Ethnicity as Process: An Examination of the Mennonite Brethren in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia

by

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Abstract

Mennonites are an ethnoreligious group that have developed a distinct sense of identity over the centuries. Traditionally they have been a closed rural social group with a distinct culture and sense of peoplehood. In the modern context, the Mennonite strategy of isolationism could no longer be practically carried out and subsequently there has been increased Mennonite participation in the structural and cultural matrix of society. This study examined the most modernized Mennonite group, the Mennonite Brethren, to explore how increased participation in Canadian society has affected their ethnic identity. This was done to determine if the experience of the Mennonite Brethren was best characterized by the assimilation theory that stresses the need for ethnic survival through cultural replication or an alternative model that conceptualizes ethnicity as an emergent process socially constructed within particular historical and social contexts.

The study used qualitative interviews with 12 members of the Mennonite Brethren, four from each generation, to gain indepth information about the form and salience of the group's identity. The form of identity was examined through an investigation of group boundaries and symbols. The salience of identity was studied by exploring how a Mennonite Brethren identity affects the lives of group members.

The results indicate that Mennonite Brethren identity consists of two intertwined identity elements, ethnicity and religion. While both elements are present, religion is currently more salient than ethnicity. The group boundaries have been expanded to include outsiders who join the Mennonite Brethren Church. The symbols used to identify the

group are increasingly religious, rather than ethnic, markers. Despite the decline of observable ethnic traits, the group has been able to maintain a distinct identity in modern society by reconstructing their identity to accentuate the group's religious history, values and beliefs.

The reconstructed Mennonite Brethren identity continues to differentiate group members from the rest of society through ideological separation. Group members share, to varying degrees, a common ideology that reflects the group's particular selection and interpretation of theology. It is a world view that has a significant effect on the social behaviour and subjective thinking of group members.

The transformation of the Mennonite Brethren identity indicates that ethnicity is most accurately seen as a dynamic phenomenon that is shaped by social interaction within particular social, geographical and historical contexts.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Purpose of this Study

Mennonites are an ethnoreligious population that has maintained a distinct sense of identity over the centuries. They originated as an urban religious group in 16th century Europe but shortly after their inception left the city to form isolated rural communities. In the closed rural setting they formed into an ethnic group with a distinct culture and sense of peoplehood (Francis, 1948). Beginning around the end of World War II in Canada, the Mennonite strategy of isolationism was no longer practical and subsequently there has been increased Mennonite participation in the structural and cultural matrix of Canadian society. This process of modernization has had a significant effect on the ethnic identity of Canadian Mennonites.

Modern Mennonite identity has been characterized as being in 'crisis' (Redekop, 1987) and in 'ferment' (Driedger, 1990) because there has been no consistently uniform response to modernity. Instead there are a variety of strategies ranging from the construction of social and geographic boundaries that shield Mennonites from the encroachment of the wider society to the adoption of secular institutions and values. This study focuses on the Mennonite Brethren, the most modernized Mennonite denomination in Canada (Driedger and Kauffman, 1991). This analysis will explore whether increased participation in Canadian society has resulted in identity replication, change or loss for members of the group.

Assimilation theory, the traditional sociological approach to identity retention based largely on the work of Robert Park (1950) and Milton Gordon (1964), would predict that increased participation in Canadian society would eventually lead to the loss of a distinct Mennonite Brethren identity. That is, the inability or lack of desire of an ethnic population to

replicate its institutions and cultural inventory in the modern Canadian context would lead to the disappearance of its distinct identity. An alternative theoretical approach presented in this study is the conceptualization of ethnicity as a process. This perspective views ethnicity as emergent and continually shaped by specific external and internal developments within the economic and political spheres and in civil society. According to this approach, ethnic identity is not dependent on replication; rather, despite changing group boundaries and loss of traditional cultural traits it can persist through a process of identity reconstruction.

The main objective of this study is to determine which of the above two perspectives on ethnicity best describes the experience of the Mennonite Brethren[1]. This will be accomplished by examining the form and salience of Mennonite Brethren ethnic identity. Using information provided by 12 informants, the form of Mennonite Brethren identity is explored through an investigation of group boundaries and symbols. The salience of identity is analyzed by determining how being a Mennonite Brethren affects the behaviour and subjective thinking of group members. The empirical findings provide insights into the effects of modernization on ethnic identity that have implications for the theoretical conceptualization of ethnicity.

A second objective of this study is to explore the boundaries of ethnicity and religion in the Mennonite Brethren identity. Although the Mennonite Brethren are an ethnic group, they are a particular type of ethnic group, an ethnoreligious group[2]. The main difference between

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[1] It should be noted that when I began this thesis I felt that the process model of ethnicity was more accurate as a result of my study of the sociological literature. However, the research was conducted in an objective manner that allowed the respondents to determine the results rather than forcing my preconceived assumptions on the data (see Chapter 4: The Research Process).

[2] Evidence for this assertion is provided in Chapter 3 in the discussion on the interrelationship between ethnicity and religion in Mennonite identity.

an ethnic and an ethnoreligious group is that the latter group shares a common religious, as well as cultural, heritage. While this characterizes many ethnic groups, an ethnoreligious group places a strong emphasis on its religious heritage and ideology. In such groups, adherence to a religious ideology is not nominal or for strictly symbolic purposes; rather, it provides a meaning system and is the guide for all of life. The link between ethnicity and religion is particularly prominent in modern society as evidenced by the Sikh separatist movement in India, Protestant and Catholic conflict in Northern Ireland, and the recent Aboriginal occupation at Gustafson Lake that was related, in part, to Aboriginal religious ceremonies and beliefs. In this study, the religious and ethnic elements of Mennonite Brethren identity are examined to determine how they interrelate. The results provide a more comprehensive understanding of ethnoreligious identity in modern society.

Shortcomings of Previous Research on Mennonite Identity

In general, research on Canadian Mennonites reveals that despite modernization, often operationalized as urbanization, a distinct Mennonite ethnic identity has been maintained, albeit in a modified form (Baar, 1983; Smucker, 1986; Driedger and Kauffman, 1991). This research, however, suffers from a number of problems. Most important, the research focuses on the public or surface expression of ethnicity. That is, research looks at the self-identification of Mennonites but does not explore the implication of their identity. As a result, there is little, if any, understanding of ethnicity's importance for the everyday experience of Mennonites. The findings also suggest that religion has become a key element of Mennonite identity. However, there is little understanding of the underlying relationship between Mennonite ethnicity and

religion. To provide a deeper understanding, the research for this thesis used qualitative, semi-structured interviews that enabled respondents to define for themselves, in detail, the nature of Mennonite Brethren identity and its importance (psychological and material) for different aspects of their lives. This method of investigation does not rely on predetermined assumptions or biases; instead, it allows the results to emerge from the data and facilitates the generation of explanatory theory about the meaning and salience of ethnicity.

A second problem with past research is the tendency to reify Mennonites as a homogeneous community with no recognition of possible generational differences. Typically, analyses attempt to determine if modernized or urban Mennonites manage to retain a distinctive identity. The samples for these studies were mainly drawn from second generation Mennonites who had grown up and been socialized in a rural environment and then moved, usually for educational or occupational reasons, to urban areas. The results indicate assimilationist forces have been resisted but there is no empirical evidence that this conclusion is valid for the third generation. Furthermore, the conceptualization of first generation Mennonites is typically tied to their experience on first coming to Canada without the recognition that this generation has also been exposed to the forces of modernization, most recently when many have moved to urban areas to retire. Consequently, the static portrayal of the first generation as traditional ethnic Mennonites may no longer be valid. In order to explore the possibility of generational differences, ensure greater variation and provide richer data, research for this thesis included respondents from three generations.

Organization of the Thesis

What follows has been divided into seven chapters. This chapter provides an introduction to the research topic. Chapter two reviews the theoretical literature on ethnicity, religion, identity and ethnic identity retention. This discussion results in a critique of the assimilation model and an outline of an alternative model that conceptualizes ethnicity as an emergent process shaped within particular historical and social contexts.

The third chapter provides a historical analysis and literature review on Mennonites, focusing on the Mennonite Brethren. Chapter four outlines the research methods used for this study. Chapter five reports on the research, examining the group boundaries and the symbols used to mark those boundaries. Chapter six explores how respondents' Mennonite Brethren identity influences their objective practice and subjective thinking. Chapter seven summarizes the research findings and discusses their implications for sociological theory pertaining to ethnic identity, particularly ethnic identity retention.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

Research on modern Mennonites focuses on two main interrelated components of their identity --- ethnicity and religion ---and the implications of modernization for identity retention. The first part of this chapter examines the sociological literature regarding ethnicity, religion and identity. This is followed by an analysis of the `classical' sociological approach to ethnic identity retention -- the assimilation model --- and an outline of an alternative model that conceptualizes ethnicity as an emergent process shaped within particular historical and social contexts.

Defining Ethnicity

In 1974 Wsevolod Isajiw analyzed 27 prominent definitions of ethnicity and abstracted twelve main characteristics: common origin or ancestors; culture or customs; religion; race or physical characteristics; language; consciousness of kind; gemeinschaft relations; common values; separate institutions; social status; and immigrant group. From this list it is apparent that the definitions of ethnicity can be categorized as either objective or subjective. This is a common distinction made in the sociological literature that reflects two different theoretical approaches to ethnicity (Dashefsky, 1975; Driedger, 1989; Winland, 1989).

Objective definitions of ethnicity are premised on the notion that an ethnic group is a collection of people with common cultural traits. These definitions are used in macro-sociological approaches that see human behaviour shaped in, and by, social-cultural systems. The focus is therefore on observable behaviour and external conditions as opposed to attitudes,

perceptions and self-conception. Some factors emphasized by this perspective are ethnic origin, language use, participation in an ethnic religion, participation in an ethnic culture, endogamy, use of ethnic media and choice of ingroup friends (Driedger, 1989: 139).

While overt characteristics can be important markers of ethnicity, the objective approach suffers from a number of problems. First, objective criteria may identify only population aggregates rather than people who are conscious of belonging to a particular group. Here a distinction needs to be made between an ethnic category and an ethnic group. It is possible that a number of people can be classified into a specific category on the basis of objective traits but do not possess a sense of community nor even interact with one another. However, when members of an ethnic category interact on the basis of shared ethnic traits they develop a "group" consciousness and sense of belonging. As a result, it is more likely that ethnicity will influence the beliefs, values and behaviour of individuals who actively participate in an ethnic group rather than people who are merely in an ethnic category. This important distinction between aggregate and group is often not addressed when ethnicity is studied from a purely objective standpoint and consequently an understanding of how ethnicity shapes practice cannot be accurately achieved.

A further problem with objective definitions of ethnicity is that the importance of traits will likely change over time and be emphasized to different degrees by different ethnic groups (Driedger, 1989). Consequently, if an ethnic group is characterized at one point in time by certain objective criteria and later some criteria change in importance or disappear altogether, one may conclude that the ethnic group is dying out when in reality it may merely be changing. This tendency to reify ethnicity as an unchanging concept results, in part, because focusing

solely on objective traits can produce a misunderstanding of the underlying mechanisms that produce observable behaviour.

An alternative approach to defining ethnicity cites subjective aspects. This type of definition is used in micro-sociological approaches that emphasize internal cognitive factors and attitudes or feelings. Isajiw (1981) has abstracted four main dimensions of subjective ethnicity: cognitive, moral, affective and fiducial.

The cognitive dimension of ethnic identity involves first the awareness of the self and one's ethnic group followed by the recognition that the self has attributes associated with that group. In other words, an individual must recognize that his or her identity is made up, in part, by ethnic factors. The process of identifying along ethnic lines includes some knowledge of the ethnic group's history, heritage and values and is often selective. That is, different factors associated with an ethnic group may be identified with, whereas other factors are discarded or emphasized only in certain social settings.

The moral dimension of identity is based upon feelings of moral obligation or responsibility to the group and varies directly with the degree of commitment to it. According to Isajiw it includes "such feelings of obligation as importance of teaching the ethnic language to one's children, of marrying within the group, of helping members of the group with finding a job, etc." (1981: 46).

The affective component of identity involves feelings of attachment to the group. Individuals can become emotionally attached to a group for a variety of reasons. For instance, membership in the group may provide the members with a sense of security or provide a comfortable and predictable social setting in which to interact. Finally, the fiducial dimension of

subjective identity is concerned with the trust individuals have in their group. In other words, a person feels that they can count on group members for support whether it be psychological, economic or political in nature.

Not all subjective definitions focus directly on these four factors. Nevertheless, they are usually of interest when studying sense of peoplehood, shared values and Gemeinschaft relations. While this framework is useful for understanding how ethnicity affects the subjective thinking and feelings of individuals, it is not sufficient in itself for analyzing ethnicity. Limiting a study to subjective aspects makes cross-cultural comparisons and generalizations about ethnicity difficult since there are no comparable objective criteria. Most important, an extreme subjective position masks the close relationship between objective and subjective criteria. That is, objective, or external, factors influence subjective ones and vice versa. Consequently, we must look at external conditions to understand the impact and reasons for subjective ideas. To overcome the weaknesses inherent in extreme objective or subjective positions there has been a trend toward composite definitions which bring together both the objective and subjective aspects of ethnicity.

Composite definitions provide the best starting point when considering ethnicity. On the one hand, an understanding of an individual's subjective thoughts and feelings toward his/her ethnic group is necessary to determine if, and why, people are likely to take an ethnic identity and to what extent it will affect their actions. On the other hand, it is necessary to analyze objective criteria to determine how ethnic identity shapes behaviour and, in turn, how external conditions affect one's subjectve identity. By considering both perspectives we can begin to trace out the relationship between objective and subjective dimensions of ethnicity.

The usefulness of a composite definition should not, however, lead one to think that subjective and objective aspects of ethnicity will be of equal importance to all individuals. A person may celebrate ethnic holidays, be able to speak their mother tongue and eat ethnic foods without having a strong attachment to the group (ritualistic identity). On the other hand, an individual may have strong psychological attachments to an ethnic group without practicing ethnic traditions or being able to speak the language associated with the group (symbolic identity). Nevertheless, it can be said that ethnicity involves both subjective/internal, and objective/external dimensions. Therefore, we can conclude that ethnicity "is always in some degree a product of the interaction of inner perception and outer response, of forces operating on the individual and group from within, and those impinging on them from without" (Epstein, 1978: 102).

A prominent debate within ethnic studies is whether ethnicity is static or dynamic. The two opposing approaches are the primordialist and situationalist perspective. The primordialist perspective views ethnic ties as universal, natural and unchanging. Moreover, the primordialist approach tends to view culture and ethnic identity as integrally connected (Nagata, 1981: 90). While it may be true that ethnicity is a durable and persisting phenomenon throughout history, the content and importance of identity often changes according to historical conditions (Smith, 1984a). The identity of an ethnic group can change in response to the interplay of internal and external variables within a specific context. A recent example is provided by Johann Funk (1991) who found that the General Conference Mennonites, a Dutch-Russian Mennonite group like the Mennonite Brethren, in the Fraser Valley of British Columbia have changed from a closed rural agricultural community with a distinct culture to an urban open community with

few observable cultural markers in response to the external forces of modernity. In addition, internal debates have resulted in a reorientation of the religious ideology of the group. Despite these changes, the General Conference Mennonites have achieved a measure of autonomy from mainstream society because their lives continue to be significantly influenced by a commonly held religious ideology, despite its transformation.

In modern society ethnic identity "is developed, displayed, manipulated, or ignored in accordance with the particular demands of particular situations" (Royce, 1982: 1). This indicates that ethnicity, in some cases, is not a constant factor but rather a resource which can be controlled and adapted to the needs of the individual and the group. It may be the case that relations based on ethnic ties have been characteristic features of human history, but the content of ethnicity appears to be fluid.

The situational or circumstantialist perspective sees ethnicity as a malleable concept that has different meanings and qualities in different social settings and for different individuals. The form of ethnicity can change due to external forces outside of the group (e.g., government policy, economic circumstances) and internal group issues (e.g., changing gender roles, religious renewal of ethnoreligious groups). Of course, external and internal factors rarely occur in isolation but are typically linked. The situationalist perspective conceptualizes ethnicity as instrumental or strategic in accomplishing particular political and economic goals. Within this approach there is a "heavy emphasis on the role of cultural symbols to exclude others. These may include religion, language, customs, institutions, music, art, food, dress, colour and even territory" (Smith, 1984b: 285). These symbols, employed to mark the boundaries of the group, are not intrinsic but change over time and in some cases become obsolete. Group

symbols have an internal aspect in that they have a subjective meaning for people. Symbols communicate a sense of uniqueness and evoke sentiment and emotion. They also, however, have an objective function since they can impel group members to action.

This fluid and flexible view of ethnicity appears to be more accurate than the primordial perspective, but in an extreme form it has several shortcomings. Although ethnicity may be dynamic there are limits to the form it can take and the speed at which change takes place. As DeVos (1975: 374) states: "Ethnic identity requires the maintenance of sufficiently consistent behaviour to enable others to place an individual or a group in some given social category, thus permitting appropriate interactive behaviour". Furthermore, ethnic discovery or rediscovery promoted by myths and symbols must have some basis in reality in order to be credible. It is true that an ethnic history may be selective and partly fictional but these stories and symbols cannot be fabricated --- ethnicity's past limits what it can become in the future. Situational formulations may sometimes also give the impression that ethnic groups are mere tools for manipulation, usually promoted by, and in the interest of, elites (Smith, 1984b). They may serve this purpose but one should be careful not to accept a purely instrumental perspective and ignore other reasons (e.g., psychological, child socialization) for ethnic formation and retention. If these necessary modifications are made to the situational perspective it may provide a more accurate model of ethnicity.

In this study an ethnic group is defined as a reference group invoked by people who perceive themselves to share a common historical tradition, based on objective characteristics (e.g., cultural traits and in some cases physical appearance) and shared internal values, which is distinctive from other groups and is developed through social interaction. This definition

implies that ethnicity involves, if it is to be more than a convenient label for categorization purposes, some degree of actual association or identification with an ethnic group --- an ethnic group cannot exist unless individuals subjectively identify with it. The degree to which individuals identify with an ethnic group and the elements of that ethnic identity are variable. However, for ethnoreligious groups, such as the Mennonite Brethren, religious ideology is considered to be an enduring component of ethnic identity.

Defining Religion

In the literature on Mennonites, religion is considered to be a prime component of Mennonite ethnic identity (Baar, 1983; Warner, 1985; Sawatsky, 1991; Kauffman and Driedger, 1991; Winland, 1993). This section explains how the concept "religion" is defined for the purposes of this study. The following section on identity examines how religion contributes to the creation and maintenance of an ethnic identity.

Like ethnicity, religion is an analytical concept that has been defined in many ways. Sociological definitions generally are categorized as being either substantive or functional. A substantive definition attempts to describe the substance or essence of religion. In other words, there is an attempt to explain what religion is. Definitions of this type often focus on specific beliefs, especially beliefs in spiritual or supernatural beings. The problem with this approach is that definitions are difficult to apply cross-culturally since some religions appear not to distinguish between natural and supernatural realms. These definitions often focus on traditional Western forms of religion and therefore are historically and culturally bound, and are unable to account for change. Moreover, they typically reflect a Western bias in that religion is often equated with a belief in superhuman beings. Consequently, a belief system such as official

Buddhism that does not make distinctions between the natural and supernatural realms would not be considered a religion.

A functional approach to religion looks at the effects of a religion (i.e., what religion does). A functional definition often conceptualizes religion as a meaning system or world view that acts as a template, affecting how one interprets and makes sense of reality. Religion bestows meaning on reality by providing an explanation of how events and experiences fit into the larger transcendent order. Whatever the religious explanation given, they give comfort to believers. The unpredictability of life is explained and the explanation is given in terms understandable and acceptable to the believers.

The explanatory function of religion has implications for the social group. Based largely on the work of Emile Durkheim (1954) religion is viewed as a powerful motivator that promotes social unity and solidarity through collective acceptance of a unified system of beliefs, reinforced through common rituals and shared symbols. Religion promotes social stability by validating the values of society and providing a mechanism for social control. Given these effects, it is not surprising that religion often acts to legitimate and maintain the existing social order. However, religion can also be a source of conflict and schism in society.

The problem with defining religion as a meaning system is that there are other belief systems, such as political ideologies, not generally considered religious that can perform the same function as a religious meaning system. But sharing some properties with religion, does not necessarily make an institution like sports or politics the same phenomenon as religion. Also, it must be recognized that in modern society religion may not be part of an individual's or group's meaning system. Even if it is, it is not necessarily an all encompassing meaning system.

It may be used only on special occasions, in what Bibby (1987) refers to as "fragmented" religious practices.

How one defines religion is generally based on one's research strategy. Since the Mennonite Brethren identify themselves as a Christian group (Francis, 1948; Baar, 1983; Toews, 1987) a substantive definition can be employed for the purposes of this analysis, one which sees Christianity as a religion because of its emphasis on supernatural powers.

