Identity Defined:

Identity formation is the process of the development of the distinct personality of an individual.

Self-identity (or Self-Concept) is the sum total of a being’s knowledge and understanding of his or her self. Components of the self-concept include physical, psychological, and social attributes, which can be influenced by the individual's attitudes, habits, beliefs and ideas. These components and attributes cannot be condensed to the general concepts of self-image and the self-esteem.

Cultural identity is the identity of a group or culture, or of an individual as far as one is influenced by one's belonging to a group or culture.

Ethnic Identity is the identification with a certain ethnicity, usually on the basis of a presumed common genealogy or ancestry.

Interpersonal identity development is composed of three elements:

- Categorization: Labeling others (and ourselves) into categories.
- Identification: Associating others with certain groups.
- Comparison: Comparing groups.

Individuals gain a Social Identity and Group Identity by their affiliation. This is from membership in various groups. These groups include, among various categories:

- family
- ethnic
- occupation
- friendship
- dating
- sex roles
- religion

Native American Identity: Fractured Effects of Assimilation, Subjugation and Marginalization.

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Every aspect involved in normal identity formation as defined above was stolen from the Native Population with the onset of Western Euro-American acculturation, subjugation and assimilation.

The identity of the American Indian continues to be affected by “Colonial Imperialism” embedded in the collective historical experiences of defeat, relocation, removal of children and “broken promises” which promoted negative beliefs about taking risks and seeking opportunities in the “unsafe” larger society.

Further collective experiences of subjugation include the following:

- **Blood Quantum** rights for reservation enrollment place limitations on who can identify themselves as American Indians.
- **Boarding School experiences** forced thousands of young people from their homes and communities into environments of abuse and cultural diversity where cultural identity conflicted with one’s tribal and community identities as the children were re-educated in settings that ignored kinship patterns, punished the use of traditional language, and sought to replace traditional religious beliefs with Christianity”**
- **Historical Trauma** persists in the continued loss of facets of identity for the American Indian represented in the experiences of discrimination, economic disadvantages on rural reservations, national disrespect, and continual sense of erosion of traditional cultures.*

Growing up in a society greatly impacted by such by-products of “ethnic cleansing” may contribute to adolescent stress and demoralization which contribute to negative outcomes and risks such as:

- Early onset alcohol and drug use.
- Dropping out of school
- High suicide rates
- Continued educational and economic disadvantages as a result of leaving school before completion.
- Chemical Dependency and Mental Health concerns
- Ambivalence, alienation and demoralization
- Anger
- Breakdown of the family system: i.e. grandparents raising grandchildren.

Persistence of American Indian Identity Prevails:

- Incorporation of traditional practices and spirituality in one’s daily life have shown to be protective factors for American Indian children and adults.
- The boarding school experiences led to the development of a “Pan Indian identity which in the later 20th century led to political activism.

*from “The Prevalence and Correlates of Perceived Historical Losses Among North American Indigenous Adolescents”. Les B. Whitbeck, Dept. of Sociology, University of Nebraska-Lincoln