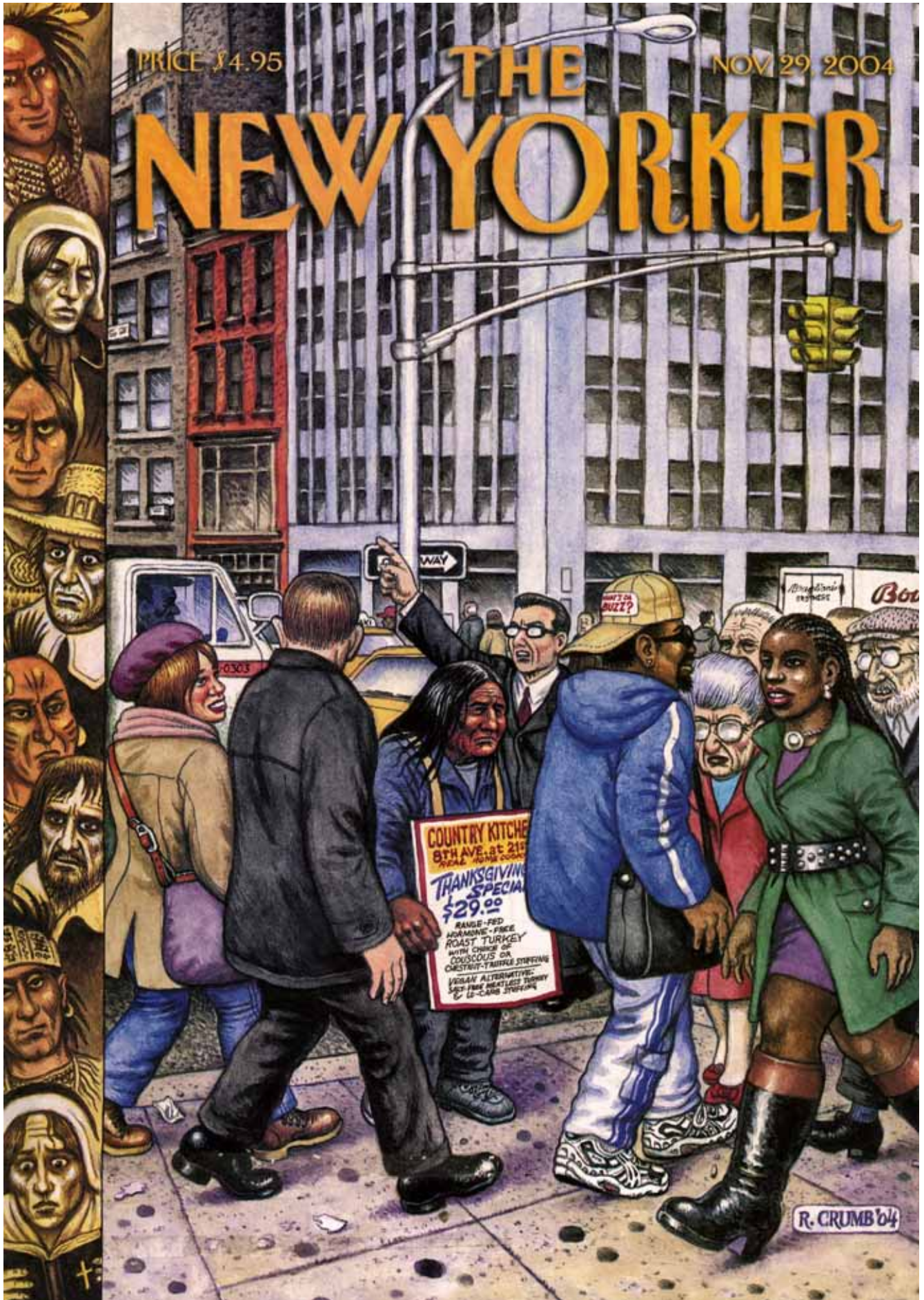
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Beginning the Journey

Aboriginal men learning fathering

- from disruption, discontinuity, & displacement ...
- to revitalization of multi-generational transmission of culture & identity

- *How can we understand the fathering experiences of Aboriginal men?*
- *What are the issues facing them?*
- *How can policy & programs support them?*

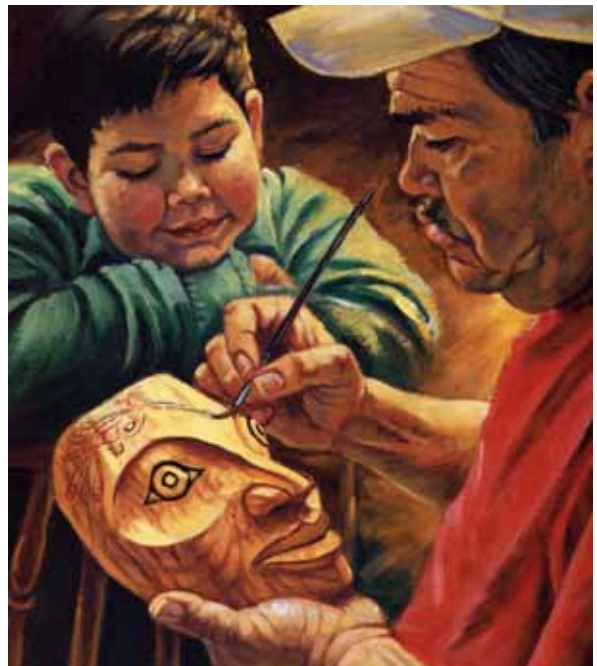
Who wants to know about Aboriginal fathers?