Toews (1975: 368-374) provides a list of distinctive Christian beliefs and practices that can be used as a basis for a more exact description of Mennonite Brethren religion.

1) Practical biblicism: the belief that the bible, not religious dogma or theological systems, provide the only true answers to spiritual problems;

2) Experiential faith: the idea that the Christian life begins with a conversion experience that brings about a radical spiritual change;

3) Personal witnessing: group members all have a responsibility for personal evangelism;

4) Christian discipleship: living according to the example Christ gave to His disciples which affects ethical behaviour and is exhibited in non-resistance (pacifism);

5) Brotherhood emphasis: an emphasis on equality among members;

6) Evangelism and missions: a simultaneous emphasis on evangelizing and providing material assistance for the needy;

7) Christ-centred eschatology: the belief that the first coming of Christ instituted a spiritual kingdom on earth that will culminate in a triumphant personal return of Christ to earth.

As in the case of ethnicity, it has been shown that both the importance and meaning of religion are not constant but variable (Hammond, 1988; Redekop, 1992). In this thesis the

nature of Mennonite Brethren religion will be explored with respondents to determine how, if at all, it is changing in the urban context and how any possible religious change affects Mennonite Brethren identity.

Defining Identity

In this study the concept of identity is defined as a general organizing concept that defines for the individual or collectivity who they are on the basis of salient attributes. This self-knowledge is continually constructed and reinforced through interaction with others as a result of which individuals come to classify themselves and others according to perceived attributes. Through this process differences become evident that allow individuals to distinguish themselves from others and describe themselves by way of contrast. Consequently, knowledge of what one is and what one is not leads to categorizations of `self' and `other'. This construction of self-identity is shaped by the context in which interaction takes place.

The attributes that are considered important for the purposes of classification depend upon the specific cultural, political and economic context in which the individual is situated. Since these factors are not static, it follows that identity is a dynamic process and historically contingent. Identity is intertwined with defining oneself in terms of one's position within institutions and society. In contrast to smaller, homogeneous, isolated, tribal and village societies, modern societies possess a complex organizational structure that makes possible many definitions of self. Thus, it is possible to identify oneself and others according to the different roles that are performed. Raymond Breton (1978: 59) states:

> Modern social structure involves a large number of organizations which structure the different segments of our lives: work, recreation, religion, politics, and so on. Our

> social personalities are thus segmented into roles and role relationships occurring in a series of organizational domains.

Individuals then, must continually manage multiple roles and identities across different situations. The identity chosen will depend, to some degree, upon its usefulness in achieving a desired goal.

Identity has an internal and external aspect. The individual is a social actor, the creator and source of behaviour, who responds to the consequences of his, or her, external social and physical environment. In general it is expected that behaviour will be adapted to accomplish best the desired consequences. Hence, identities communicated through external displays of appearances, behaviour and language are often chosen for instrumental purposes and are continually adjusted as the individual reacts to the changing external reality.

Ethnic self-identity exists when individuals define themselves, to some degree, by attributes that are used to define an ethnic group. If this occurs, ethnicity becomes a personal, or internal, identity as well as an external social label, each with consequences for social interaction. Of course, not all identities are equally available to a person. For example, some individuals cannot assimilate into the dominant ethnic group because of physical, social and political barriers. An ethnic identity, then, is not always freely chosen but sometimes imposed by others -- it involves voluntary and involuntary aspects.

Ethnicity, like other identities, is not necessarily constantly displayed; its presentation and salience will change according to context. While such presentation is often for instrumental reasons, it should be noted that an ethnic identity is not usually a completely conscious phenomenon. It involves, to some degree, unconscious behavioural, attitudinal and affective

elements, mainly resulting from childhood socialization which leads to behaviour patterns being taken for granted as "normal" and commonplace.

Religion and Ethnic Identity

In the sociological literature on ethnicity, religion is commonly viewed as a distinctive ethnic trait that fosters group identity and unity (Driedger, 1989). This is not to say that if one is religious one necessarily has an ethnic identity, but that ethnicity often involves participation in the religion associated with one's ethnic group (Gordon, 1964; Reitz, 1980). Religion's importance for ethnic identity varies among different ethnic groups and the contexts in which they are situated (Hammond; 1988, 3), but for ethnoreligious groups like the Mennonites it is particularly salient.

A basic premise held by certain sociologists of religion is that individuals share a common need for meaning and that this need is often fulfilled by religion. Religion provides a comprehensive "world view" that allows for the interpretation of situations and events in a meaningful manner (e.g., Peter Berger's sacred canopy model, 1967). For example, it introduces order and stability that facilitates successful identity maintenance (Winland; 1989, 59). It is also both normative and explanatory in that it helps to explain why things are the way they are and prescribes how things should be (McGuire; 1987, 25). This results in a sense of identity for individuals because it provides them with a sense of who they are and how they fit into the `bigger picture'.

A collective identity is facilitated through shared meanings that are reinforced through group practices. Hence, the religious practices, discourse and beliefs of an ethnic group can

foster communal identity and unity. Hans Mol (1976) suggests that religion acts to sacralize identity in that certain aspects of life (e.g., ethnic) are set apart as something special and consequently should be preserved. For example, an ethnic practice which is based on religious doctrine such as the traditional Mennonite emphasis of territorial separation from the world, can take on sacred qualities (Toews, 1975; Dyck, 1977). Religion also fosters group identity by establishing norms (e.g., plain dress codes for the Amish) and feelings of moral obligation to these norms. Hence, religion can motivate commitment and sacrifice to ethnic group goals.

One must be careful, however, not to overemphasize the stability-enhancing characteristics of religion since it can also be an instrument for conflict and change, especially in a religiously pluralistic society (O'Dea, 1966; Roberts, 1984; McGuire, 1987). As will be shown later, even within a homogeneous group such as the Mennonites, religious conflict has been a source of schism (Toews, 1975). Religion then, can contribute to ethnic identity by both reinforcing the unity within a group and creating group, even ethnic, boundaries based on religious differences. This topic will be addressed throughout this thesis in exploring the relationship between religious faith and ethnicity.

In the sociological literature Mennonites are typically conceptualized as an ethnic group with religion being one of a number of distinct ethnic markers (e.g. Francis; 1948, Kauffman and Driedger; 1991). This study focuses on the most modernized Mennonite denomination, the Mennonite Brethren. It is recognized that it is possible the research data may indicate that religion is of no importance or, more likely, that the group is more accurately characterized as a religious rather than an ethnic community. In other words, it is possible that the Mennonite Brethren have shed a distinct ethnic identity due to their increasing participation in Canadian

society and become primarily a religious group. This topic of identity change and the ability of groups to retain an ethnic identity is a main focus of the assimilation theory.

Ethnic Identity Retention: Assimilation Theory

In conducting an analysis of ethnic identity, it becomes necessary to address the topic of ethnic assimilation. This is the `classical' sociological approach to ethnicity that predicts the eventual disappearance of minority ethnic groups as a result of urban industrial forces of technology and majority power. The emergence of this perspective can be traced back to the work of theorists from the Chicago School in the 1920s and 1930s. Theorists such as Louis Wirth, Robert Park and W.I. Thomas studied ethnic relations in the context of patterns of migration and adaptation. Specifically, they focused on the voluntary immigration of Europeans to the United States. Influenced by the ideas of evolution in science, these sociologists proposed that ethnic relations go through a set of stages until an ethnic group eventually becomes assimilated. They viewed group differences as temporary conditions that would eventually fade away as individuals became exposed to modernizing forces such as urbanism, industrialization, mass education and mass consumption.

According to this approach, there are two possible forms of assimilation. First, assimilation can occur when two or more groups become fused and produce a new collective that is qualitatively different from the original separate groups. This is referred to as the melting pot doctrine. Second, assimilation can occur when an individual or minority group becomes absorbed into the dominant group. This process, when it occurs in English Canada and the United States, is referred to as Anglo-conformity or amalgamation. Underlying this position is

the belief that English institutions, language and culture should dominate society. This second conceptualization seems to have been the most widely accepted.

According to Park (1950), assimilation was the last of the four stages all ethnic groups eventually experience as a "race relations cycle". Contact was the necessary first stage followed by competition, accommodation and finally assimilation. In the first stage, migration and exploration bring different ethnic groups in contact. This inevitably leads to competition and conflict. In order to overcome the disruptive conflict accommodation takes place. Finally, over a period of time assimilation occurs.

The next major development in the assimilation school was Milton Gordon's (1964) seven stages of assimilation. This framework, sometimes referred to as modified assimilation, was more specific than Park's earlier work and responsive to the idea that assimilation is not a simple unitary process but a complex process made up of different components. The seven stages were as follows:

1. Cultural assimilation: change of cultural patterns to those of the core society;
2. Structural assimilation: penetration into cliques and associations of the core society at the primary-group level;
3. Marital assimilation: significant intermarriage;
4. Identification Assimilation: development of a sense of identity linked to the core society;
5. Attitude receptional assimilation: absence of prejudice and stereotyping;
6. Behaviour receptional assimilation: absence of intentional discrimination;
7. Civic assimilation: absence of value and power conflict.

Perhaps the most important aspect of Gordon's work was his distinction between cultural and structural assimilation. While Park also made this demarcation, he argued that structural assimilation was an inevitable result of cultural assimilation. Conversely, Gordon maintained that assimilation did not necessarily occur in this order. He stated that structural assimilation can exist without leading to cultural assimilation and vice versa. Nevertheless, though the process of assimilation was seen by Gordon to be uneven he still held the assumption that total assimilation inevitably occurs. Based on the work of Gordon, some assimilation theorists use the term integration to describe an ethnic group that is structurally assimilated but is not culturally or behaviourally assimilated. This process of integration, however, is also seen as an intermediate stage before total assimilation.

A more recent variation on the assimilation model is the concept of symbolic identity adopted by Herbert Gans (1979). Gans developed this idea in response to Marcus Hansen's theory of third-generation return. Hansen (1952) argued that assimilation and acculturation were only temporary conditions of first and second generation immigrants and were replaced with an "ethnic revival" among the third generation. Gans, on the other hand, argued that the processes of assimilation and acculturation continued to characterize the third-generation and that ethnicity was symbolic or psychological, not social.

According to Gans, symbolic ethnicity emphasizes a concern for identity through the use and identification with symbols and not necessarily through participation with ethnic cultures or institutions. It is a form of ethnic attachment that is based upon a psychological identity and subjective "sense of groupness", a voluntary identification that is "characterized by a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation, or that of the old country; a

love for and a pride in a tradition that can be felt without having to be incorporated into everyday behaviour" (Gans, 1979: 9).

In the past, affiliation with an ethnic group resulted in member's lives being significantly shaped by the norms, values, sanctions and insitutions of the group (Elliot and Fleras, 1992: 146). In modern, society, however, this form of ethnicity no longer appeals to individuals attracted by consumerism, mobility, and materialism. While there may be a psychological attachment to an ethnic community, group sanctions, restrictions and obligations are rejected. Ethnicity is no longer instrumental but rather takes on an expressive form. Gans argued the shift to a private individualistic ethnic identity results because of the decreased salience of ethnicity in modern society. It is a type of leisure time activity that involves the symbolic or ceremonial display of ethnicity but does not significantly influence or interfere with one's life (e.g., it is not a barrier to social mobility). According to Gans then, an individual or group can be both structurally and culturally assimilated yet have an ethnic identity which provides psychological rewards (e.g., sense of identity, pride in heritage).

There are a number of problems with Gans's work and the assimilation model in general. The assimilation model implies that all ethnic groups have a tendency to assimilate. The assertion that all groups eventually assimilate implies that there must be something that compels outsiders to join the host society. This approach to ethnic relations has been rightly critisized as ethnocentric because it is taken from the standpoint of the dominant majority. The model assumes that if assimilation does not occur it is because of cultural inadequacies or a lack of personal motivation, thus, disadvantaged individuals and groups have only themselves to blame for their lack of assimilation. This viewpoint masks the reality that barriers may be

erected by the dominant group to ensure assimilation and mobility do not take place, especially in the case of visible minorities. This lack of understanding exists because the assimilation model gives inadequate attention to economic and political inequality in ethnic relations.

Another weakness of the assimilation perspective is that it views assimilation as the natural end result of a linear process of intergroup relations. Indeed, many theorists went so far as to predict the disappearance of ethnicity. This prediction was intertwined with the conceptualization of ethnicity as a static concept, a concern for ethnic survival (e.g., cultural replication) and consensus which ignores the dynamics of change and conflict within and between ethnic groups. It appears, however, that ethnicity is quite adaptable to both cultural and structural change (Van Den Berghe, 1981; Royce, 1982; Smith, 1984a). Contrary to the assertion of the assimilation perspective, ethnic relations do not necessarily proceed along a linear path but occur within particular historical contexts. Furthermore, assimilation theory portrays the host or dominant culture as static. In fact, so-called dominant cultures change and ethnic pluralism, the preservation of ethnic subcultures, may be an element of the dominant culture. This is not to suggest that ethnic groups never assimilate or always face discrimination, merely that the failure to address other possibilities is a major shortcoming. Despite the weaknesses of the assimilation approach, it does provide a useful description of some ethnic groups' experience and continues to be the focus for most studies on ethnic identity (even if the goal of the research is to disprove assimilationist assumptions).

Ethnic Identity Retention: Ethnicity as Process

As a consequence of the above discussion of ethnicity as seen through assimilation theory, it seems peferable to consider ethnicity in processual terms. Rather than equating ethnicity with the maintenance of an essentialist cultural form, ethnicity as process means that ethnicity, composed of inter-related objective and subjective factors, is an emergent and on-going response/reaction to social context. Hence, ethnicity is not static but is often continually, socially constructed within particular historical and social contexts. By conceptualizing ethnicity as process the emphasis becomes one of change. This is not to suggest that the form of ethnic identity cannot at times be characterized by continuity but that change is always a possibility.

All or some of the traditional culture of an ethnic group may be discarded but this does not signify the end of ethnicity. As Barth (1969) noted, cultural content can change and yet ethnicity persist through the maintenance of group boundaries. That is, an ethnic group can maintain a viable identity by employing distinctive symbols (material and ideological) that serve to differentiate it from the larger society. These boundaries are not fixed but fluid and the symbols used to mark them change in response to, and through the process of, social interaction. Unlike the assimilation model, this approach to ethnicity recognizes that social interaction and ethnic relations are often characterized by conflict, mainly because of the competition for resources that may be naturally scarce or scarce because those with the power to control them do so, and that this conflict has important implications for the nature and display of ethnic identity. As well, ethnicity as process recognizes that structural assimilation or integration does not necessarily lead to the erosion of a distinct identity. That is, ethnic group

members can participate in modern society and yet retain a measure of difference and autonomy from the larger society.

In this thesis the object is to explore if, and how, the form and importance of ethnic identity of one particular Mennonite group, the Mennonite Brethren, have changed over time in the modern environment. Using information provided by 12 informants, it explores the symbols/markers urban Mennonite Brethren employ to maintain a distinct identity and the meaning they associate with those symbols. It also examines whether traditional cultural traits have been retained and community boundaries have been redrawn. The consequences of ethnic identity for respondents' behaviour, beliefs and attitudes are also studied. In the following chapter the discussion of ethnic identity includes an historical analysis that demonstrates the dynamic nature of Mennonite ethnic identity and suggests how external (e.g., government policy, economic competition, anti-Germanism) and internal forces (e.g., theological schisms) have shaped and continue to shape Mennonite Brethren identity.

Chapter 3: Mennonites -- History and Literature Review

This chapter presents a historical analysis and literature review on Mennonites, and in particular the Mennonite Brethren, the group under study. Far from being static, Mennonite identity and the two main elements of that identity, ethnicity and religion, are shown to have changed in both form and salience throughout the history of the group.

Mennonites in Europe

Named after their leader Menno Simons (1496 - 1561), Mennonites began as one of many Anabaptist religious groups born out of the Reformation. Anabaptists (rebaptizers) came into conflict with the established Catholic and Protestant state churches as a result of their rejection of infant baptism and their practice of rebaptizing adults who indicated their willingness to commit themselves to a new life of Christian faith. Membership in the church was viewed as voluntary and consequently an individual, upon infant baptism, was not viewed as an automatic member of the church.

Anabaptists called for a separation between state and church. As Driedger (1990, 65) notes: "the idea of the two kingdoms, the one holy and coming from God, the other apostate and degenerate, resulted in a stance of nonconformity to the world, and rejection of linking with the state and religious institutions". Driedger goes on to say that from this belief it followed that membership in the religious community was not synonymous with membership in the political state, and participants in the former were not necessarily obliged to the latter. As a result, "true" Christians did not need to adhere to state obligations when they contradicted

Biblical law. Anabaptists did not enter into military service because it was against the Christian law of love. They did not swear oaths to the state because their allegiance was with the Holy Kingdom not an earthly one. They also felt that the state was not entitled to taxes if the money was to be used in a manner incongruous with the scriptures. Moreover, Mennonites were sceptical of the system of private property because of its potential to cause selfishness. As result of these radical beliefs "Anabaptists presented a formidable ideological challenge to accepted European social and religious traditions, a challenge felt mostly by the establishment" (Winland; 1989, 80). This challenge was met with widespread oppression and persecution of Mennonites.

Religious persecution contributed to the formation of the Mennonites as an ethnic group. Dutch-Russian Mennonites, from whom the Mennonite Brethren descended, trace their ancestors back to the early Anabaptists of the Netherlands. The majority of the original members were urban craftsmen (41%) or farmers (33.6%) (Driedger; 1988, 17). The group was made up of ethnically heterogeneous elements and held together by shared religious beliefs and practices. When the Counter-Reformation began in the Netherlands (around 1544) a great number of Mennonites resettled to West Prussia, particularly Danzig and the Vistula Delta, where they were offered religious tolerance in return for skills in dyke building and land reclamation. Though craftsmen continued to reside in urban centres, there was a move toward farming on agrarian block settlements which developed into distinctive communities. As Francis (1948) states: "they eventually grew into Mennonite communities with a culture of their own which included language, customs, dress, etc., based on a Low-German-Dutch social heritage and Mennonite religious institutions" (101). At this time the main focus of Mennonite

identity continued to be religion. When Mennonite groups moved to Russia, however, land and culture took precedence.

After 1772, the kings of Prussia enacted discriminating laws against the Mennonites, prohibiting land purchases without the consent of the king, because of their refusal to pay taxes in support of the state church and military. This caused widespread discontent among the Mennonite people. The Russian government took advantage of the situation and convinced a large number of Mennonites to settle in the Ukraine, becoming "model farmers" to settle the frontier land. There Mennonites obtained free land and religious freedom. The Russian state defined the Mennonites as a corporate body based on ancestral heritage to which the state extended various political rights on the basis of membership in the group. In other words, a system of privileges was established that was based on ethnic heritage not religious faith. This arrangement resulted in homogeneous ethnic settlements held together because of the common interest in maintaining rights granted by the Russian state.

The Russian government granted the Mennonite settlers a large measure of self-government. "The only direct link with the government in Petersburg up to 1870 was a Supervisory Commission appointed by the Tsar" which "performed primarily administrative functions" (Toews; 1975, 15). Inside the geographically isolated settlements, or colonies, the inhabitants developed their own political, economic and cultural system separate from that of their Russian neighbours. They maintained this separation, in part, by strict endogamy and minimal contact with outsiders. Consequently, "within less than three generations the Mennonites in Russia had become a homogeneous community with all the characteristics of an ethnic, even a folk group" (Francis; 1948, 105). The original Mennonite teachings promoting a

voluntary community of believers was replaced by an involuntary geographically bounded ethnic community in which church membership and citizenship were conflated. As a result, many religious practices, such as baptism, came to resemble civil rather than religious rites, and ancestral heritage, not religious commitment, became the requirement for group membership (Toews; 1975, 21).

Economic success from farming, aided by political privileges, transformed the Mennonites into a wealthy ethnic group in comparison with their Russian neighbours. This economic success contributed to the transformation of Mennonites from a strict religious sect to a more worldly community. As Urry (1989) states: "agricultural production was mainly commercial and many Mennonites had grown prosperous, wealthy and worldly from its profits" (21). Religion still played a role in the community but entrepreneurial interests and the economic organization of the community increasingly overshadowed Mennonite theological and religious concerns (Driedger; 1988, 20). This decline of religiosity was a major source for tension within the Mennonite colonies.

Another conflict within the Mennonite colonies was the development of a class hierarchy. In the latter part of the 19th century the Mennonite colonies prospered economically and experienced a population boom. The colonies became densely populated, but the land acreage could not be expanded beyond what the Russian state permitted. Consequently, land and economic opportunities were not open to all and a `landless class' developed. The landless were disenfranchised and often had no choice but to become low-paid labourers in the service of Mennonite landowners. This situation resulted in a class hierarchy that contravened the Anabaptist interpretation of a "brotherhood" community with equality among members.

The Establishment of the Mennonite Brethren

The spiritual decline and class inequality in the Mennonite colonies caused discontent among some community members. Feelings of spiritual inadequacy were intensified when a number of colonists began to attend the religious services of their surrounding neighbours, the Lutherans and the Moravians. Attendance at these meetings convinced the colonists that their own churches were spiritually inferior. Consequently, in 1859, a group of Mennonites started meeting together for Bible study and prayer separately from the established Mennonite church. At these gatherings individuals referred to each other as brothers and thus the group came to be called the "Brethren".

The Brethren criticized the established Mennonite church leaders for the waning spiritual condition of the colonies and called for a return to the Anabaptist understanding of a believers' church separate from the political structure of the community in which membership was based on faith not ancestry. In the secession document of the Mennonite Brethren (1860) the following points were emphasized: (1) Baptism (church membership) was to be granted only to genuine committed believers who had a personal conversion experience; (2) A return to the interpretations of the Christian life as set out by Menno Simons; (3) The need for the church to return to a mission emphasis; and (4) Carnal and unrepentant Christians must be banned from the fellowship of believers (Toews; 1975, 34-35).

When the group persisted in its opposition and started to celebrate communion separately from the official church it was denounced by the leaders of the Mennonite colonies. In denouncing the Brethren the leaders turned a religious issue into a political issue, thereby contravening the Anabaptist teaching of the separation of church and state. The leaders, or

elders, charged that the Brethren were an illegal group. They applied the Russian Penal Code dealing with secret societies. By using threats of imprisonment and banishment to Siberia they were able to prohibit the Brethren from holding meetings (Hamm; 1987, 48). In response, the leaders of the Brethren made several trips to St. Petersburg to petition government officials and in 1866 they were rewarded with a promise of freedom of worship, civil rights and legal protection (Toews; 1975, 49). This official recognition of the Mennonite Brethren resulted in the other Mennonite colonists (who are now called the General Conference) grudgingly accepting their presence. The two Mennonite groups continued to coexist but, not surprisingly, tensions between them remained and persisted even after settlement in Canada.

Russian Mennonites Emigrate to Canada

In 1874 the Russian government enacted a new military law which threatened the Mennonites' exemption from military service. This new law, the government's increasing pressure upon minority groups to assimilate with the Russian population, and the shortage of land in the colonies together prompted many colonists to begin a search for a new homeland (Dyck; 1974, 154-155). Delegates from the colonies were sent to Canada to search for good farming land and to strike a deal with the Canadian government. At this time Manitoba had just become a province and the government was eager to have it settled in order to counteract American expansion and to initiate capitalist agricultural development. The Canadian government considered Mennonites to be ideal settlers since they were known to be good farmers and were relatively self-sufficient, providing their own social institutions. For these reasons the government promised to grant the Mennonites land settlements and guaranteed

them the freedom to practice their religion and to control their social institutions. As in Russia, being labelled a Mennonite by the government was materially advantageous and likely contributed to group solidarity and identity.

There were three main Mennonite emigrations from Russia to Canada[3]. Approximately 8,000 Mennonites settled on two large land reserves in Manitoba between 1874 and 1880. The landless class formed the bulk of the first wave of settlers to Canada in the 1870s. As Driedger (1988; 41) states: "Many who came to Canada in the 1870s were the landless, the poor and conservative elements of the Russian Furstenland villages. They were inclined to better their economic land status, and tended to take a conservative approach to culture, the community and religion". According to all known sources, no Mennonite Brethren were among these first settlers (Toews, 1975).

This first group was followed in the 1920s by approximately 20,000 Russian Mennonites who settled mainly on farms in the prairie provinces. This contingent included a large proportion of Mennonite Brethren whose actual numbers are not known. A final emigration period took place between 1947 and 1961 when approximately 7,000 Mennonites arrived and settled in the Western provinces (Toews; 1975, 153). These immigrants had no official ties with a particular denomination because religious groups and meetings were outlawed under Stalin. The cause for the second and third wave of Mennonite immigrants was a desire to escape Communist rule under which Mennonites had lost political privileges and material resources, and experienced hostility toward religion. While the immigrants of the

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[3] In addition to Russian Mennonite emigration, approximately 8,000 Swiss Mennonites came to North America between 1707 and 1895. They settled mainly in Ontario, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois (Dyck; 1974, 146-147).

1920s and 1940s were not as conservative as the original settlers, they were still strongly committed to reproduce in Canada what they had lost in the Soviet Union. In each case energies were directed at rebuilding the Mennonite colonies in Canada, emphasizing insulated farm settlements and culture, while downplaying the importance of religion.

The Mennonite Brethren Migrate to the Lower Mainland

In their study of Mennonites in Canada, Kauffman and Driedger (1991) estimated that 69% of the Mennonite Brethren in Canada live in British Columbia with a high concentration residing in the Lower Mainland. The Mennonite Brethren first came to the Lower Mainland in 1928 and settled in an area that is now the town of Yarrow. The main reasons for migrating westward were bleak economic prospects on the prairies and the fertility of land recently reclaimed from Sumas Lake. The agricultural community in Yarrow was successful as "most settlers became prosperous raspberry farmers, so that in non-Mennonite circles Yarrow was described as the community of two "R's" - religion and raspberries" (Toews; 1975, 167). The community grew at such a fast rate that in 1948 it had the largest Mennonite Brethren church in Canada with over 900 members. By 1993 the membership had declined to 208.

Shortly after the Yarrow settlement other communities were established in the Lower Mainland. Churches were organized in Greendale (1931), Abbotsford (1932), Arnold (1934), and Chilliwack (1947). In 1937 the first church in Vancouver was opened but it was not until after the economic recession in 1948, which affected crop prices, that large numbers of Mennonite Brethren moved to the urban centre of Vancouver in search of employment.

Today the Mennonite Brethren, as well as the General Conference Mennonites, continue to reside in large numbers in the Lower Mainland. In 1992, when 75 Mennonite Brethren churches in British Columbia with a membership of 13,005, in the Lower Mainland alone there were 52 established Mennonite Brethren churches with a membership of 10,899. Weekly church attendance is estimated to be even higher at 15,044 which means that there were people affiliated with the churches who were not official members (CMBC Yearbook, 1993). In addition to churches in the Lower Mainland, there are other institutions affiliated with the Mennonite Brethren. For example, a private elementary and high school (Mennonite Educational Institute), a bible camp (Columbia Bible Camp), a bible college (Columbia Bible College) and the B.C. offices of the Mennonite Central Committee.

Despite a relatively large population of Mennonite Brethren, there are no longer any geographically bounded Mennonite Brethren settlements in the Lower Mainlaind. The disappearance of insulated homogeneous Mennonite Brethren settlements has resulted in group members becoming increasingly integrated into the surrounding community, a situation that also characterized the early Mennonites in the Netherlands.

In summary, the Mennonites began as a largely urban heterogeneous group whose members were drawn together for religious reasons. Later in Prussia and Russia they became characterized as a rural ethnically homogeneous community in which ancestry and a distinct culture were more prominent than religion. The Mennonite Brethren began largely as a reaction against this decline of religiosity and the associated isolationist perspective. In Canada, however, faced with the difficult task of resettling in a foreign environment, the Mennonite Brethren remained a relatively isolated ethnic community. This task of resettlement was made

more difficult by the Great Depression, language barriers, poor education and being identified as a German cultural group whose members did not participate in the war. However, after World War II these barriers faded and the Mennonite Brethren joined the general Canadian trend toward urbanization to take advantage of employment opportunities and amenities associated with industrialization, technological advancement and the economic growth of the 1950s and 1960s. Assimilation theory predicts that this increased participation in modern society would result in structural assimilation and eventually the loss of a distinct ethnic identity.

Today, the Mennonite Brethren in the Lower Mainland are predominantly an urbanized group. Their migration to the urban environment has led to increasing participation in the cultural (e.g., English language use, leisure pursuits, dietary patterns, media consumption) and structural realms (e.g., occupational choices, educational attainment, urban residence, use of public institutions) of Canadian society. This situation has resulted in, among other things, Mennonite occupational choices, educational attainment, leisure pursuits and media consumption being increasingly typical of middle-class Canadians rather than something that would set them off as being unique.

Research on Mennonite Identities

Assimilation Theory and Mennonites

A distinct Mennonite ethnic identity has traditionally been maintained by a strategy of withdrawal from the rest of society that was reinforced by the religious principle of maintaining separation from the larger secular society. This isolationist tactic of boundary maintenance

resulted in Mennonites having minimal contact with individuals outside their own ethnic community and the internal development of a distinctive Mennonite ethnic identity premised on territory (homogeneous rural block settlements), culture (Dutch-German), theology (Anabaptism) and a community of believers (Driedger, 1989). However, since approximately the end of the Second World War there has been a growing trend toward urbanization and increasing participation in Canadian society among Mennonites, particularly the Mennonite Brethren. With the erosion of geographical boundaries, strict boundary maintenance could no longer be effectively maintained. According to assimilation theory, when strict boundary maintenance is absent ethnic groups are eventually unable to fend off the increasing threats to their persistence. The urban migration of Mennonites then, made the retention of a distinct identity problematic.

Contrary to the predictions of the assimilation model, some recent analyses of more progressive Mennonites (urban, modernized) suggest that Mennonite identity does persist despite a loss of traditional cultural markers and group structures. As will be discussed later, this conclusion may be inaccurate but nevertheless it is a dominant argument in the sociological literature on Mennonite ethnicity. According to researchers such as Kraybill (1985), Hamm (1987), and Kauffman and Driedger (1991), it is a newly constructed identity that emphasizes Mennonite religious ideology and redefines the Mennonite community in terms of a community of voluntary Christian believers as opposed to an involuntary ethnic group. These authors argue that Mennonites are an ethnoreligious group and consequently their identity involves both religious and ethnic components. Within the closed Mennonite communities in Europe and the early settlements in Canada, ethnicity became the prime focus of Mennonite identity at

the expense of religion (Francis, 1948). That is, religious affiliation and practice were not considered as important as ethnic factors (e.g., German language use, Mennonite ancestry) for group membership. Presently, it is asserted that a reversal of this position is occurring as religion is accentuated and other aspects of ethnicity (e.g., territory, language use, culinary patterns) downplayed.

The most comprehensive study undertaken of Canadian Mennonites was conducted by Kauffman and Driedger (1991) who surveyed the five main Mennonite groups. They concluded that the Mennonite Brethren were the most modernized Mennonite group in Canada for the following reasons. First, the Mennonite Brethren were the most urbanized. As Table 1 demonstrates, in 1972 56% of Canadian Mennonite Brethren lived in urban centres with populations of 2,500 or more, and by 1989 the number had increased to 73%.

Table 1: Percent Urban, 1972 and 1989

Denominations	1972 (N=3591)	1989 (N=3083)
Mennonite Brethren (MB)	56	73
General Conference (GC)	40	53
Evangelical Mennonite (EM)	39	47
Mennonite Church (MC)	26	37
Brethren in Christ (BIC)	30	32
Total Average	35	48

Source: Kauffman and Driedger (1991)

Second, Mennonite Brethren had the highest level of educational attainment (see table 2). According to 1989 statistics 8% of Mennonite Brethren had only an elementary school education, 32% had completed high school, 33% attended college, and 27% had graduate school training.

Table 2: Educational Attainment (in percent) by Denomination, 1989

Level attained	MB	GC	EM	MC	BIC	Total
elementary (grades 1-8)	8	10	4	15	8	11
secondary (grades 9-12)	32	37	39	41	48	39
college (grades 13-16)	33	32	37	24	28	29
graduate school (1+yrs.)	27	21	20	20	16	21

Source: Kauffman and Driedger (1991)

Third, Mennonite Brethren had the highest income level of all Mennonite groups. Twenty-six percent of Mennonite Brethren households had a yearly income of more than $50,000, and only 5% had an income under $10,000. Finally, the Mennonite Brethren had the highest occupational rank with a high concentration in professional and business occupations (specific denominational comparisons are not given for these last two variables).

Despite the increasing modernization of the Mennonite Brethren, Kauffman and Driedger (1991) concluded that the forces of modernization and assimilation had been counteracted by a strong sense of in-group identity premised on religious ideology (Anabaptism), family, participation in a community of Christian believers and institutional completeness. Thus, Kauffman and Driedger argue that religion has now become key to the identity of progressive Mennonites, especially the Mennonite Brethren.

In a study of Canadian Mennonite Brethren, Peter M. Hamm (1987) reached a similar conclusion. Hamm focused on the dialectic of secularization and sacralization and concluded that despite evidence of accommodation and assimilation, the Mennonite Brethren continue to have a distinctive identity based on religious vitality. According to Hamm, this religious emphasis has resulted because increasing modernization and integration have prompted a search for a new identity. As a result, there has been a de-emphasis of non-religious ethnic

traits and factors and a sacralization of the Mennonite Brethren identity that serves to counteract the forces of secularization.

Ellen Baar (1983) surveyed Mennonites (not specifically Mennonite Brethren) in the Niagara Peninsula and found an increasing emphasis on religious commitment, despite the trend toward secularization in surrounding communities, combined with a decreasing emphasis on ethnicity. Although there was a loss of traditional cultural traits, Baar concluded that assimilation had not occurred. Instead, differentiation from the rest of society remained, but now the group boundary was marked by religious symbols. According to Baar, ethnicity was not salient because it did not cause conflict nor differentiation in the social setting in which the Mennonites were situated. However, they did experience conflict and feelings of difference in comparison to the larger society based on their religious beliefs. For this reason, Mennonites chose to accentuate certain aspects of their heritage related to religion rather than ethnicity. The decline in non-religious ethnic practice does not, however, imply the end of ethnicity. As Baar (1983: 88) notes:

> A change in environment or renewed interest in another subset of core values and beliefs could in future alter the nature of group boundaries, the basis of identification and the energy devoted to resisting entropy. Through such a process, ethnic identification could become increasingly salient...

Thus, a decline in ethnicity's importance does not necessarily signal the death of an ethnic group because future circumstances may cause ethnicity to be revived.

In his study of urban Mennonites in Ontario, Joseph Smucker (1986) reached a similar conclusion. He found that individuals strove to keep alive their Mennonite religious identity while distancing themselves from their ethnic roots. Mennonite identity was maintained by redefining Mennonite community as a voluntary religious organization emphasizing Christian

service in the larger community, rather than ascription premised on ethnic membership. While ethnicity was downplayed by respondents, it is interesting to note that they preferred not to participate in other religious groups because they felt "they would not have the sense of community and personal identity which they gain in association with other Mennonites" (Smucker, 1986: 277). It is likely that this preference is a result of shared similarities resulting from a common ethnic socialization. It appears then that ethnicity may play a role in the lives of these respondents despite the changing nature of their identity; ethnicity may not be as central as it once was, but it may still exist.

In a recent study of General Conference Mennonites in the Fraser Valley, Johann Funk (1991: 167) found that:

> despite transformational changes, shared cultural inventory and the influence of cultural plurality, Anabaptist-Mennonite culture has persisted through time and continues to represent a distinct `constituting spirit' and `signifying system'.

According to Funk, the General Conference Mennonites have reoriented their identity in response to the external forces of modernity and a liberal democratic society. As a result, they shifted from closed to open communities, rural to urban residence patterns, a distinct to an invisible cultural inventory and agricultural to professional occupations. Internal debates have also occurred over the importance of Anabaptism and the adoption of outside religious beliefs and practices (e.g., evangelism). Despite these changes, a distinct minority status has been retained. Funk's findings indicate that the cultural form of ethnic groups does not necessarily disappear as a result of external and internal forces but rather these forces can result in a process of social construction that serves to redefine and recreate a new identity.

While religious ideology is a large part of this new identity, Funk, and others (Winland, 1989; Redekop, 1992), make the important point that Mennonite religion has not remained static but has changed throughout the history of the group. For example, evangelism of non-Mennonites was essentially non-existent in Russia but in Canada it is strongly advocated by the Mennonite Brethren. Religion then, is malleable and changes in response to new contexts and pressures. Consequently, whether one focuses specifically on the religious component of ethnicity, or Mennonite ethnicity in general, it is not possible to point to a factor that has remained constant.

From this literature review two important conclusions can be made. First, research reveals the shortcoming of assimilation theory in describing the experience of Mennonites, mainly because the centrality of religion for Mennonites' lives serves to differentiate them from the rest of Canadian society. This relates to the second major finding that there appears to be an increasing importance placed on religion by Mennonites in expressions of self and group identity. Other ethnic traits (e.g., German language use, ingroup friendship selection) may still exist but they appear to be less central to Mennonite identity.

There are a number of dangers in uncritically accepting these conclusions. The assertion that religion has become more important than other aspects of ethnicity for Mennonites should be regarded cautiously. Research discussed in the next section points out that Mennonites often consciously attempt to hide their ethnicity publicly because of embarrassment about it or the desire to win converts among outsiders. As Winland (1989) notes, questions about ethnic and religious identity often elicit "party line" responses that promote a religious identity. The reported centrality of religion in the lives of Mennonites may

be more a result of the methodology employed rather than an accurate reflection of reality. I do not want to suggest that religion is unimportant but rather that it may be overstated or important in a nominal sense (i.e., people find it useful as a way of talking about themsleves rather than of intrinsic significance in their lives).

A research method commonly employed (e.g., by Baar and Smucker) is to ask respondents to describe the nature of Mennonite identity. This research approach may lead to rehearsed answers that do not correspond with the actual lived experience of Mennonites. This methodology may also result in an over emphasis on Mennonites' ability to resist the forces of assimilation. That is, an individual's assertion that being a Mennonite is important to him/her, does not necessarily mean that s/he has resisted assimilation. If an individual states that s/he has a Mennonite identity but it is essentially symbolic with no real importance for social practice, it seems logical that, for all intents and purposes, they have been absorbed into the cultural and social structure of Canadian society.

A second methodological approach commonly used to analyze Mennonite identity (e.g. Kauffman and Harder, and Hamm) is to determine the extent of religiosity by the use of scales that measure religious beliefs, devotionalism, experiences and participation and then compare these results to scales measuring ethnic traits (e.g., communalism, separatism, family patterns, participation in ethnic institutions). The reported salience of religion may be influenced by a desirability effect and may not provide an indepth understanding of how religiosity affects the lives of individuals. Consequently, it seems problematic to assert that religious beliefs and practices counteract assimilative forces when there is little understanding of how religion affects different aspects of individuals' lives.

The interrelationship between ethnicity and religion in Mennonite identity.

A common theme among the studies discussed is a renewed emphasis on religion by Mennonites and an erosion of traditional ethnic traits and the decline of the closed homogeneous community. What is not clear is how ethnicity and religion are conceptualized in relation to one another. In other words, is religion something separate from ethnicity or is it a distinctive ethnic trait? This confusion over the relationship between these two key concepts is not confined to academics but has, according to Mennonite writers led to an "identity crisis" within the Mennonite community (see Redekop, 1987; Toews, 1987; Hamm, 1987; Sawatsky, 1991).

The term Mennonite has taken a double meaning - ethnic and religious. A tension has arisen among more progressive Mennonites between a universalistic religious ideology stressing evangelism and an ethnocentric ethnic identity. The religious ideology of the Mennonites emphasizes evangelism and a the need to create a community in which membership is voluntary and based on religious belief (fellowship of believers). This contradicts much of the history of the group in which community membership and interaction was restricted to ethnic Mennonites. While there is still the desire on the part of some group members to retain an insulated homogeneous ethnic community a conscious effort is being made by Mennonites to present themselves to outsiders as a religious denomination. Consequently, one is left to wonder what role ethnicity plays in the lives of Mennonites and brings up the thorny question of where to draw the boundaries between religious belief and ethnic practice.

In his book, A People Apart: Ethnicity and the Mennonite Brethren (1987) John Redekop provided evidence that the Mennonite Brethren are an ethnic group as well as a religious denomination. The evidence cited for the existence of a distinct Mennonite ethnicity is 1) repeated references in the Mennonite press to Mennonite culture; 2) the categorization of Mennonites as a cultural group under the Canadian government policy of multiculturalism; 3) the perception of outsiders that Mennonites are an ethnic group; and 4) the frequent use of ethnic categories by academics to describe Mennonites. Redekop proposed that this ethnic identity was a detriment to church growth and evangelism of non-Mennonites who shied away from Mennonite churches, including Mennonite Brethren, because of feelings of exclusion. Consequently, he suggested that the term Mennonite Brethren be dropped and replaced with a title that did not involve any "cultural baggage". According to Redekop and other Mennonite leaders, Mennonites should preserve their ethnicity but it needs to be separated from religious practice. For this reason, it has been proposed by some younger members (i.e., second generation) of the Mennonite Brethren that the name of the Mennonite Brethren Church be changed to the Evangelical Anabaptist Church. This proposal has never been accepted but a number of Mennonite Brethren churches have independently decided to exclude the term Mennonite Brethren from their title to avoid the ethnic connotations of the term. This debate indicates the current struggle to provide a contemporary definition of Mennonite peoplehood.