- Aboriginal Early Childhood Development movement
- Early Childhood Development Intercultural Partnerships (www.ecdip.org)
- Indigenous knowledges, child-raising practices & community-based program development
- Aboriginal research capacity building
- Social justice – addressing the fall-out from Residential Schools & other colonial abuses, working as partners to strengthen circles of caring for children and families



Aboriginal Fathers Project

- I. Literature Review
- II. Demographic Profile
- III. Interview Study
- IV. Family Service Programs Review
- V. Book survey: How are Aboriginal men portrayed in the lives of children?



I. Literature Review

What is known about Indigenous fathers?

... Nothing ...

- 5 articles of Indigenous parents found in Canada & US (published & grey lit.)
- Virtually every question about Indigenous fathers and fathering is unanswered.
- Ing (1991): *Just because it isn't known by academics doesn't mean it isn't known. It is known to Aboriginal peoples.*
- Prevalent conceptual frameworks for understanding European-heritage fathering are not likely to fit well for Indigenous fathers (e.g., generative or lifecourse perspectives)
- “Parenting programs” are not fitting
- Start with an emic approach, involving Aboriginal fathers in telling their stories



II. Demographic Profile of Aboriginal men in Canada

- Source: 2001 Census data (?!?)
- **Younger** pop. than non-Aboriginal males
- 60% non-status
- 70% live off-reserve / 70% in urban areas
- **Higher mobility:**
 - 50% moved in last 5 yrs, mostly within region
- **Lower education:**
 - 51% less than high school completion (31% non-Ab.men)
- **Lower employment:**
 - 32% over 15 yrs. unemployed (25% non-Ab men)
 - 29% full-time work (45% of non-Ab men)
- **Lone Aboriginal men heading households**
(perhaps 15,000 families & increasing)
- **Poverty:**
 - Aboriginal lone fathers 3.5 times as likely as non-Ab lone fathers to have family income under \$7000/yr.
- ▶ **Poverty, employment instability, & relationship instability are known to have profound negative impacts on father involvement.**



III. Community Partnerships for Interview Study

- Little Hands of Friendship Aboriginal Head Start Program, Prince George, BC
- Power of Friendship Aboriginal Head Start Program, Prince George, BC
- Pqusnalcw Child and Families Programs, Lil'wat Nation BC
- Terrace Child and Family Services Dad's Group, BC
- Esketemc First Nation, BC
- Skidigate First Nation, BC

Many other Aboriginal fathers ...

Interviews with Aboriginal Fathers

- High interest in participation
- 80 1 ½ hr. taped structured interviews
- Most First Nations, some Metis, no Inuit

- Demographics
- Children in their lives
- Father roles
- Father satisfaction
- Work issues
- Arrangements with partners
- Learning to be a father?
- Needs – direct & societal
- Fathering in the community
- Fathering history



Preliminary Themes

It's about TIME

- Chronosystem
- Understanding the reproduction of fathering from a historicentric view
- Cultural holocaust post-contact
- Disrupted attachments due to apprehension practices:
 - Residential schools
 - Child protection policies
 - Fostering
 - Adoptions
 - Incarcerations

Challenges due to holocaust

Reproduction of abusive or neglectful fathering

- Unknown numbers of children
- Substance abuse problems
- Incarcerations
- Homelessness
- Lack of confidence & fathering skills
- Low self-worth & depression
- Negative expectations in Aboriginal & non-Aboriginal communities
- Mothercentric programs
- Vacuum of support

Highly variable Aboriginal father involvement over time

- High mobility
- One or both parents may leave the family home for work, school, family obligations, treatment, incarcerations, leaving lone parent for days, weeks, years.
- Lack of employment – often combine short-term jobs, seasonal jobs away from home
- Substance abuse relapse
- With multiple caregivers, ‘parenting’ can be continuous.



Cross-generational developmental processes

- Aboriginal fathers today describe getting to know their children as adults

“We’re more like best friends”

- Many describe how they are on a similar ‘healing’ journey of recovery and cultural rediscovery as their children.

“We’re all going through this together.”

- Many have serial families (multi-generational child-child relationships).



- Many describe ‘growing themselves up’ as they participate in their own child’s growth (e.g., play, attachment, being in a school)
- Many describe learning to be a father *“from my child.”*

“My 3 year old has taught me to be a better man.”