A couple of points need to be made in response to Redekop's study. First, the methods used to determine ethnicity lead one to wonder if an ethnic label was imposed upon Mennonite Brethren which ignored the actual experience of individuals. Second, Redekop's suggestion that the elements of ethnicity and religion be distinguished and separated from each other is a

difficult, probably impossible, task. Religion and ethnicity are fused together in the Mennonite identity, as evidenced by recent empirical research (Winland, 1989; Warner, 1985).

In her study of Ontario Mennonites, Winland (1989) studied the changing Mennonite self-concept. It was discovered that there is an increasing emphasis on religion that involves a redefinition of community (ethnic to religious) and an emphasis on Christian service. This process often causes confusion for Mennonites. Winland asserts this is because Mennonites, in many cases, want to separate their religious identity from their ethnic identity; yet this is difficult since the two are not mutually exclusive. Religious faith and ethnic culture are intertwined and an attempt to unravel the two is problematic, if not impossible, because much of Mennonite ethnic practice is based on Mennonite religious ideology (e.g. gender relations, behavioural taboos).

The task of providing an unambiguous and unifying definition of Mennonite peoplehood is further problematized because it ignores dynamic, processual elements and the ways in which context dictates the expression of Mennonite identity. Winland found that Mennonites expressed themselves primarily in terms of ethnicity in informal contexts and in terms of religion in more formal or public situations. These seemingly competing expressions of identity do not, according to Winland, hinder the perpetuation of a distinct Mennonite identity. Instead, the fact that there is no essentialist or ideal version of Mennonite peoplehood allows individuals to have a common Mennonite identity and "sense of groupness" even though they may have different ideas and opinions on what it means to be a Mennonite and the consequences of that label. In other words, Mennonites can share the same symbols and therefore share a feeling of affinity but attach different meaning and importance to the symbols.

Since these symbols are imprecise and the boundaries of the group are not fixed, Mennonites are able to accentuate different aspects of their identity (religious or ethnic) in order to adapt to their surroundings. If an essentialist Mennonite identity were attained, it could then be lost. However, since there are different expressions and components of identity, it can be manipulated by individuals to best suit their purposes within specific contexts. This malleable quality of Mennonite identity contributes to its continuation and confounds attempts to characterize Mennonites as essentially a religious or ethnic group.

This conclusion is supported by a study conducted by Miriam Warner (1985) on a Mennonite Brethren congregation in Harrison, California. Warner found that some behavioural assimilation had occurred among the congregation under study but nevertheless a distinct ethnic identity was retained primarily though the process of voluntary enclavement. Group members chose to live in close proximity to each other and carried out the majority of their primary social and religious activities within the community. Consequently, distinctive ethnic practices still existed (e.g., gender roles, emphasis on kinship, traditional moral codes) but at the same time there was a conscious effort to publicly hide ethnicity (e.g., German language use, importance of kinship ties) in order to gain converts.

Through her participant observation Warner discovered that the ethnic Mennonites were not as successful as they thought themselves to be in incorporating outsiders. A division was made, in some cases consciously and in others unconsciously, between the achieved religious membership available to all and the ascribed ethnic membership that could not be attained by outsiders. While it was possible for outsiders to practice the formal religious codes of the group, it was much more difficult to grasp the informal codes governing behaviour.

These behavioural codes (e.g., frugality, obligation to kin, work ethic) were learned through the process of socialization within the ethnic group and were often not recognized by ethnic Mennonites as being distinctive but were seen as `normal' or `common sense'. Warner also points out that in cases when difficult value judgements had to be made there often were no formalized rules. Instead decisions were influenced by the informal behavioural codes commonly held by ethnic Mennonite Brethren members. Ethnic practice then, was often not objectively known nor articulated. This unconscious effect of ethnicity implies that practice is not necessarily rule-governed nor rational and there is a difficulty inherent in the attempt to shed one's ethnicity.

Perhaps a useful way of conceptualizing the relationship between ethnicity and religion for ethnoreligious groups, such as the Mennonites, is to propose that the ethnic component of identity involves the selective use and interpretation of religious theology. In discussing Mennonites, Kraybill (1988: 158) states, "the very essence of Anabaptism itself with its imperative to obey and practice the gospel quite naturally fosters subcultural or ethnic expressions of religious experience." This suggests that religious faith informs ethnic culture. That is, Mennonite ethnicity involves living out the religious beliefs commonly held by group members.

This relationship between ethnicity and religion is not straightforward, however, because it is shaped by the political, economic, and cultural context in which the group is situated. It must be remembered that what is considered traditional Mennonite ethnicity resulted, in large part, from a particular (Anabaptist) reading of the Bible within a specific social, political and economic context. For example, the closed rural communities that once

typified Mennonite life were deemed necessary to fulfil the religious requirement of separation from the world and were practically necessary since Mennonites faced persecution and expulsion from major urban centres in 16th century Europe. This practice was maintained in Russia despite the lack of persecution largely because of the economic rewards associated with group membership. Within the isolated rural settlements, Mennonites formed into an ethnic group characterized by strict endogamy, self-sufficient political, economic and social institutions, German language use, occupational concentration in agriculture, common dress and food consumption patterns, and common descent (Francis, 1948). When geographical separation was no longer feasible in the Canadian context, because of external pressures (e.g., government intervention, lack of economic opportunities in rural areas), this precept was reinterpreted and separation was defined more in terms of an ideological separation (i.e., differentiation based on religious belief) rather than on the basis of geographic boundaries (Kraybill, 1988; Smucker, 1986; Baar, 1983). Today theology continues to inform the practice and thoughts of Mennonites but, to some extent, the interpretations and consequent implications of religion have been altered, largely as a result of the changed milieu in which the group is situated.

In the following chapter this relationship between religion and ethnicity will be explored by analyzing the nature and salience of the Mennonite Brethren identity as shown by the research for this thesis. It will be seen how the Mennonite Brethren identity is being shaped in the modern urbanized environment and how this process affects group members' thinking and practices. An attempt will be made to assess whether Mennonite Brethren ethnic identity is more accurately characterized by replication, loss or change.

Chapter 4: The Research Process

Research for this thesis used semi-structured interviews to explore the topic of ethnic identity from the subjects' frame of reference. This chapter discusses that research method and the reasons why it was selected. It also describes how the data were gathered and analyzed.

Research Method

To date there has been no in-depth research conducted on the form and salience of Mennonite Brethren ethnicity in Canada. Hence, this study is exploratory and uses semi-structured interviews that allowed the researcher the flexibility to pursue topics that proved themselves to be pertinent during the interview process.

A semi-structured, or open-ended interview, is well-suited for determining ethnic salience because it enables the researcher to ask respondents to describe in detail if, and how, ethnicity influences specific decisions or aspects of their lives. It also allows for the use of probes and clarifications that provide more detailed and in-depth information. As well, the richness of the data gained lends itself to the explication of complex phenomena such as group boundaries and symbols when analyzing the form of ethnic identity.

Another advantage of using a qualitative interview method is that it offers an opportunity for explaining the existence of associations and patterns. Allowing respondents to describe their own experience provides a better understanding of the experiential aspect of ethnicity. One is able to go beyond surface expressions of identity and get at a deeper understanding of how ethnicity affects the lives of group members. Furthermore, the collection of intricate data allows the researcher to see how experiences of ethnicity are related to social

contexts and how they are shaped or changed in response to different pressures. A qualitative analysis then, is well suited to grasp the processual and experiential aspects of ethnicity and their relationship to the economic, political and social setting. Having said this, it must be acknowledged that this methodological approach does have drawbacks.

A drawback of the research method employed in this study is the degree to which results can be generalized. While it is possible to see regularities or patterns from the interviews it is problematic to generalize the results because a small non-random sample is used. Nevertheless, what may be lost in the ability to generalize should be compensated for by the in-depth insights gained and the ability to provide explication concerning the complex topic of ethnicity and ethnic salience.

The Study Group: The Mennonite Brethren

In this study the Mennonite Brethren community in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia is the target population. This population was chosen for several reasons. First, in contrast to popular assumptions Mennonites are not a homogeneous population; so the study is limited to one specific denomination so that denominational differences do not influence the data. Second, I am familiar with the community and have access to individuals either directly or through church and family connections. Third, the Mennonite Brethren are the most modernized of North American Mennonite and are therefore most likely to experience assimilationist forces populations (Driedger and Kauffman, 1991). Consequently, they provide a good opportunity to observe the processes of identity formation, loss and change and perhaps

may signal what is to come for other Mennonite groups as they become more urbanized and incorporated into Canadian society.

Data Gathering

Interviews were conducted with 12 members of the Mennonite Brethren community. The actual number of interviews was not fixed before the study began; rather interviews were conducted until a saturation point was reached when the data obtained allowed for an adequate explication of the topics under study (e.g., no new information was uncovered).

The sample was divided according to generation with 4 respondents (two males and two females) in each of three generations. The different generations included in the study are defined as follows. The first generation is comprised of individuals who immigrated to Canada. Second generation members were born in Canada and are offspring of the first generation. The third generation, also born in Canada, are offspring of the second generation.

Respondents in the study were selected by way of a snowball sample. I relied on my community contacts to obtain introductions to prospective respondents. The individuals selected had to meet the following criteria. First, given the study's concern with ethnic change, respondents had to have an ethnic Mennonite Brethren heritage. Individuals attending a Mennonite Brethren church but who did not have an ethnic Mennonite Brethren background were excluded from the analysis. Second, the respondents had to consider themselves to have a Mennonite Brethren identity. This was determined by simply asking prospective respondents if they considered themselves to be a Mennonite Brethren. I also attempted to select individuals

in a manner that ensured variation in certain potentially important variables (e.g., educational attainment, occupation, income and marital status).

When a prospective respondent had been identified by a community contact I directly contacted the individual to ask if she/he wished to participate in the study. At that time the respondent was told about the topic so s/he could think about it in advance. Also, any questions participants had were answered and assurances of confidentiality and anonymity were given. All of the individuals that were contacted agreed to be interviewed.

The Interviews

Interviews were conducted from October 1993 to February 1994. All of the interviews except two took place at the respondent's residence. Of the other two interviews, one was conducted at my home in Victoria and the other at my parents' home in Chilliwack. Before the actual interview I informed the sample members of their rights as research participants and told them about my responsibilities as a researcher. An informed consent form was then signed by myself and the interviewees (see Appendix 2).

A semi-structured interview questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was used as a guideline during the interview process. This questionnaire was developed well in advance of the study and was re-worked after being pre-tested with three individuals from the Mennonite community (two were Mennonite Brethren). The degree to which the questionnaire was followed varied from one respondent to another. Generally, I introduced broad topics and then let respondents talk freely on the subject. Specific questions were asked, however, to gain clarifications and to prompt respondents to discuss subjects in more detail.

The length of the interviews varied from 45 minutes to two hours. Interviews were tape recorded to allow me to participate more actively in the interview process and ensure a complete and accurate record of the interaction. I also made notebook entries immediately after each interview in order to record pertinent information and as a method of reflection. Furthermore, the phone numbers and/or addresses of respondents were recorded so that I could contact them later to obtain any necessary clarifications or ask further questions that arose during the research process. In total, four interviewees were re-contacted.

Data Analysis

Since there is no indepth research dealing directly with the salience and form of ethnicity for the Mennonite Brethren in Canada, this study is exploratory in nature. The research analysis, therefore, does not involve forcing predetermined concepts and categories on the data. Rather, the techniques of the grounded-theory method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) are used to analyze the data and inductively derive explicatory theory. Consequently, data analysis was an ongoing process throughout the study. As interviews were conducted and transcribed I continually reflected upon the material and its implications. The interviews were transcribed by myself because of the opportunity it afforded to become familiar with the data. As a result of working with the data as it was collected, I added several topics to the interview schedule and focused more closely on others that emerged as important issues through the interview process.

To protect the research participants' anonymity and to ensure confidentiality, the names of the respondents are not used in the written portion of the thesis. Furthermore, the informed consent forms and tapes have been kept separately in a locked cabinet. The tapes

were marked with a number and transcribed by myself using a dictaphone. After the interviews were transcribed, a hard copy was produced, kept in a locked cabinet, and identified only by a number.

Once a hard copy of the interviews was produced, the data were coded according to the method outlined by Corbin and Strauss (1990). First, open coding was used to identify important concepts that emerged from reading and rereading the data. Second, axial coding was employed to group together related concepts under specific headings or categories. These concepts and categories were looked for by manually reading the transcripts and also with the help of the computer program "Textbase Alpha". This software program provided a quick method for cutting and pasting relevant material from the interviews. Ten broad categories were used to organize the data into topic sections. These categories were; 1) group boundaries, 2) group symbols, 3) the effects of a Mennonite Brethren identity, 4) social network, 5) gender issues, 6) family, 7) group characteristics, 8) heritage, 9) morality,
and 10) religious emphases. Once these categories were identified a third step, selective coding, was employed to identify core categories and discover how different categories were related.

This inductive method of analysis allows the data to guide the research process rather than forcing it to fit a preconceived theory. Hence, the results of the study are directly based on the informants' descriptions and explanations of their lived experience. This provides for an in-depth explication of the process of Mennonite Brethren ethnic identity that enables the researcher to see if the lived experiences of group members are characterized by identity replication, loss or change and the degree of salience that identity has for their lives.

Chapter 5: Mennonite Brethren Responses on Beliefs and Identities -- Group Boundaries and Symbols

The literature on Mennonites repeatedly points to religion and ethnicity as the two main interrelated elements of Mennonite identity. There is an ongoing debate within the Mennonite, and more specifically the Mennonite Brethren, community over the proper relationship between faith and culture. This "identity crisis" revolves around Mennonites' confusion over whether to define their collective identity as primarily an ethnic or a religious one. In this chapter I discuss the respondents' comments on group boundaries and the symbols used to mark those boundaries. This analysis explicates how, if at all, the Mennonite Brethren differentiate themselves from the larger Canadian society and provide evidence as to which side of the ethnicity versus religion debate the sample members favoured. To begin, background information on respondents is provided.

Research Participants - Demographic Information

The sample in this study consists of 12 individuals residing in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. All 12 participants identify themselves as having a Mennonite Brethren identity and can trace their ethnic heritage within the group. Moreover, all participants reported that they are familiar with and involved in the Mennonite Brethren community in the Lower Mainland.

The sample is divided according to generations so that there are 4 respondents, 2 females and 2 males, in each of three generations (see Table 3). In the first generation of

Mennonite Brethren the two women respondents are housewives who, before their husband's retirement, had been housewives on farms. Of the two men in this generation one is a retired farmer and the other a retired teacher. The former teacher took university courses at UBC and has the highest level of educational attainment in respondents within this first generation. The other three first generation respondents left school at the grade 8 level. In addition to their formal education, three of the four respondents had bible school training. All four individuals reported that their yearly household income was below 20,000 dollars. Three of the four respondents are married while one is a widow. The age of the respondents at the time of the interviews were 76, 80, 80, and 82.

The two females in the second generation are both housewives, however, one of the women also works as a bookkeeper in her husband's dairy farm business. One male is a Christmas tree farmer while the other is a chiropractor. Two of these respondents were in households with yearly incomes over 80,000 dollars while one belonged in the $61,000 - $80,000 range, and another in the $41,000 - $60,000 range. The levels of educational attainment for these four individuals were grade 11, grade 13, a Bachelor's of Education and graduation from chiropractor college. Also, one male and one female have completed 2 years of bible school training. All four of the second generation respondents are married and it should be mentioned that all the married respondents in the sample (8 including the one widow) are in first marriages. The ages of the second generation respondents were 39, 52, 53, and 62.

In the third generation three respondents are currently university students (2 females and 1 male). One is taking education courses, another is in his last year of a Bachelor of Arts Degree and one respondent is finishing her Master's Degree in Art History. The one respondent

who is currently working is employed as a general clerk in a grocery store and has completed a Bachelor of Arts Degree. In addition to a university education all four respondents have spent at least one year at a bible school. All four respondents are single and have a yearly income of less than 20,000 dollars. At the time of the interviews three of the respondents were aged 26 while the other interviewee was 27 years old.

In terms of religious adherence, 10 of the 12 respondents define themselves as Christians and are members of their church. The two respondents who are not Christians are members of the third generation (one male and one female). Despite the lack of religious affiliation with the Mennonite Brethren church both individuals grew up within the community and consider themselves to have a Mennonite Brethren identity.

Table 3: Summary Table of Demographic Information

Subject	Generation	Gender	Education	Occupation	Marital Status	Income	Religion	Age
#1	1st	female	grade 8/1 year bible school	housewife	married	below $20000	Christian	76
#2	1st	female	grade 8/1 year bible school	housewife	widowed	below $20000	Christian	80
#3	1st	male	grade 8/1 year bible school	retired farmer	married	below $20000	Christian	80
#4	1st	male	university	retired teacher	married	below $20000	Christian	82
#5	2nd	female	grade 13/ 2 years bible school	housewife/book keeper	married	$80000+	Christian	53
#6	2nd	female	grade 11	housewife	married	$61000-$80000	Christian	62
#7	2nd	male	university	tree farmer	married	$41000-$60000	Christian	39
#8	2nd	male	college/ 2 years bible school	chiropractor	married	$80000+	Christian	52
#9	3rd	female	university/1 year bible school	student	single	below $20000	non-Christian	27
#10	3rd	female	university/2 years bible school	student	single	below $20000	Christian	26
#11	3rd	male	university/1 year bible school	clerk	single	below $20000	non-Christian	26
#12	3rd	male	university/1 year bible school	student	single	below $20000	Christian	26

Group Boundaries

From the interviews it appears that respondents believe the Mennonite Brethren are consciously attempting to expand the boundaries of the group to include Christians who join a Mennonite Brethren church. The exact definition of joining a Mennonite Brethren church varies and ranges from becoming a baptized member to just becoming a Christian (e.g., experiencing an evangelical conversion) and attending church services. The crucial point is the emphasis on attracting outsiders into the church in order to proselytize and gain Christian converts. A second generation respondent described what he considers to be the goal of the Mennonite Brethren:

> ...to preach the gospel to everybody and reach out to everybody, unbelievers and believers alike regardless of their denomination or their affiliation with whatever. If you are only reaching out to Mennonites I mean we would die and stagnate. I think that was the focus, we wanted to reach out into the community and be a force in the community, a spiritual force in the community, change lives. And if identifying closely with culture and ethnicity were to hinder that goal then it has to be put aside and that is exactly what happened, and is happening.

This statement illustrates the intent of group members to evangelise outsiders and a willingness to shed their traditional ethnicity in order to gain Christian converts. It will be shown that this goal has significant implications for the maintenance and positioning of group boundaries.

Based on the interviews there appear to be three main types of individuals who are considered, at least by some group members, to be a Mennonite Brethren. First, there is the individual who has a Mennonite Brethren ancestry and is a practising Christian in a Mennonite Brethren church. Such a person has both an ethnic and religious Mennonite Brethren identification and consequently there is no ambiguity in his/her identity. All 12 respondents considered individuals with these qualifications to be a Mennonite Brethren. A second type of person sometimes defined as being a Mennonite Brethren is one who has a Mennonite Brethren

ethnic heritage but is not an evangelical Christian. These individuals have an ethnic Mennonite Brethren identity but not a religious one. A third type of person considered by some respondents to be a Mennonite Brethren are non-ethnic Mennonite Brethren who join a Mennonite Brethren Church. In this particular case there is a religious identification with the group but not an ethnic one. Respondents' classification of these latter two types of individual varied and it is interesting to see how responses related to the interviewees' generation.

Second Generation Respondents Conception of Group Boundaries

Respondents from the second generation put a strong emphasis on the religious component of Mennonite Brethren identity. All four individuals considered ethnic outsiders who join the Mennonite Brethren church to be Mennonite Brethren. A theme common to members of this generation was that their own perceptions of the group boundaries were not static but had changed over time to emphasize religion over ethnicity. As an informant stated:

> My definition has changed over the years but at the present time I would describe it as a very spiritual thing. It is not really related to ethnicity.

While all four second generation respondents acknowledged there are ethnic aspects to the Mennonite Brethren identity, they seemed to downplay the importance of these factors as one respondent's comment about the nature of Mennonite Brethren identity demonstrated:

> It is not ethnic[4]. I think within the group of Mennonites in total there is ethnicity or shall we say cultural distinctives, after all we did live in isolation for a 100 years or more, or 200 years, a long time, so certain practices are prominent among Mennonites in general but that doesn't make them Mennonites. Being Mennonite means following the tenets laid down by the Church fathers, Menno [Simons] is considered to be prime, and if you think back to Menno what distinguished the people was that they followed the teachings of faith, not whether they ate certain foods or did certain things.

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[4] This comment appears to contradict the earlier statement that all respondents acknowledged there are ethnic aspects to the Mennonite Brethren identity. However, in a different section of the interview the respondent did identify ethnic characteristics associated with the group.

This quotation illustrates a trend among the second generation respondents to focus selectively on the religious, as opposed to the ethnic, heritage of the Mennonite Brethren. That is, religion is considered the central defining characteristic of the group while ethnicity is secondary, almost coincidental.

The emphasis on voluntary religious identification was the reason two of the four interviewees in the second generation considered an ethnic Mennonite Brethren who left the church to no longer be a member of the group. Another second generation respondent had difficulties categorizing this type of individual.

> I would say that whenever I hear of somebody on the news or whatever with a name like ours I think of them as a Mennonite but really and truly if they are not a church member or a Christian I would probably say well they are not a Mennonite. That is a little bit hard to answer.

From the above statement, it appears that the respondent thinks of these individuals as Mennonite Brethren but considers this line of thought to be incorrect, perhaps because it violates the `party line' that stresses religion. The emphasis placed on a religious identification[5] implies that the second generation respondents have strict qualifications for group membership; ethnic heritage is not, generally, considered sufficient for inclusion.

Third Generation Respondents' Conception of Group Boundaries

Respondents of the third generation were quite comfortable with stating that the Mennonite Brethren identity is both cultural and religious and all four felt that one could have a Mennonite Brethren identity solely on the basis of ethnic heritage. Three of the four

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[5] As will be discussed in chapter six, a religious identification for the Mennonite Brethren is not a nominal commitment. Rather, a religious Mennonite Brethren is equated with an active Christian adherent.

respondents also categorized outsiders who join a Mennonite Brethren church as being a Mennonite Brethren. In other words, ethnic heritage was not considered necessary but was sufficient for a Mennonite Brethren identity. Generally speaking then, members of the third generation identify three different types of Mennonite Brethren - solely ethnic, solely religious and both ethnic and religious. Compared to the other two generations the third generation informants have the most inclusive conception of a group boundary.

First Generation Respondents' Conception of Group Boundaries

First generation respondents, and one second generation respondent, made a distinction between Mennonites and Mennonite Brethren. In talking about an ethnic non-religious Mennonite Brethren an interviewee commented:

> He is just ethnic. He has the same background as I have and maybe the same traditions I have but he is not a Mennonite Brethren because to be a Mennonite Brethren you have to be baptized.

For members of the first generation Mennonites were defined as an ethnic group, whereas Mennonite Brethren were people who voluntarily joined and were baptized in the Mennonite Brethren church. Moreover, all four respondents in the first generation considered outsiders who join the church to be Mennonite Brethren, however, three mentioned that they were not ethnic Mennonites. Consequently, it appears that first generation respondents are defining Mennonite Brethren more strictly as a religious group and Mennonites in general as an ethnic group[6].

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[6] The definition of the Mennonite Brethren as a religious group does not mean that ethnicity does not play a role in the lives of these individuals. It will be shown later that ethnicity is, in fact, an important dimension for first generation members.

Conversations with respondents suggest that when considering group boundaries and the notion of `us' versus `them', first generation respondents defined `them' in a somewhat different manner than individuals from the second and third generation. For the latter two, Mennonite Brethren seemed to be conceptualized as one particular ethnic group within the larger Mennonite family and consequently respondents freely generalized in terms of Mennonites as opposed to others. However, first generation respondents' distinctions were frequently made in terms of the Mennonite Brethren and other Mennonites.

Whereas second and third generation respondents appeared to accept General Conference Mennonites (the other main Mennonite group in the Lower Mainland) as being similar to themselves, first generation respondents often defined themselves in opposition to this group. This is likely the result of the already mentioned religious schism in the early 1860s when some members of the General Conference split from the group and formed the Mennonite Brethren. Consequently, because the Mennonite Brethren in Russia defined themselves in terms of religious opposition to the General Conference and were relatively isolated from other non-Mennonite groups they often see the General Conference people as the `other'. Another topic pertaining to first generation boundary maintenance needs to be briefly addressed before concluding the discussion on different identities within the Mennonite Brethren.

From the interviews with members of the first generation there appears to be a willingness, in fact a stated goal, to evangelize and attract outsiders into the group. Consequently, they seem to share the goal of evangelism, expanding the group boundaries to incorporate Christian converts. This mission seems somewhat incongruous with the statements

of the interviewees that the Mennonite Brethren have only recently become more inclusive and outward looking. First generation respondents themselves described their own generation as made up of individuals who "keep pretty much to their people, their beliefs." When asked to compare the Mennonite Brethren with the general Canadian society one first generation respondent stated;

Well I can't say much about other people. I don't mix with others....

It appears then that the expansionist goals of this generation, in general, do not match up with their actual experience. It is not my goal to discuss all the possible factors as to why the group boundaries for the first generation were, and appear to remain, relatively impermeable but a number of comments offered by the respondents will be briefly mentioned.

First generation respondents discussed two main factors that they felt contributed to their lack of integration and evangelism. First, the Mennonites had to promise that they would not prostelyze while living in Russia. The Mennonite colonies were granted land and autonomy by the Russian government but in return the colonists had to agree not to evangelize outsiders. Second, on coming to Canada they were once again granted land settlements but had to promise to stay on their farms for a given period of time. This geographical isolation combined with poor, if any, English language skills, a lack of formal education and being viewed as a German ethnic group during the Second World War, contributed to an inwardly focused group. What this suggests, and first generation informants implied, is that the isolationist perspective may not be so much a conscious choice on the part of first generation members but, to some degree, a consequence of situational factors outside of their control.

Summary of Group Boundaries

Second generation informants typically considered membership in the Mennonite Brethren to be based strictly on a voluntary association with the Mennonite Brethren Church. First generation respondents also share this view. Third generation respondents are willing to define individuals as Mennonite Brethren if they either join the church or have a Mennonite Brethren heritage[7]. For respondents of this generation ethnicity is used to assign membership to the Mennonite Brethren. Third generation respondents also used ethnicity to assign group membership. However, they use ethnicity to distinguish between outsiders and Mennonites, rather than between outsiders and Mennonite Brethren.

Within all three generations there was a recognition that religion takes primacy over ethnicity for group self definition. It appears then that group boundaries are being drawn along religious lines and, except for the third generation, ethnic heritage is not considered sufficient for membership in the Mennonite Brethren. Further evidence for this position is provided by considering the respondents' views on intermarriage and the importance placed on their childrens' Mennonite Brethren self-identity.

Marriage Patterns: Implications for Group Boundaries

Traditionally Mennonites are a highly endogamous group (Winland, 1989; Redekop, 1986). Marriage within the group is important for retention of an ethnic identity because the family is the primary agent in the transmission of ethnic values from one generation to another. Common sense indicates that if both marriage partners are from the same ethnic background

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[7] It must be mentioned that undoubtedly this result is affected by the fact that two of the four respondents are not Christians, yet identify themselves as cultural members of the group.

the chance of their children maintaining that identity is increased. This form of reasoning was used by respondents, however, not in terms of transmitting an ethnic identity but more importantly for continuation of a Christian identity. A second generation respondent said:

> ...people should not be unequally yoked. Christians should not marry non-Christians because the value systems are different and that has the potential for much conflict.

This statement is representative of the 10 Christian respondents. It was important to them that they themselves, or their children, marry Christians and have Christian homes suggesting that religious identification was considered more important than an ethnic identification. The two non-Christian respondents were not concerned about marrying either a Mennonite or a Christian.

Despite the emphasis that religion was a more significant factor than ethnicity for marriage partner selection, ethnic considerations were mentioned by some respondents. Four interviewees commented that it might make marriage adjustments easier to marry an ethnic Mennonite Brethren as opposed to someone of another ethnic background. A second generation informant stated:

> Well what we said to our children is if you marry someone of your own ethnic background your adjustments are fewer...the adjustments will be fewer than if you marry into another ethnic background or church background. But there again we have always said to them if they're Christian it doesn't matter.

This statement indicates that while ethnic background is a factor for the respondent it is overshadowed by religious considerations.

Interestingly, of the eight respondents (all members of the first and second generation) who were or are married, seven have or had ethnic Mennonite Brethren spouses. This fact may lead one to speculate that respondents are consciously, or unconsciously, downplaying the

importance of ethnicity since ethnic background and marriage selection do appear to be correlated for sample members. In order to investigate this possibility, respondents were asked to explain this apparent `contradiction' and they unanimously stated that at the time of marriage their social network primarily consisted of Mennonite Brethren and thus it was just a natural consequence. As one first generation respondent stated:

> We two we didn't have no other choice (sic). We were from that community.

If this explanation is true it would follow that members of the third generation who are more integrated into the larger Canadian society, and thus have a more heterogeneous social network, would be more likely to marry outsiders. None of the third generation interviewees were married but all reported having dated people (three of the four repondents had only dated Christians) outside of the Mennonite Brethren group. Marriage patterns then may be, as respondents suggest, more of a coincidence of social networks rather than an expressed intent to preserve group boundaries. Nevertheless, the ethnic social network[8] may have the unintended effect of maintaining group boundaries. It appears then, that both ethnic (i.e. social network) and religious factors come into play but religion is deemed more important.

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[8] As will be discussed in the section on ethnic symbols, the Mennonite Brethren social network involves family, religious and friendship associations. However, respondents reported the majority of family, friends and religious contacts are ethnic Mennonite Brethren. For this reason, the social network is labeled an ethnic social network.

Importance of Children's Identification with the Mennonite Brethren: Implications for Group Boundaries.

Another method used for measuring the importance of ethnic identity was to ask sample members how important it was that their children, or potential children, identified with Mennonite Brethren. None of the 12 respondents felt that this identification was important, however, all 10 Christians interviewed stressed it was very important to them that their children identify as Christians. Furthermore, all 10 Christian respondents were not concerned that their children join the Mennonite Brethren denomination as long as they were affiliated with a "bible-believing" (i.e., evangelical/fundamentalist) Christian denomination. As one first generation respondent commented about his children: "I wouldn't mind if they decided to join the Baptist Church or abandoned their pacifist beliefs". It seems this is another case where religious concerns outweigh ethnic considerations. This trend also reveals itself when one considers respondents' goals in raising their children.

Respondents were asked to talk about how being a Mennonite Brethren affected the way they raised, or potentially will raise, their children. In the discussions an emphasis was placed on instilling Christian values in their children. A second generation informant stated:

> It is important that children have stable homes, that they be cared for and be raised up into adulthood so that they can become independent, productive, self-sustaining people. The part of being Mennonite, and I am equating that with Christian, plays that you teach them a value system, a world perspective whereas if you don't...even a non-Christian will teach values so it is very important and being a Christian is important in that it teaches the Christian value system.

In talking about raising children the only references to ethnicity were in terms of the religious heritage of the group and the importance of transmitting those particular values. For example, a

respondent made the following comment when asked how he thought his heritage would influence how he raised his son.

> The positive things that would strengthen my life as a Christian and strengthen my son's life as a Christian. I would bring that out and say this is what your forefathers did, but only because I think it would strengthen him as a Christian. That would be the overriding strength as to why I would do it.

This declaration illustrates that once again respondents want to accentuate the religious as opposed to ethnic heritage of the Mennonite Brethren. What is most important for sample members is that their children be Christians, not that they retain a Mennonite Brethren ethnic identity. Consequently, a moral obligation exists to perpetuate the religious identity, rather than the ethnic identity of the groups.

From the above discussion of group boundaries, it is apparent that largely because of evangelical concerns the group boundaries are being drawn along religious lines. Ethnic Mennonite Brethren are willingly opening their churches and extending group membership based on religious commitment. Furthermore, there appears to be minimal concern on the part of group members about ethnic intermarriage and the ethnic identity retention of their children. Consequently, ascribed membership based on ancestry is reportedly secondary to achieved membership based on Christianity. The overwhelming emphasis placed on religion by respondents makes it tempting to conclude that the Mennonite Brethren are strictly a religious, not an ethnic, group. However, as will be seen in the next section on group symbols, the Mennonite Brethren identity is infused with ethnic elements; To define it as strictly a religious group, as some respondents do, is too simplistic. Nevertheless, it is accurate to say that sample members consider religion to be the vital element in their Mennonite Brethren identity. As a result, they are, whether consciously or unconsciously, de-emphasizing ethnic factors and

expanding the group boundaries to incorporate Christians who join the Mennonite Brethren Church, as well as showing a high level of tolerance toward other evangelical Christians.

Mennonite Brethren Group Symbols

In this section the group symbols used to identify the Mennonite Brethren will be briefly listed. These symbols will be discussed again in more detail in the following chapter to determine how, if at all, they affect the lives of the respondents. Two types of symbols will be included in the analysis: (1) those reported by respondents, and (2) others not mentioned by respondents but considered relevant in the literature on Mennonite identity. As will be seen, there are religious and ethnic markers of Mennonite Brethren identity and often symbols incorporate both elements.

Sample members were asked to discuss factors which they felt symbolized the group and/or made them feel different from other Canadians. The following factors were listed by sample members: a common heritage, distinct Mennonite Brethren surnames, strong kinship network, the importance of family, culinary patterns, ethnic values, the importance of Christianity in their lives, pacifism, charitable service and a conservative morality. Symbols not mentioned but included in the analysis are ethnic language use, occupational patterns, endogamy and residence patterns. The Mennonite Brethren are considered an ethnoreligious group. Group symbols are often comprised of both of ethnic and religious elements. For analytical purposes, however, the following analysis categorizes the symbols as either primarily religious or ethnic.

Ethnic Symbols

All respondents except one could trace back their roots for many generations within the Mennonite, and after 1860, the Mennonite Brethren community. This heritage provided the respondents with a common history that contributed to a sense of uniqueness. As one respondent stated: "It is something interesting, unique, it is something that differentiates me from the masses". A consequence of this common ancestry is possession of a Mennonite, not always specifically Mennonite Brethren, surname (e.g. Klassen, Unruh, Toews). Individuals involved with the Mennonite Brethren have knowledge of the group surnames and those who possess them are often automatically labelled as a group member even if they themselves feel no connection with the group. In talking about her surname one third generation respondent stated:

> I know for example that if I went to a Mennonite Church in Winnipeg or Calgary or whatever I would immediately be accepted and they would ask me who I was related to and, once they found out and confirmed my family background and that I was okay or that I belonged, I would be treated as one of the group[9].

A distinct surname then serves as an instant creditation of ancestral membership in the group. Associated with this common ancestry are specific cultural patterns.

The common Mennonite Brethren cultural heritage is Dutch-German in origin and traditionally involves distinct culinary patterns, a strong musical tradition and German language use. Interestingly Mennonite food was the ethnic marker most often referred to by respondents. Mennonite Brethren really have no food items specific to the group; the food items are often

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[9]This statement implies that ethnic heritage is necessary to belong to the group. However, this informant earlier stated that religious affiliation is sufficient for group membership. It appears then that members of the Mennonite Brethren may differentiate between ethnic and solely religious members and that for certain purposes ethnicity may be important, while for other purposes it is not.

dishes that they adopted from their historical neighbours. For example, Mennonite dishes such as zwieback (double buns) are originally Polish and borscht and vareniky (similar to perogies) are Ukrainian in origin. Besides specific dishes, two third generation respondents mentioned that Mennonite cooking is essentially a meat and potatoes diet that does not involve many spices.

Ethnic language use is considered in the literature to be a vital element and marker of ethnic identity (see Breton et al.; 1990, 49). Traditionally the Mennonite Brethren used High German in their religious services and Low German in everyday communication. As will be discussed in the next section, the use of the German language is minimal among the sample members which likely accounts for it not being listed by respondents as a marker of the Mennonite Brethren.

In addition to external cultural practices there are certain personal qualities or characteristics commonly ascribed to the Mennonite Brethren, and Mennonites in general. These are characteristics such as a strong work ethic, honesty, responsibility, reliability, cleanliness, industriousness, self-sufficiency and frugality. These common values are emphasized within the group and learned as part of the socialization process of group members. As one second generation respondent stated:

> A lot of positive traits that have been passed on from generation to generation that typically ascribe to Mennonites. Things like being hard-working, charitable, being dedicated to family.

These values may not be equally shared or practised by Mennonite Brethren but they are known to all group members and, as will be discussed later, they are traits commonly attributed to group members by outsiders. These personal characteristics are likely valued within the

group, in part because possession of them contributed to being successful farmers, the traditional occupation of Mennonites.

None of the 12 respondents listed farming as a typical occupation or marker of the Mennonite Brethren. Instead they asserted that there are no distinct occupational patterns within the group. This may be correct although Kauffman and Driedger (1991) reported a high concentration of Mennonite Brethren in professional and business occupations. The assertion that Mennonite Brethren are no longer predominantly involved in agricultural occupations seems accurate, considering that in North America in 1989 only 7% of Mennonites were farmers (Kauffman and Driedger, 1991).

A factor that respondents thought characteristic of Mennonite Brethren was a strong family, defined specifically as a nuclear family. Based on their understanding of the Bible, Mennonites in general assert the following: (1) marriage vows are sacred, (2) marriage should be a permanent arrangement, (3) fornication and adultery are sinful, (4) the husband is the rightful head of the family, (5) children should be taught to be dutiful and obedient, (6) individual preferences are subordinate to family needs, and (7) taking care of kin is important (Kauffman and Driedger; 1991, 105).

All 12 respondents stressed the importance and strength of Mennonite Brethren families. When respondents were asked to recall their earliest recognition of how being a Mennonite Brethren made them different than others, most respondents talked in terms of family differences. A third generation respondent stated:

> Most of my friends from elementary school who weren't Mennonites were from divorced homes so that was a typical thing. They would spend one weekend with one parent and another weekend with the other parent. For me all my Mennonite friends from church they were all in double parent families in first marriages so that was a basic

> difference. Also the difference in discipline. Most of non-Mennonite children that I knew weren't disciplined very much whereas in Mennonite families it was quite strong.

While strong family bonds and strict discipline may be ethnic characteristics it must be remembered that the Mennonite Brethren consider these important, in part, because they believe they are Christian practices. For the respondents the emphasis was not on a Mennonite Brethren family but on a Christian family. For example, when a second generation respondent was asked how being a Mennonite influenced his views on the family he responded:

> The most important thing is how the family functions according to how the scripture defines how the family functions. So it is from a Christian perspective, how a Christian family operates.

An endogamous marriage pattern is often thought to be a marker of the Mennonite Brethren (Redekop, 1986). Canadian census data show that exogamous marriages among Mennonites, in general, have risen from 7% in 1921 to 39% in 1981; despite this increase Mennonites still have the second lowest exogamous marriage rate among ethnic groups in Canada, behind Jews (Kauffman and Driedger; 1991, 110). However, as already discussed, sample members felt endogamy was becoming less important and did not list it as something that characterized the group or differentiated them from the larger society. Nevertheless, until recently endogamous marriage patterns and separation from the surrounding society resulted in church congregations largely made up of ethnic members who were often related in some manner. Since group members' activities largely centred around the church and church related activities, the majority of ones' friends were also from this limited population. Consequently, family, ethnic, religious and friendship networks were fused into one to form the Mennonite Brethren network. While this description accurately reflects the Mennonite Brethren in the past, the missionary emphasis of the group and the increased contact with outsiders in the

urban milieu, has resulted in the network becoming increasingly heterogeneous. Hence, the symbol (Mennonite Brethren social network) remains but its content has changed.

Traditionally the Mennonite Brethren network, comprised solely of ethnic members, was maintained in part by living in isolated farming communities. Today this form of residence is not common. However, in her (1985) study of a Mennonite Brethren community in California, Warner suggests that they form a voluntary enclave. Warner defines a voluntary enclave as the agreement or understanding, either conscious or unconscious, reached by members of a particular group to live together or in close proximity because they feel that the maintenance of their identity depends on the close association with members of their group and conversely, limited contact with individuals from other groups. If one considers the actual residence of the respondents this conclusion seems accurate given that the Lower Mainland, especially the Fraser Valley, has a relatively high concentration of Mennonite Brethren.

Among sample members of the first generation there still exists a preference to live near other members of the Mennonite Brethren community. Three of those four respondents stated it was important to them to live close to other Mennonite Brethren. The only first generation respondent who did not express this preference stated that she would be just as happy to live within other non-Mennonite Christian communities but admitted "there are some of our group yet they stick very much to the Mennonite Brethren". According to the respondents, the preference for living close to other Mennonite Brethren was influenced by the importance of group fellowship and the group commonalities.