Multiple caregivers in extended families

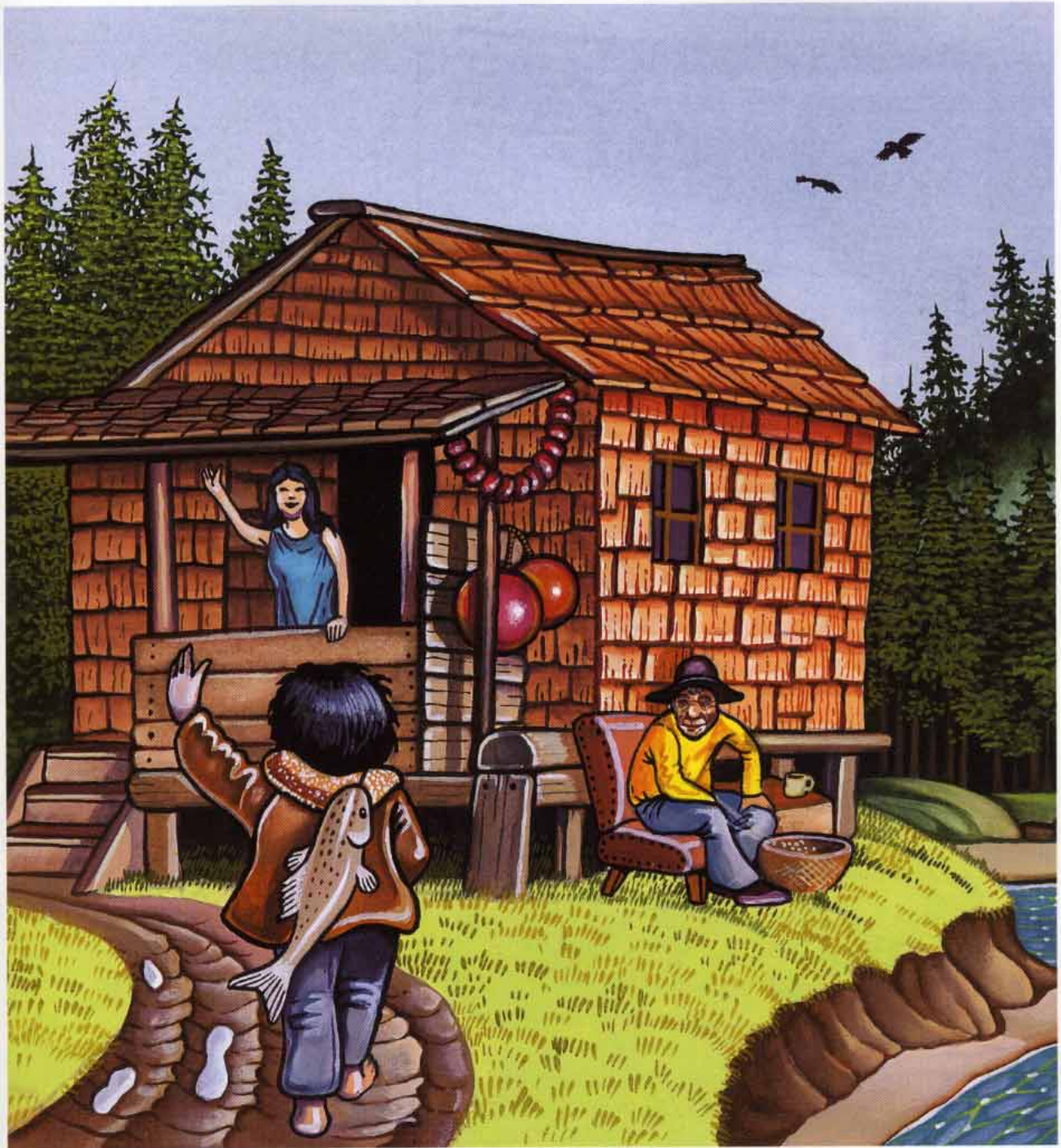
- Even in communities low on social cohesion, there tends to be a sequence of men involved in lives of children – grandfathers, brothers, uncles
- Serve to connect child through certain skills & roles to extended family & community.
- Potential for continuity in caregiving across changing family circumstances
- Implications for kith and kin policies
- Need research on outcomes of multiple & sequential relationships with men in caregiving roles



Multi-generational cultural transmission

- Interviewees' construction of 'responsible fathering' includes:
 - fathers & other male relatives passing on cultural knowledge and role entitlements to their own & others' children (e.g., naming, conferring honorific titles, teaching traditional dances, songs, & drumming).
 - ensuring the child is connected with the Aboriginal community(ies) to which the parents belong.





Grandfather was sitting in his favourite chair in the evening sun, and as soon as Jason had cleaned the fish and given it to his mother to cook, he hurried to where the old man was dreaming of days gone by. Grandfather did not like to be hurried

at any time, and after Jason had gabbled out the story of what he had seen, the old man closed his eyes for a few moments before he gave his reply in the slow and gentle voice of his people.

Understanding Aboriginal fathers on their own terms

- Construct new models of responsible, satisfying & effective fathering that fit Aboriginal men
- Identify ways to expand programs & social policy to embrace this under-served population.