In contrast to the first generation, all four third generation respondents stated it was not important to them to live near other Mennonites but two mentioned they liked to live close to

their families. Likewise in the second generation respondents felt living in close proximity to other Mennonite Brethren was not the main reason they resided in the Lower Mainland although one respondent mentioned she enjoyed living close to other Mennonites. For these informants, the prime determinant for residence patterns was identified as job prospects. Hence, for the second and third generation it appears that while living in an area that has a high proportion of Mennonites was considered positive it was overshadowed by other concerns, mainly economic. It appears then that the Mennonite Brethren have moved away from geographically bounded communities given the fact that none of the respondents lived in a homogenous Mennonite Brethren community, and second and third generation respondents expressed no preference to live amongst other members of the group.

Up to this point the symbols discussed have been ethnic markers of the Mennonite Brethren (although often they also include, and are influenced by religious factors). What follows is a discussion of the religious symbols of this ethnoreligious group.

Religious Symbols

Respondents were asked to talk about Mennonite Brethren religion or theology and in doing so to mention the ways they thought it differed from other religious denominations. Respondents, especially those in the first and second generation, considered the Mennonite Brethren to be a Christian group. This identification caused them to view themselves as different from the majority of Canadians because of the importance they attached to Christianity and their perception that Christians were a minority in society. However, it is important to note that being a Christian for the Mennonite Brethren means being a converted,

evangelical Christian. In reading a draft of this thesis, a member of the Mennonite Brethren community stated:

> You need to define what the Mennonite Brethren mean by `Christian'. There are a lot of people who call themselves Christians who we do not think are Christians.

This topic will be returned to in the next chapter which outlines the effects of a Mennonite Brethren identity. At this point it can be stated that religion for the Mennonite Brethren is typically an all encompassing world view rather than a nominal commitment or association with a Christian denomination. Moreover, the Mennonite Brethren adhere to an evangelical form of Christianity (Funk, 1991; Friesen, 1993). In a recent article in the Vancouver Sun (1995) Mennonites in the Fraser Valley were classified as one of eight evangelical Christian groups in British Columbia. Although evangelical groups are diverse, they typically believe in:

1) Conversionism - that lives need to be turned away from sin to faith in Christ.

2) Activism - the need to convert others.

3) Biblicism - that all spiritual truth is in the Bible.

4) Crucicentrism - that without Christ dying on the cross as a sacrifice for humanity's sins, reconciliation with God would not be possible. (Todd, 1995)

The common conception of Mennonite groups is that they are different from other religious denominations because of their Anabaptist beliefs. It was surprising then that respondents unanimously stated that they did not think the Mennonite theological interpretation is that different from most other evangelical churches. Respondents compared the Mennonite Brethren church to other fundamentalist evangelical groups such as the Alliance, Christian Missionary Alliance, Baptist and Evangelical Free Churches. The one element that was thought to be distinctive was the Anabaptist principle of pacifism. Although this was recognized by

respondents to be a distinct aspect of Mennonite Brethren identity there was a general feeling that pacifism has lost its importance, maybe even relevance, in the present Mennonite Brethren identity. According to one respondent:

> With the Mennonite Brethren it [pacifism] has always been traditionally an important doctrine that we have subscribed to. But now the trend seems to be this is what our doctrine is and you as an individual you decide between you and God whether you agree with the doctrine... I think there is more leeway there to give individuals an option to agree or disagree and have degrees of acceptance or non-acceptance to that.

Along with others this respondent argued that adherence to pacifist teachings was becoming less of a group dictum and more of an individual choice.

The lack of emphasis on pacifism within the church seems most evident in the third generation. One third generation respondent stated:

> As far as religious beliefs I don't think there is really...you know you always talk about Mennonites being Anabaptist and pacifists but I mean people in our generation [third] really haven't had to test that pacifist thing so I don't think that is a big deal and actually now people our age wouldn't be in to that so much. I think that if given options, people would often fight if given the opportunity so I don't know if that is much of an issue and Anabaptism doesn't seem to be an issue.

From this comment and others it seems that the respondents felt that Anabaptist elements, like pacifism, are not a significant factor in the theology of the group. So while pacificsm may be a group symbol its effect on the experience of group members, at this time, appears to be minimal. Instead the emphasis is on evangelism and outsiders are not expected to convert to Mennonitism or an Anabaptist version of Christianity but merely to an evangelical fundamentalist form of Christianity shared with other denominations (e.g., Baptist, Missionary Alliance). In other words, the emphasis is put on becoming a dedicated born-again Christian while traditional Anabapist principles such as pacifism and the refusal to swear oaths are open

to individual interpretation. In talking about her particular church a respondent talked about this issue of Anabaptist distinctiveness:

> It is not really pushed as an article of faith. You know when you get baptized or pastor _____ preaches it is nothing to do with being a Mennonite it is to do with being a Christian in today's world.

It is not the Christian beliefs that respondents believe to have originally made Mennonite Brethren distinct but rather the importance of evangelical conversion and Christianity in their lives.

Given the general consensus that Anabaptism is becoming less important, it is interesting that another group symbol identified by some of the respondents is the Mennonite Brethren reputation for service and charitable work. A second generation respondent stated:

> I think Mennonites are a very giving charitable people and if you check the activities in terms of missions and I don't mean just proselytizing but in terms of schools, medical health and that kind of thing, agricultural help, your M.C.C. [Mennonite Central Committee] as a help to poor people, I think Mennonites have given a great deal of time and money.

Respondents commonly pointed to the international reputation of the Mennonite Central Committee, an international aid organization, as a positive emblem of the group. This emphasis on service work provided the respondents with a sense of pride and was viewed as a practical expression of their Christian beliefs.

A conservative morality is another group symbol mentioned by informants. Respondents considered a strict morality to be characteristic of group members and a common image of the Mennonite Brethren held by outsiders. The behavioural code of the group, or the "do's and don'ts", are not specifically religious or ethnic but involve elements of both. That is, the moral guidelines of the group govern the behaviour of group members and are part of the

ethnic culture and are justified in religious terms. For example, taboos against drinking alcohol and smoking are justified because they are viewed as activities that desecrate God's holy temple (i.e., the human body) While there are definitely generational differences, it is accurate to generalize that the respondents embrace a conservative morality as evidenced by the findings reported in the following chapter.

Discussion of Findings

In this chapter it was shown that Mennonite Brethren group symbols and boundaries exist and differentiate group members from the larger Canadian society. Hence, a distinct Mennonite Brethren identity has survived in the urban environment despite changes that have occurred. Detailed evidence for identity change will be provided in the following chapter but nevertheless it can be said that respondents as a whole emphasized the primacy of religion over ethnicity in the Mennonite Brethren identity. This situation is contrary to the emphasis on ethnicity in the Russian colonies and early Canadian settlements documented by Mennonite historians (Urry, 1989; Driedger, 1989; Toews, 1975; Francis, 1948).

The conclusion that religion has become more salient than ethnicity for Mennonite Brethren identity is a common theme of recent studies on Mennonites (e.g. Driedger and Kauffman, 1991; Hamm, 1987; Baar, 1983). These studies imply an inverse relationship between two separate but related identity factors - religion and ethnicity. Traditionally ethnicity was dominant whereas religion was secondary and currently the relationship is reversed. Given the schismatic beginnings of the Mennonite Brethren and the comments of first generation respondents emphasizing the priority of religious faith, it seems more accurate to state that

since the inception of the group the importance of religion has remained constant rather than becoming important only recently. While religion has remained salient, the form of religiosity has changed. Most noticeably, evangelism has become important and distinctive Anabaptist principles like pacifism are less prevalent.

The reported importance of religion leads one to speculate whether the Mennonite Brethren have become strictly a religious group as some respondents suggested. The examination of group symbols suggests otherwise. When informants were asked to identify elements associated with, or markers of, the Mennonite Brethren, they listed the ethnic markers of heritage, distinct surnames, kinship networks, culinary patterns, musical ability and ethnic values (i.e., valued personal characteristics). Another important marker was a conservative moral code that is tied, in part, to ethnicity. The distinctive religious value mentioned was pacifism but it was considered to be losing its importance for group definition. Ethnic symbols then, are numerous in the identity of the Mennonite Brethren despite ethnic group members' attempts to emphasize religious aspects of the group identity. It may be, as Warner (1985) and Winland (1989) suggest, that ethnicity proves to be salient for Mennonites if one gets past surface expressions of identity. To accomplish this, it is necessary to analyze how respondents feel being a Mennonite Brethren influences different facets of their lives. From such an analysis insight can be gained as to which aspects of identity are more important for the actual lived experiences of group members.

Chapter 6: The Impact of a Mennonite Brethren Identity - Respondents' Practices

This chapter explores how being a Mennonite Brethren influences group members' behaviour and subjective thinking. The analysis will explore the relationship between religion and ethnicity and the affect both have on the lives of group members. Based on this information, the chapter will conclude with a discussion about the ability of group members to maintain a distinct identity in modern urbanized society and the implications of the findings for sociological theory regarding ethnic identity retention.

Observable Ethnic Practices

I begin this discussion with a review of the external ethnic practices listed by respondents as group symbols. These are culinary patterns and the use of the German language. Despite the emphasis on food as a marker of Mennonite Brethren identity it appears to be essentially a symbolic marker. Only one respondent (first generation) reported that he ate ethnic food more than other types of food. Outside of the first generation all respondents reported that they ate Mennonite Brethren food very infrequently (e.g. once every two months).

German language use would likely be a significant marker because of its implications for interaction patterns but it is found infrequently outside of the first generation. All first generation respondents were fluent and spoke German on a daily basis but also used English. In the second generation three interviewees reported being able to speak German but stated

their ability was limited and their use of the language was confined to infrequent occasions such as talking to German relatives, treating German clients or talking to their spouse in German so that their children could not understand them. The knowledge and use of the German language was non-existent for third generation respondents who all stated they could not speak nor understand German.

The apparent decline in the use of the ethnic language is not surprising given that it is a trend common to most ethnic groups (Breton et al, 1990). What is interesting is that first generation respondents did not seem to be concerned about the loss of the German language:

> Right now to me, Doug, it doesn't make a difference to me. If somebody spoke to me in German I would speak German if not I speak English. Now between the two of us [husband and wife] we don't speak German. All our schooling is in English. Over here in our Church we have two sermons in the morning, German and English. I never attend the German.

Another first generation respondent commented that German was originally the predominant language of the group "but that has completely changed since we have, of course, taken the English ourselves". So from the declining use of German and the apparent lack of concern regarding this issue it seems safe to conclude German language use is not a significant factor in the lives of the respondents, especially those in the second and third generation.

From the above discussion it appears that there are not many observable ethnic markers of the Mennonite Brethren and those that do exist have little impact in shaping the lives of group members. Hence, they would seem to be essentially symbolic markers that do not significantly influence or interfere with one's life. Further evidence for this conclusion was sought by asking respondents if they thought outsiders could identify them by observing their behaviour or practices. Respondents typically reported:

> There are no particular things, Mennonite things, that I would do that would identify me as something different.

None of the 12 respondents felt they could be identified as members of the Mennonite Brethren group by outsiders unless topics such as religion, morality or heritage were discussed.

To further explore the salience of ethnicity and ethnic markers each informant was asked if he/she considered him/herself to be an ethnic person and if they felt at all separate or differentiated from the larger Canadian society because of their ethnicity. I felt that if feelings of ethnic difference were experienced it might signal a lack of economic, political or cultural integration. However, from the interviews it was apparent that the informants did not feel differentiated from the rest of Canadian society on the basis of ethnicity. Only two of the 12 respondents stated that they thought of themselves as an ethnic person. One of these respondents was a member of the first generation who considered herself to be ethnic but also stated that outside of her generation, group members were more like other Canadians. The other informant said he was ethnic in the sense of being aligned with an ethnic heritage but he still defined himself as a Canadian before a Mennonite Brethren.

Ethnicity does not create a sense of difference for the sample members, in part because the Mennonite Brethren are of European ancestry and consequently do not have physical characteristics that would mark them as different. As a third generation respondent put it:

> Well I personally don't think this idea of a typical generic Canadian really exists and so I don't think I consider myself a minority. In terms of being a Caucasian I am in the majority. I think those more visible, external factors are much more important in determining difference and distinction in the general Canadian society.

This remark provides evidence that informants do not consider their ethnic background to make them distinct from the larger Canadian society. This is not surprising given the lack of

observable ethnic traits. In fact, it would appear that, besides ethnic language use by first generation members, the Mennonite Brethren have no observable ethnic practices that are incorporated into their everyday behaviour.

On the surface ethnicity does not appear to be salient for the Mennonite Brethren. Even for third generation respondents who were willing to define a Mennonite Brethren in terms of ethnicity, it was reported that ethnic practices do not widely occur nor create separation from the larger Canadian society. This, however, does not mean a Mennonite Brethren identity is irrelevant for the lives of group members. At the present time group members are accentuating the religious aspect of their identity at the expense of ethnicity. Consequently, the main implications of a Mennonite Brethren identity stem from the religious beliefs and practices of the group. Having said this it must be mentioned that ethnicity is not non-existent but rather secondary. The existence of ethnic factors can be seen when one considers the Mennonite Brethren social network.

The Mennonite Brethren Social Network

The Mennonite Brethren do not confine their interaction to ingroup members and institutions but it is safe to say that the church community is the focal point of their lives. That is, participation in the church and church related activities are considered an important priority. In their 1991 study of different Mennonite groups Driedger and Kauffman found that 96% of the Mennonite Brethren attend church almost weekly or more often which is a high rate when compared to the national average of 23% in 1990 (Bibby, 1993). The church then is the central component of the Mennonite Brethren social network. This network is becoming more

heterogeneous as outsiders join the group and it seems accurate that ethnic factors are presently being downplayed in order to accomplish the goal of evangelism. Nevertheless, while the significance of ethnic factors for group members' behaviour and for membership has changed, the Mennonite Brethren social network still plays an important role in the lives of group members. From the interviews it appears that involvement in the Mennonite Brethren network influences the lives of its members in two main ways. First, it affects the associations group members form and second, it results in the internalization of a commonly held value and belief system.

An obvious implication of being a Mennonite Brethren is the importance of participation in the church and church related activities. The ten Christian respondents were all actively involved in a church community. Regular Sunday attendance was the norm and all reported they practised some form of daily devotion and prayer. Respondents also typically attended mid-week church activities such as bible study groups and less frequent church sponsored activities like picnics, potluck meals, retreats and special lecture series. In addition, some first and second generation members were, or had been, involved in the organizational structure of the church (e.g., as church treasurer, member of music or building committee, church elder). Furthermore, the majority of respondents also reported performing some form of service work sponsored by their church or a larger Mennonite Brethren organization (e.g., working at an orphanage, volunteering at the MCC relief store, preparing and serving food at a Mennonite kitchen, preparing food for single mothers, providing farm aid for Russians, making blankets to send overseas etc.).[10]

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[10] The emphasis placed on service work is an important marker of Mennonite identity identified by other researchers (Smucker, 1986; Driedger and Kauffman, 1991).

Another church related organization that deserves special mention is the private Christian school. A formal religious education was generally highly valued by the informants. All members of the third generation plus three first and two second generation members had attended a bible school (six of the nine schools attended were affiliated with the Mennonite Brethren). In addition, three of the four third generation respondents attended a private Mennonite (not exclusively Mennonite Brethren) high school. In the second generation one interviewee attended a Mennonite high school and another went to university at a private Christian institution (Trinity Western University). Attendance at a Christian school and participation in activities centred around the church community have implications for respondents' associations such as the formation of friendships.

Respondents were asked to discuss their friendship networks and how these associations were related to being a Mennonite Brethren. Third generation respondents were asked what percentage of their friends were from an ethnic Mennonite Brethren background. The answers given were 5%, 40%, 50% and 50%. In every case the respondents stated that ethnicity was becoming less of a factor in their current friendship selection. Their earliest and long-term friends were usually Mennonite Brethren but this was not in their estimation due to a conscious choice on their part but rather a coincidence of their interaction patterns as children and teenagers. As a respondent stated:

> I have a lot of friends who aren't Mennonite but I have friends who are just because...I mean my friends who are Mennonites are friends from way back. We grew up together, went to school together.

Unfortunately, the data from the interviews were not detailed enough to provide an indepth discussion on this topic.

In addition to the declining percentage of Mennonite Brethren friends, none of the respondents expressed a preference for ethnic Mennonite Brethren friends and perhaps not surprisingly the two non-Christian respondents stated that they felt more comfortable with non-Mennonites. In contrast, the two Christians in the third generation both stated that of their non-ethnic Mennonite Brethren friends, the majority were Christians.

The changing nature of social networks was also brought up by second generation respondents. All four respondents stated that the vast majority (i.e., over 90%) of their friends were Christians but not necessarily ethnic Mennonite Brethren. One respondent estimated 66% of her friends were ethnic Mennonite Brethren whereas another individual stated the number was around 50%. [In terms of the other two respondents, one was not willing to differentiate between ethnic and non-ethnic Mennonite Brethren and the other felt she was unable to give an accurate estimation]. Respondents stated that they had a high proportion of ethnic Mennonite Brethren friends because of the associations they formed while interacting at church and church related organizations and functions. For example, when talking about her involvement in a church sponsored program a respondent remarked:

> That association has helped to form friendships and I think because so much of our social life is involved around the church I think we tend to gravitate towards those people.

Another respondent provided a similar explanation:

> That is just the way it is because as a church group a lot of the times, well you spend a lot of time together with the people in your church and you develop friendships because you spend a lot of time with the church and church people.

First generation respondents also pointed to the importance of church activities for establishing their social networks. As one respondent stated:

> We grew up the same, we attended the same church and that is where you make friendships.

Although first generation respondents did not express themselves in terms of percentages, all stated the majority of their friends were ethnic Mennonite Brethren but that they also had friends from other Christian denominations.

It is evident that the respondents select friends from a pool of people with whom they are familiar and the people they are most familiar with, especially in the case of first and second generation respondents, are members of their church. Even among third generation members the Mennonite Brethren social network is an important factor. Although there may be a decline in associations with ethnic members, those actively involved in the community still interact to a great degree with evangelical Christians with whom they come in contact while participating in the church community. Consequently, although the Mennonite Brethren social network is increasingly ethnically but not religiously heterogeneous it still affects the group members' associations. In the past this led to associations primarily with ethnic Mennonite Brethren and currently it results in associations primarily with Christian Mennonite Brethren.

Associations formed within the Mennonite Brethren social network have implications for more than just friendship and marriage selection. Although none of the respondents stated a preference for dealing with Mennonite Brethren in economic matters, a number stated that business and work opportunities did arise because of familiarity with individuals in their social network. A second generation informant commented:

> It might be that in my church for example there was someone who needed a job done and I happened to be there and because we went to church together he called me up...but only because we happened to run into each other socially or through the church.

As the following statement illustrates, being part of the church network can be a positive resource for group members, especially since there is an emphasis on mutual aid:

> If there is someone out of work I mean there will be people keeping their eyes open for a job and if they do happen to have one, a job available, they will definitely give it to that person because they are part of the church family and they know the need is immediate, it is right there.

From the comments of respondents it was apparent that material benefits were not considered a significant factor, or result, of participating in the Mennonite Brethren social network. Typically any benefits that were derived were considered the natural consequences of participating in a group. I would assert, however, that sample members overestimate the ability of outsiders to join social groups that have the same degree of community, caring and mutual obligation that the Mennonite Brethren demonstrate.

The sample members in this study came from four different churches and provided estimates of the percentage of active members in the church who were ethnic Mennonite Brethren. The estimates for the four churches were 55%, 60%, 70% and 99% (this last church is unusual in that it consists primarily of first generation members). Consequently, although the Mennonite Brethren social network is increasingly heterogeneous, ethnic members still outnumber outsiders. Furthermore, group members have the ability to differentiate between ethnic and non-ethnic members within their social network by inquiring about an individuals surname and family relations. In the interviews respondents stated that there were no status differences between these two groups, however, they did make comments suggesting that a common ethnic background had positive benefits.

Respondents mentioned a sense of kinship and mutual understanding felt among ethnic members.

> There is a certain kinship that I find with people that are [ethnic] Mennonites... Like when you meet Mennonite people you have something in common right away that is a lot of this intangible stuff that I talked about, you sort of connect.

This statement was made by a non-Christian respondent who was not directly involved with the Mennonite Brethren community. Despite the lack of involvement, she continues to share feelings of attachment and common ground with group members. These shared similarities facilitate interaction and understanding among group members. For example, a respondent made the following comment when comparing his interaction with non-ethnic and ethnic Mennonite Brethren:

> I'm talking, I suppose, about understanding where they are coming from. You say `remember 10 years ago on the farm we did this and this'. Yeah I know how they did farming because I grew up in that sort of setting whereas another good friend of mine who grew up here in Richmond and his father is a veteran and they are a military family and a alcoholic family. I have a hard time, we have to take more time, we need more time for me to understand how he perceives life and relationships and doing things.

The ease of interaction and association with other group members contributes to feelings of belonging to a caring community.

Feelings of connection and understanding are partly a result of a common socialization experience in which group principles and beliefs are taught to children at a young age. One third generation respondent described how these similarities resulted in being drawn to other members of the Mennonite Brethren community while growing up:

> It was easy to get along with people because you had the same kind of backgrounds, you had everything in common pretty well. They were pretty much all Mennonites and we had all the same beliefs, values, we thought the same ways.

Despite these similarities and connections between ethnic members, informants were of the opinion that outsiders generally were accepted as full members and felt no significant differences between themselves and ethnic Mennonite Brethren. While this may be true it

seems likely the emotional warmth, feelings of intimacy and intuitive understanding gained from growing up and being part of the ethnic community would result in qualitatively different associations than with those of outsiders. Consider the following remark:

> The only difficulty they [outsiders] experience when they do want to come to our church and belong, they have a hard time integrating because of our clan structure because so many people within the Mennonite community, and I am talking now [about people] that grew up in it, we know each other from generations back and we have intermarried and so on. So many people are related to other people and so people that are proselytized in find a hard time becoming part of the intimate community but if they persist long enough they are accepted for who they are, only it takes them almost a life-time to find out who is married to who and who...and who is a cousin and so on. But in terms of faith I don't think there is any, what should I say...they are accepted as well as anybody, at least in my church experience.

This respondent was of the opinion that kin relations within the group might be of interest, or amusement, to outsiders but they had no significant bearing on acceptance since membership was not premised on ethnic relations but an adherence to the Christian faith. However, one would think that ethnic members would at least have an advantage or head start in forming friendships and gaining knowledge of the more informal group values. To test this assertion, however, is unfortunately beyond the scope of this study.

While observable ethnic practices do not identify the respondents as ethnic, more subtle factors related to participation in a Mennonite Brethren social network do suggest ethnicity is still a factor for the lives of group members. Participation in the Mennonite social network usually means interaction and associations are still largely with ethnic members. This interaction pattern and common socialization experience shared by group members results in mutual understandings, feelings of closeness and group solidarity. It also has an instrumental aspect in that group members often provide assistance (e.g. material, emotional, psychological) for one another. Furthermore, it contributes to the internalization of a particular world view.

The Mennonite Brethren Value and Belief Systems

A consequence of being a member of the Mennonite Brethren network is the internalization, to varying degrees, of a value and belief system that influences how they perceive the world around them and guides their actions within it. As the generations progress this world view seems to be becoming less concrete, more open to personal interpretation; nevertheless, there still exist general values and beliefs that respondents adhere to, to differing degrees. The value and belief systems are based upon the group's particular emphasis on biblical principles which, according to respondents, are essentially like those of other fundamentalist and evangelical Christian denominations. These principles are characterized by a practical biblicism that results in individuals attempting to live their daily lives as laid out in the Bible. Apart from the two non-Christians, informants stated this is the most significant factor in their lives for determining their beliefs and behaviour. As one respondent explained:

> Attitude always precedes action. So being a Mennonite [defined in terms of religion] is the basis on which I live. So it affects everything, so it is of upmost importance.

As Bibby (1987, 1993) demonstrates in his studies of religion in the Canadian context, this idea that Christianity is an all encompassing world view is uncommon. According to Bibby, the majority of Canadians identify with a religion and are interested in the religious realm but actual participation in traditional organized religions has been declining since the mid 1960s. Individuals draw selectively on religious beliefs and practices and religion is no longer a "life-embracing system". That is, "at the individual level, religion has also been highly marginalized, so that it has a limited influence on the day-to-day living of most people" (Bibby; 1993, 59). Instead, people are picking and choosing what they want from religion. I suggest that this

general Canadian trend is not found among the Mennonite Brethren. Rather, the Christian faith continues to affect the way members interpret the world and informs their behaviour in all spheres of life. To strengthen this argument I will briefly compare some measures of religiosity reported by Driedger and Kauffman for the Mennonite Brethren with those of the general Canadian population reported by Bibby.

As mentioned earlier, weekly church attendance, which has a high correlation with religious commitment (Bibby; 1993, 83), is at a rate of approximately 23% for Canadians in general (Bibby, 1993). In contrast, 96% of the Mennonite Brethren attend church weekly, 92% feel that church participation is "very important" or "fairly important" and 65% report having held a leadership position in their church congregation within the past three years (Driedger and Kauffman, 1991). Measures of devotionalism also suggest that the Mennonite Brethren are more religiously committed. Eighty-three percent of Mennonite Brethren pray privately on a daily basis and 75% read the bible once a week or more (Driedger and Kauffman, 1991). National figures for these respective measures are much lower at 53% and 25% (Bibby, 1993). Bibby suggests that religion is becoming a matter of individual selection as opposed to adhering to a traditional belief system. However, only 37% of the Mennonite Brethren feel "one's own religion should be more of a matter of personal choice than directed by churchly doctrines and standards of behaviour" and only 24% think "it's not really the business of the church to be directly involved in my personal affairs" (Driedger and Kauffman; 1991, 97). In comparison, when one considers that "religion, Canadian-style, is ... not expected to be very demanding" and that "it has at best a marginal place in the lives of most Canadians" (Bibby; 1990, 142-

143), it appears that the Mennonite Brethren are much more open to having their lives dictated by the church than Canadians in general.

An obvious consequence of the Mennonite Brethren world view is the necessity of converting others to Christianity. Furthermore, informants placed importance on expressing their Christian faith through service activities and financial contributions. The world view also accentuates certain traits commonly attributed to the traditional ethnic group such as a strict moral code, important personal characteristics and an emphasis on the Christian family.

The importance of these factors can be seen when one considers the benefits respondents felt they had gained from growing up in the Mennonite Brethren community. When respondents were asked what assets (i.e. economic, political, emotional) they associated with being a member of the Mennonite Brethren, the majority of answers focused on the importance of learning certain values. More specifically, three main types of values were discussed. First, personal characteristics associated with Mennonites were commonly mentioned by informants:

> Well one thing about Mennonites is I think they are very stable and very reliable and I think I kind of grew up with people who are good people, decent people. They are hard-working, they are organized, they are responsible people and I think they were good role models for me because those are the characteristics I now value in people.

Second, the strength and value placed on the family was seen as very significant:

> I would say a very strong point is the emphasis on family solidarity and extending that to the greater family and then expanding that even to the Church family. We grew up in a lot of security within the family and not having experienced fragmentation or family fighting the way I think or I have read it has happened in the community as a whole.

Finally, the importance of a Christian upbringing was emphasized by informants:

> I am thankful to God and I am thankful to my parents for the heritage I have because they took me to Sunday School to hear the Word of God.

These three sets of values emphasized by respondents are, of course, interrelated. That is, the personal characteristics emphasized within the group and the importance of family are considered by informants to be biblically based. Although these values have traditionally been attributed to Mennonites, informants thought them to be commonly held Christian beliefs. It seems plausible that these values have, as Mol (1976) suggests, become sacralized within the Mennonite Brethren community. In other words, these values are deemed to be particularly salient because they are considered religious, or sacred, as opposed to merely secular values.

The existence of commonly held values (Christian, personal characteristics, family) is evident once again when one considers the reported perceptions outsiders have of group members. Despite the lack of an external identity, all respondents stated that if a stranger were to discover they are Mennonite Brethren, s/he would immediately have certain perceptions and stereotypes about them. Although some respondents mentioned people sometimes wrongly associated them with `old order' or traditional Mennonites, the perceptions associated with the group were thought to be generally positive and related to the morals or ethics shared by group members. A first generation respondent stated:

> I think when they are going to deal with a Mennonite they expect the Mennonite to be reasonably honest, he'll keep his word and he will be a good hard working type of partner.

A number of respondents related personal stories to illustrate the perceived positive image of the group. One informant recalled facing difficulties when applying for a loan in 1944 but when the bank manager discovered he was a Mennonite Brethren he responded "you can have all the money you want". Another interviewee recalled a situation when she forgot her identification needed for cashing a cheque but when the clerk recognized her Mennonite

Brethren surname on the cheque the identification was no longer required. These two experiences point to the existence and significance of values that group members and outsiders ascribe to the Mennonite Brethren.

One common perception, reported by respondents to be held by both group members and outsiders, is the existence of a strict and conservative moral code. From the respondents' comments on moral issues it seems that this assertion is correct despite the softening of the traditional "do's and don'ts" of the group.

Of the twelve informants only one, a non-Christian, thought homosexuality was acceptable. In comparison, 34% of Canadians approve of homosexual relations (Bibby; 1993, 199). Ten of the twelve respondents felt pre-marital sex was always wrong. This rate is significantly higher than the national rate of 20% (Bibby; 1993, 199). The two interviewees who felt it was acceptable were non-Christians from the third generation. In terms of drinking alcohol, all first generation respondents considered it sinful:

> They do not agree with that...any alcoholic drink, because once you start one thing it can lead to another.

In contrast, members of the second and third generation considered it acceptable given certain limitations. A third generation respondent stated:

> I don't have a problem with drinking. I have never been drunk so I don't know if I have a problem with that but drinking socially is fine.

This remark suggests that social drinking defined as not becoming drunk was considered acceptable. However, three second generation respondents stated that for themselves they chose not to drink, but they would not condemn others for doing so. There were significant generational differences in terms of attitudes towards smoking. None of the first generation

considered it acceptable to smoke whereas in the second and third generation the general feeling was that smoking was not sinful but not a good idea for health reasons.

All first generation respondents considered it sinful to dance except for one who stated:

> Well I don't go along with dancing. It all depends. If a husband and a wife dance to music at home, no problem. But if they are in public with worldly people one thing will lead to another.

In the second generation all respondents stated that dancing in general is permissible but the setting and type of dancing was an important factor; going to a disco or nightclub would likely be frowned upon, but line dancing or square dancing in a community event would be acceptable. None of the third generation respondents expressed any reservations about dancing although they did mention that because of their upbringing they had no experience dancing and therefore felt somewhat awkward at times[11]. As one respondent stated:

> I have never grown up with people who dance so I have never done it but I don't have a problem with it either...I would actually like to learn some time.

There was less variation when respondents were asked their opinions on abortion. Ten of the twelve thought abortion was immoral, and while the two non-Christian third generation members thought it might be acceptable in certain situations, generally they were also opposed. If one considers that 38% of Canadians approve of abortion on demand (Bibby; 1993, 199) it is apparent the sample members' views on abortion are relatively restrictive.

Not surprisingly, the two respondents who were most liberal in their opinions were third generation non-Christians. But despite the lack of adherence to commonly held group

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[11] Although all third generation respondents did not have a problem with issues such as drinking and dancing, their actual experience of these activities was either minimal or non-existent.

beliefs, they both considered their background to have had a significant affect on their sense of morality. One of these respondents stated:

> Well there is a definite sense of high morality, the way I was brought up. I find it hard to believe that anyone of my generation had more of a strict upbringing, well that is pretty strong. Obviously I had a strict upbringing where morals were very high. That has obviously affected me... A lot of your personality in life is formed when you are young and all these verses and songs go through your head. You go to battalions, you go to Sunday School, to MEI [Mennonite Educational Institute] and you are just ingrained. You don't get to experiment with anything but later on in life you see what the world is actually about but you still have these things in the back of your mind. It is like a guilt trip.

The other non-Christian respondent also mentioned she is still influenced by the group values and beliefs. "I think there is a degree I've come, I've strayed from the original beliefs but only to a certain point and I think it is definitely to do with my Mennonite background". As Warner (1985) and Winland (1989) suggest, there appear to be unconscious behavioural and attitudinal factors associated with Mennonite identity. Even when group members reject Christianity and the related group norms, their socialization within the Mennonite Brethren is not easily discarded.

Family and family relations are of paramount importance for the Mennonite Brethren. The proper family is defined by respondents as a Christian nuclear family. For example, a second generation respondent stated:

> The most important thing is how the family functions according to how the scriptures define how the family functions. So it is from a Christian perspective, how a Christian family operates.

Respondents stressed the importance of practising religious endogamy, that marriage is a sacred union that should not be broken except by death, and the need to teach their children Christian values. It is interesting that although children were not considered to be Christians

until they experienced a personal conversion, they were socialized to think and act as Christians. As already illustrated even when religious doctrine is later rejected it is difficult, if not impossible, to discard this early socialization experience.

Respondents stressed the importance of maintaining family ties because of the security they provide and the feelings of mutual obligation among family members. As one respondent put it:

> You derive strength from it. If your friends fall away your family is always there. Some of your friends will go on and leave or not become friends because circumstances change but your family will always be there...You can always count on your family and I think that is the reason why it is a priority.

Feelings of closeness generally extended beyond one's immediate family to the larger kin network and even to the church family that often includes one's relatives.

> I would say a very strong point is the emphasis on family solidarity and extending that to the greater family and then expanding that even to the Church family. We grew up in a lot of security within the family and not having experienced fragmentation or family fighting the way I think or I have read it has happened in the community as a whole.

Respondents generally stated they felt Mennonite Brethren families were more close-knit and harmonious than those of the larger society. The reason given for this was the superiority of the Christian family.

One aspect of the Christian family as practised by the Mennonite Brethren is patriarchal marital relationships. However, once again there were large generational differences exhibited in terms of gender roles and relations but patriarchy appears to be prevalent outside of the third generation[12]. First generation respondents generally felt it was the duty of the woman to raise

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[12] I do not want to suggest that patriarchy is specific to the Mennonite Brethren. Nevertheless, it is a characteristic of the group, justified by religious beliefs, that warrants discussion.

the children and take care of the home while the man performed the traditional bread-winner role. Furthermore, the man was definitely considered the head of the household. As one respondent expressed:

> Well they both have their headship but it has to be scripturally yielded that the male counterpart is the head of the house. You can't go against the Word.

Second generation respondents were less strict in their gender role prescriptions. They emphasized a partnership strategy where husband and wife took on roles according to their expertise. Despite this assertion, all four respondents in this generation were in relationships with traditional male-female roles and there seemed to be an underlying assumption that female expertise was generally in the domestic realm. Moreover, three of the four informants felt that the husband ultimately has authority over the wife but they stressed this was not meant to be an unquestioned or all-powerful headship. A female respondent put it this way:

> ...I still think the husband has the responsibility to be the head of the household, not the head of the household as in being the authority and everybody has to bow to him but kind of the one who provides the ultimate authority.

Informants justified this position by arguing that a husband is to follow the teachings of the Bible and if he follows them correctly he will be doing God's will which will result in the wife being treated fairly and respectfully.

The two Christian respondents in the third generation tended to view gender roles and relationships similarly to the second generation. While they did not consider there to be innate gender roles, both preferred the women to stay at home and expressed that the man is ultimately in charge of the family. One non-Christian respondent was less conservative in his view about women's role in the home. He expressed no reservation about women working outside of the home and felt that domestic duties should be split evenly between husband and

wife. He did, however, state that the man was ultimately the head of the house. The other non-Christian respondent defined herself as a feminist. She felt there were no specific gender roles and that neither the husband, nor the wife, should be given the ultimate authority in the family. However, she acknowledged her viewpoint was in opposition to the teachings and practice of the Mennonite Brethren:

> It took me kind of a while after being submerged in that mind set to figure out my own position because I didn't think of myself as a feminist. It is only in the last five years that I defined myself as such because it took me a long time for those latent feelings of feminism to come out. I know even when I went to bible school there was always issues about women. Almost all of the speakers, 90% of the speakers we had were male and they really bolstered that male position in the Church and it really bugged me at the time and I didn't know how to articulate it at the time, I didn't have the background to support my views.

This remark suggests that while some third generation members are less conservative in their views on gender roles, the viewpoints are not necessarily a result of the changing ideology of the group but due, in part, to external influences, such as the media or the education system.

A current debate within the Mennonite Brethren Church that illustrates male authority is the issue of women becoming senior pastors. At the 59th Convention of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches in July 1993, 61% of the delegates voted against women assuming leadership roles in the church. Respondents were asked how they felt about this decision. All first generation respondents agreed with the decision and one female interviewee went so far as to suggest the idea of female pastors was the work of the "Evil One". For this generation the woman's role was definitely secondary as the following comment illustrates.

> And you can see a good preacher, a good pastor, that he has a good wife in the background, that's her job.

In the second generation two of the four respondents were unsure as to the acceptability of female pastors whereas the remaining two were opposed. In the third generation three respondents thought that women should be able to be pastors. However, one member of the third generation rejected this idea:

> ...not that the bible de-emphasizes women, not at all, but definitely it puts them in certain roles. Teaching, any high levels of teaching, but never really in the leadership.

So it appears that while patriarchy generally still characterizes the Mennonite Brethren, its prevalence is decreasing with each generation.

Up to this point it has been argued that the Mennonite Brethren share an abstract value and belief system based on Christian principles that emphasizes evangelism, Christian service, a strict morality, specific personal characteristics and strong Christian families characterized by patriarchal relations. It is difficult to pin-point specific everyday practices that result from this orientation. Rather it appears to be an internalized world view that acts as a general guide for group members' thinking and behaviour. The adherence to, and interpretation of this value and belief system is not uniform but varies somewhat according to individual generational or Christian/non-Christian differences. Also, from the interviews it seems likely that the effects of being a Mennonite Brethren are often unconscious or not recognized by group members since the internalized group beliefs and values were often considered common-sense, widely shared attitudes rather than the result of a particular socialization process.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to identify all the possible situations in which this belief and value system affects group members because it can potentially have an effect on all aspects of one's life. Moreover, consistent specific consequences often do not exist due to the different subjective interpretations and the importance placed on group values and beliefs.

However, to explore how the values and beliefs influence group members, the following analysis will explicate how being a Mennonite Brethren affects political views and practice.

The Effect of a Mennonite Brethren Identity on Political Views and Practice

Traditionally Mennonite groups have ventured into politics only to secure corporate rights (e.g., land) and to ensure a measure of autonomy from the rest of society. This trend of political separation is changing, however, as evidenced by informants' discussions pertaining to politics. All 12 respondents felt it was necessary to be politically aware and active since it is an important way in which to shape society. The goal of reshaping society did not, however, involve structural change but rather moral change. Informants reported that Mennonite Brethren interest in politics is centred on moral issues such as sex education in schools, abortion, the breakdown of the nuclear family and homosexual rights. Although, in general, respondents did not advocate pulpit politics it appears obvious that their religious beliefs influence their political thought and action. One informant stated:

> Where there is a political party or political candidate who completely departs from this [the Word of God] and is an antagonist towards it, that would sure help me know if I should vote or not vote for them.

In addition to the influence of Christian values, personal characteristics emphasized within the group also shaped respondents' political views.

Other important political issues mentioned by informants, not related to morality, were the federal debt and welfare scams. Although these concerns are obviously not restricted to the Mennonite Brethren, it is likely that Mennonite Brethren values of financial stewardship and

work ethic play a role. For example, a respondent made the following statement while discussing social welfare issues:

> We have been taught you work for your living and you don't take things from the government and that affects how we feel towards policies that are set, just because we have been brought up in a hard working community where everybody works for their living.

This group emphasis on self reliance definitely affects group members' opinions of political policy and parties. For example, in his 1987 study Hamm made the following statement about Mennonite Brethren: "They strongly believe in the Protestant ethic, poverty being caused by lack of discipline, and are reluctant for the government to provide a guaranteed income" (73).

All but one of the sample members who voted in the last federal election supported right-wing parties (Reform or Conservative). Respondents commonly stated that these parties received their support because they most closely represented their interests in current social issues. I would suggest that they also favoured the pro-business, free-enterprise stance of these parties. These more conservative parties appeal to both the moral and self-sufficient values held by the group members. On the other hand, the N.D.P. has a negative, anti-Christian, image because of such matters as its pro-choice approach to abortion, the homosexual identity of MP Svend Robinson, and a witch attempting to represent the party in the Matsqui riding. Moreover, its "socialist" policies prompted some first generation respondents to draw parallels between the party and their experience with the Bolsheviks in Russia.

The respondents' political views and practices provide an example of how the value and belief system of the group affect their actions within society. It also provides a good example of how ethnic and religious elements of the Mennonite Brethren identity are intertwined. The main impetus for the Mennonite Brethren participating in politics is not to improve the situation

of its members but rather primarily to bring about moral change in Canadian society. While the role of their Christian beliefs is paramount, the effect of personal characteristics deemed important by ethnic group members (e.g., self-sufficiency, frugality, work ethic) are also salient, particularly in shaping group members' attitudes toward economic policy. Hence, while religious beliefs are most important, one cannot discount the impact of ethnic values that have become sacralized within the group. This effect was not generally recognized by the respondents and seems to point to unconscious implications of their ethnic identity.

Discussion of Findings

The Mennonite Brethren identity has not disappeared in the urban environment but it has changed. The current Mennonite Brethren identity is based primarily upon the selective accentuation of the group's religious history, values and beliefs. The religious principles of the Mennonite Brethren influence their beliefs and dictate their actions. Consequently, the goal of the group has been and continues to be the merging of "the Word" (i.e., the Bible) and culture. Hence, in the present context a Mennonite Brethren culture continues to exist but it is based primarily on religious elements rather than observable ethnic factors. This is largely due to group members' desire to shed an ethnic identity in order to promote a universal religion. In the process, religious beliefs and principles have also changed (i.e., Anabaptism has declined, evangelism has increased) but the prime importance of religious belief and practice for members of the Mennonite Brethren has remained constant.

Despite the accentuation of religion, it is premature to conclude that the Mennonite Brethren are no longer an ethnic group or that a religious identity has been separate from an

ethnic identity. The fact remains that the majority of individuals in a Mennonite Brethren church share a common historical tradition with which they associate distinctive beliefs about their culture, even though the practice of these beliefs may be limited, and valued personal characteristics continue to distinguish them from the larger Canadian society. As a result of these similarities ethnic group members feel connected with one another, and experience feelings of mutual understandings, obligations and emotional attachment. It is true the respondents' thinking and behaviour is largely dictated by their particular brand of Christianity but it is also the case that the particular theological emphases and interpretations within the group are reflective of the group's collective historical experience. Consequently, it remains accurate to conceptualize the Mennonite Brethren as an ethnoreligious group although the religious element of identity is currently more salient.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The study has explored the form and salience of the modern Mennonite Brethren ethnic identity. This chapter summarizes the findings of the analysis and compares them with the theoretical material outlined in Chapter two to determine if the Mennonite Brethren experience is best characterized by the assimilation model or the alternative model that conceptualizes ethnicity as a process. The chapter concludes with some suggestions for further research that would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the Mennonite Brethren identity and ethnoreligious identity in general.

Summary and Analysis

The findings of this study have provided evidence that the Mennonite Brethren are undergoing a process of change. This is especially apparent when one considers generational differences. Despite the small number of respondents, they appear to represent a number of general trends within the group. First, group boundaries are being redrawn to include outsiders who join the Mennonite Brethren Church. This reflects the emphasis currently being put on an achieved religious membership as opposed to ascribed ethnic membership. Second, group members are presently accentuating the religious symbols of the group and downplaying ethnic ones. Third, second and third generation members of the group are mixing or interacting more frequently with non-ethnic Mennonite Brethren. With each subsequent generation the social networks are increasingly heterogeneous, marriage with outsiders is becoming more prevalent and residence patterns are less influenced by concerns for ethnic association. Fourth, the importance and practice of ethnic practices is declining. Fifth, the group is becoming less legalistic in terms of moral and behavioural taboos. Sixth, educational and occupational

opportunities are much greater for members of the second and third generation and consequently there is now a wider variety of occupational and educational choices made available to group members. These results suggest that the Mennonite Brethren are becoming increasingly integrated into Canadian society.

Has this increasing integration resulted in the existence of a merely symbolic identity as anticipated by Gans (1979)? That is, is the Mennonite Brethren ethnic identity purely expressive, or symbolic, with no significant influence "in" or "over" group members' lives? There is certainly some evidence for this prediction. From the interviews it appears that there are no salient, observable ethnic markers among Mennonite Brethren. Ethnic markers such as food and language are essentially symbolic, at least for second and third generation members. These aspects of identity do not hinder cultural, economic or political integration and are largely expressive rather than instrumental. These aspects of identity do not hinder the participation of ethnic members in different spheres of modern society because they are largely symbolic. Besides being symbolic, ethnic markers are situational and can be expressed or downplayed according to the preference of group members. This feature of ethnicity is well suited to modern Canadian society in which individuals must manage a number of different roles and identities across different situations. This ability to control one's display of ethnicity means that it is a voluntary identification rather than one imposed by members of the group or by outsiders. Individuals are free to choose to affiliate with the symbols of Mennonite Brethren identity when preferences dictate and situations demand.

For second and third generation members, the common ethnic trait appears to be a shared heritage. This historical legacy is largely symbolic in the sense that it has little impact on

the daily lives of respondents. Instead, its influence appears to be limited to the psychological realm in that it provides informants with a sense of their past and contributes to their personal identity. As one third generation respondent commented:

> It [Mennonite Brethren heritage] is something interesting, unique, it is something that differentiates me from the masses. But for example, I would never call myself a Mennonite Canadian. I am a Canadian and I am a Mennonite but I don't see those two as conflicting.

This statement illustrates that a Mennonite Brethren heritage provides individuals with a sense of personal identity but does not conflict with other identities (e.g., Christian, Canadian) nor is it an impediment to educational or occupational mobility or other forms of social integration. It seems then that, as one respondent said, "Mennonite ethnicity is more of an internalized, knowing your heritage, rather than a practice."

If one looks across the generations and observes the increasingly symbolic nature of ethnicity and the apparent structural and cultural integration, one may conclude the Mennonite Brethren are in the process of becoming assimilated. This conclusion, however, is too simplistic because it involves separating out the ethnic and religious elements of the Mennonite Brethren identity. Ethnicity is becoming less of a factor in the identity and practice of the Mennonite Brethren, yet a distinct identity still exists which has an effect on group members' lives.

Assimilation theory predicts that the Mennonite Brethren would eventually be absorbed into Canadian society. On the one hand this would seem to be happening given the successful integration of group members. It seems accurate that the respondents are structurally assimilated and their culture more closely resembles middle class North American culture than a traditional Mennonite Brethren ethnicity. Nevertheless, feelings of difference persist among

group members. While difference was previously ascribed to both ethnic and religious difference, it is now largely premised on religious grounds. As one respondent explained:

> The ethnicity part of the Mennonite tradition, I don't think it really has anything to do with my everyday life...The religious part yes. In terms of what I believe, what I do, what I don't do.

Respondents may not feel economically, politically or culturally separate from the larger Canadian society but they do consider themselves different because of their commonly held internal or subjective values and beliefs.

Despite these general similarities, there are differences between Mennonite Brethren who see themselves as non-Christians and those who see themselves as Christians. One of the latter said:

> From my perspective a Mennonite is a spiritual identification so therefore you would be a Christian and that would make you different from non-Christians in society.

This statement suggests that the respondent felt that being a Christian differentiated him from others. This seems to be an accurate assertion when one considers that the Mennonite Brethren adhere to a religious ideology that permeates all aspects of their lives whereas all encompassing religious systems are no longer prevalent in the general Canadian context (Bibby, 1993). The ethnic component of Mennonite Brethren ethnicity mirrors modern society in that it is abstract, situational and fragmented. However, the religious component of their identity distinguishes them as unique because the Mennonite Brethren adhere to a religious ideology that provides direction and meaning for their lives as opposed to a nominal religious attachment characterized by fragmented religious practices.

Rather than group boundaries disintegrating as the Mennonite Brethren become more Canadianized, strict boundaries have been maintained but they have been redrawn along

religious lines. This emphasis on religious qualifications for group membership is considered by respondents to be more in agreement with the original Anabaptist beliefs of the group. As one third generation informant commented:

> It is not like a private little club where only Mennonites with the proper historical qualifications are allowed in. The original Mennonites followed Menno Simons, they were a whole mixed breed from a cross-cultural dimension, different countries. So the original group was not a homogeneous kind of unit, there was a whole mixed breed too. So for us to say now we are going to limit it to only Mennonites would be wholly against what it was in the beginning.

Another change that is considered a more accurate reflection of the group's beginnings is the shift from the practice of being a separate people to becoming active in society to bring about change. A second generation respondent commented:

> You can't go out on the farm and just support yourself and stay away from everyone. I think that mentality of separation is completely wrong and completely unbiblical. I don't know where that came from in the first place. The scriptures say we are supposed to be going out to the four corners of the earth and telling people, you know being involved in the community and telling people about Christ and you can't do that in isolation.

The change occurring within the Mennonite Brethren should not be characterized as loss, but rather a reorientation of goals and practices. Thus, the Mennonite Brethren have not become completely absorbed into Canadian society; instead, they have redefined their distinctiveness. While there may be convergence with Canadian society culturally and structurally, there is still an ideological separation that has implications for the lives of respondents.

Assimilation theory would predict that the Mennonite Brethren identity would largely be symbolic with little impact on individuals' lives. In the previous chapter this was shown not to be the case. The beliefs and values held in common by group members definitely influenced the lives of the Mennonite Brethren. While the salience of the ethnic identification of the Mennonite Brethren may be declining, their religious identification certainly is a significant

factor. Moreover, the importance of association with group members and participation in the Mennonite Brethren community remains high. Even when the religious identification no longer exists, socialization within the group has lasting implications for individuals due to the internalization, to differing degrees, of the group's value and belief systems, and feelings of closeness and mutual undertstandings with other Mennonite Brethren.

The shortcomings of the assimilation theory to explain the persistence of the Mennonite Brethren identity lies in its emphasis on ethnic survival rather than ethnic change. Ethnic survival is dependent on the successful preservation of an ethnic group's institutions and cultural inventory. A historical and contemporary examination of the Mennonite Brethren provides evidence that this approach is flawed. The identity of the group has been fluid not fixed; group boundaries have changed as well as the symbols used to mark them in response to the external forces of modernization and the internal emphasis on evangelism. Despite this transformation, the Mennonite Brethren have retained a distinctive identity. The reorientation of identity reflects changes in the emphasis put on the two key identity components of the Mennonite Brethren, religion and ethnicity.

A historical analysis shifts that Mennonite Brethren identity reflects an alternating emphasis from religion to ethnicity to religion. The Mennonites began as a largely urban, heterogeneous group whose members were drawn together for religious reasons. Later in Prussia and Russia they formed into a rural, ethnically homogeneous community in which ethnic concerns dominated religious ones. In response to the decline in religiosity, the Mennonite Brethren broke away from the larger Mennonite community and emphasized

religion over ethnicity. The findings in this study suggest the emphasis on religion still prevails but that it cannot be separated out from ethnicity.

In this study it has been shown that religion and ethnicity are not mutually exclusive in the identity of group members; rather, these two identity elements are interrelated. The religious beliefs of the group have informed and continue to inform the social practices and subjective thinking of group members. While the importance of religious faith for practice has remained constant, the particular beliefs emphasized and their interpretation have changed as a result of the religious schism that produced the Mennonite Brethren and pressures such as government policy, economic competition that often involved conflict and were experienced within different contexts.

In the contemporary setting, group members have redefined their identity to accentuate the religious component. However, this is not a clear cut process because Mennonite Brethren identity remains a complex phenomenon that cannot be reduced to a single common denominator. Consequently, attempts to articulate a clear and simple definition of Mennonite Brethren identity often result in ambiguity. For example, the criteria for group membership reported by respondents were not consistent. Some considered ethnicity to be sufficient while others did not. It is also often difficult to categorize the group's symbols as specifically ethnic or religious because they are reflective of both. For example, the conservative morality and ethnic values (i.e., valued personal characteristics) that characterize the group appear to have become sacralized by group members and have consequently taken on religious significance.

This difficulty in providing a single all-encompassing definition of Mennonite Brethren identity does not, however, appear to undermine identity retention but in fact can contribute to

its viability. It allows group members to accentuate or downplay the religious and/or ethnic aspect of their identity in response to different situations and is therefore adaptable to different contexts and can be employed for different purposes. If it were possible for the Mennonite Brethren to provide an essential definition and experience of Mennonite Brethren identity, it would also be possible they would eventually lose it. The fact that the group's identity eludes simple description means it is capable of transformation. This ability of the group to reconstruct its identity, both in the past and now, has contributed to the persistence of a distinct Mennonite Brethren identity in different historical, geographic, and social contexts.

The exploration of Mennonite Brethren ethnic identity provides evidence for the conceptualization of ethnicity as an emergent process continually shaped by and in reaction to social interaction within specific historical, geographical and social contexts. There are, however, two additional points that are implied in this model but need to be made more clear as a result of the findings of this study. First, it is not only the form (i.e., boundaries and symbols) of ethnicity that can change. The history of the Mennonite Brethren shows that its salience is also fluid. As Breton (1978) and others have demonstrated, the importance of ethnicity will change depending upon the context in which an individual is situated. What is not always made clear is that the salience of ethnicity can ebb and flow for an entire community over an extended period. Second, sociological theory suggests that if an ethnic group can no longer replicate its traditional cultural form it faces one of two possibilities: It can change the form of its ethnic identity or it can become assimilated. However, a third possibility appears to exist. The process of identity change can occur over a period of time to such a degree that an ethnic identity will no longer exist. Nevertheless, if a group can retain a collective identity,

albeit in a different form, that has a significant effect on the lives of group members, it cannot be said to be assimilated.[13]

The future identity of the Mennonite Brethren is open-ended. Throughout the history of the group, its members have attempted to live their lives as practical expressions of their religious beliefs. The expressions of those beliefs and the resulting identity has been, and will continue to be, shaped by the environment in which the group is situated. It seems likely that if the group maintains its goal of evangelism and is successful in attracting outsiders, the ethnic identity of the group will remain largely symbolic. Over time, if the ethnic background of group members becomes increasingly heterogeneous and religious ideology, rather than ethnic tradition, is used to explain and justify group behaviour, it is possible the Mennonite Brethren identity will become devoid of ethnic elements. If this occurs, the Mennonite Brethren could be more accurately conceptualized as an evangelical religious denomination. However, as long as group members identify collectively with a common history and cultural background, no matter how symbolic that identification is, ethnicity will persist and under the right circumstances has the potential to take a more prominent role in the group identity. For example, if military conscription were introduced group members might again emphasize their heritage because of the historical privilege of exemption from military service, that is justified in terms of their traditional religious (pacifist) beliefs, granted by the Canadian government to members of the ethnic group. While it is not possible to know the future form and salience of the Mennonite

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[13] This point is not made because it is thought to describe the current situation of the Mennonite Brethren. However, given the information from the interviews it appears possible that the group will over time transform itself into strictly a religious group.

Brethren identity, it will certainly be shaped by social interaction and the contextual setting in which that interaction takes place.

Future Research

This study has begun to describe the form and salience of the Mennonite Brethren ethnic identity. There is, however, a need for further research. As this study has revealed, respondents feel that Mennonite Brethren ethnicity has a limited effect on their lives. To gain further information on this topic from a different viewpoint, it would be useful to conduct research with non-ethnic Mennonite Brethren who participate in the Mennonite Brethren social network (i.e., Church). As a result of their interaction within the network, these individuals could provide insights into the role and salience of ethnicity in the lives of ethnic Mennonite Brethren. It would also be interesting to know how these individuals define themselves. That is, do they consider themselves to be Mennonite Brethren based on their religious affiliation, and do they experience a sense of difference when interacting with ethnic Mennonite Brethren as a result of their non-Mennonite background?

In this study, two potential ethnic markers were identified that were not fully explored due to the lack of indepth data. First, it was reported by respondents that their relationships with other ethnic members were typically long-term and that family relations are of utmost importance. It would be useful to examine if the relationships ethnic members have with each other are qualitatively different than the relationships they have with outsiders. It may be that the quality and length of relationships within the ethnoreligious group are distinct. Second, service work was reported by all respondents as an important aspect of their lives. Further

research could be conducted to determine the degree of commitment and practice (e.g., frequency, personal cost) associated with service work. It too may be a significant distinctive ethnic marker that has implications for the practice of group members.

The research findings provide evidence that ethnic Mennonite Brethren who are not Christians are still influenced by the ideology of the group. However, given that there were only two such informants in this study, this assertion should be retested with a larger sample. Moreover, these two informants had only recently (approximately 3 to 5 years ago) become non-Christians. It would be informative to conduct a longitudinal study to determine for how long and to what degree the ideology of the group affects ethnic Mennonite Brethren who reject the Christian faith. It may be that the ideology of the group becomes less of an influence on individuals' lives as the religious ties to the group become less salient.

The two non-Christian respondents in the study continue to identify themselves as Mennonite Brethren. However, there are individuals with an ethnic Mennonite Brethren heritage who leave the group and no longer consider themselves to have a Mennonite Brethren identity. It would be informative to research individuals with a Mennonite Brethren ancestry who identify with the group in comparison to those who do not. For example, how many ethnic members are staying or leaving the group? It is possible that a distinct identity persists but only among a relatively small proportion of individuals that have an ethnic Mennonite Brethren identity. If this were the case, there would be stronger evidence that assimilation accurately reflects the majority of ethnic Mennonite Brethren. Of those individuals who leave, it would useful to examine whether their behaviour and thinking are still affected by the ideology

of the group. Such an examination would indicate if there are aspects of ethnicity that are difficult to shed even when one rejects a specific ethnic identity.

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Appendix 1

Interview Schedule

Before the interview began I engaged in friendly conversation to put the respondent at ease and reconfirmed that he or she had a Mennonite Brethren identity. Moreover, I made it clear I was specifically examining the Mennonite Brethren. I briefly explained what the study was about and thanked them in advance for their participation. I told them that if they did not fully understand a question to ask me to explain myself better. Also, I emphasized that I was interested in their own personal opinions and experience and encouraged them to talk freely and at length. To avoid any confusion, I stated that when I used the term Mennonite, I was referring to the Mennonite Brethren. This statement was repeated at least once during the course of the interview.

Personal Information Questions

1) Where were you born and where did you grow up?

2) What is your educational background?

3) What is your marital status?

4) What is, or was, your occupation? (If applicable) What is your spouses occupation?

5) Could you tell me what your households' average yearly income roughly is? (A card with a list of different income categories was used for this question because of the potentially sensitive nature of the topic).

6) What is your age?

General Identity Questions

7) What beliefs and practices do you think of as being characteristic of Mennonites, Mennonite Brethren in particular? In other words, how would you describe a typical Mennonite Brethren?

8) Are there any important ways in which you are not a typical Mennonite Brethren? Explain.

Ethnic Salience Questions

9) Generally speaking, how much influence do you think your Mennonite Brethren identity has on your life?

...Now I want to get you to tell me how being a Mennonite influences different aspects of your life. If your Mennonite identity is influential please explain to me how it is important and why it is important.

[Once a general category had been given I let the respondent talk freely. There were, however, specific subtopics which needed to be covered and consequently if the interviewee did not address them I brought them up during the conversation. When discussing the topics I tried to get at both opinions and actual reported behaviour to determine how these were related to religious ideology.]

10) How does being a Mennonite Brethren affect your religious beliefs and practices?
- are there distinctive Mennonite emphases/practices?
- to what degree are Anabaptist principles important (i.e., service, pacifism, peace issues)?
- degree of importance of emphasis on evangelism, do they actually evangelise to outsiders?
- importance and practice of church participation and devotionalism?

11) How does being a Mennonite affect where you choose to live? (residence patterns)
- is it important to live in close proximity to other Mennonites? Why or why not?
- is there a critical mass of Mennonites in the area?
- do family members live in the surrounding area?

12) How does being a Mennonite affect what organizations, committees or groups you belong to or participate in? When I say organizations or groups I mean such things as service organizations like M.C.C., church related groups, sports teams, professional organizations etc..
- what is the degree of involvement with Mennonite institutions/organizations? Are Mennonite organizations preferred? Why or why not?
- is it important to be involved in service organizations (value of and actual practice)?
- amount of participation in church and church-related activities?

13) How does being a Mennonite affect the way you choose your friends?
- % of friends Mennonites, importance of and why.
- do respondents feel more comfortable with other Mennonites?
- what characteristics are considered important in friendship selection?

14) How does being a Mennonite affect how you value your family?
- how much importance is placed on maintaining contact with family and actual amount of interaction that occurs. Why or why not is it important?
- do feelings of closeness/connection exist?

15) How does being a Mennonite influence your choice of partner for dating or marriage?
- how important is it that he/she is a Mennonite? Why?
- if they have a partner is she/he a Mennonite?
- what characteristics are deemed important? Why are they important?
- how important is it to become married?

16) How does being a Mennonite affect the way in which you train/raise your children? [If they don't have children] If you were to have children ....

- what values, beliefs and practices need to be transmitted to children? Why and what is the best way of attaining these goals?

17) What Mennonite cultural practices do you engage in?

- language use (knowledge and amount of use of Low German).
- types of food consumed.
- dress or appearance (simplicity?).
- use of Mennonite media.
- care of home (cleanliness, neatness).

18) How does being a Mennonite affect your views on gender differences? In other words, do you think men and women are different in any important ways and do you think men and women should have different roles?

- what are the attitudes towards, and practice of, leadership/authority/submission in the home and the church?
- what are the attitudes towards, and the practice of, employment of women?
- who should and does control the finances?
- how should the responsibility of raising children and household duties (cleaning, cooking) be divided up?
- what are the attitudes about gender equality?

19) How does being a Mennonite affect your views on the following moral issues?

- attitudes toward, and practice of... drinking, premarital sex, divorce and remarriage, abortion, dancing, gambling, homosexuality, smoking, social welfare, types of t.v. programs and movies considered inappropriate.

20) How does being a Mennonite affect your educational choices?

- how important is attaining higher education? Why?
- is some training considered better than others? Why?
- how important is religious education (outside the church)? Why?
- do respondents prefer to send children to private Mennonite schools? Why?
- should educational goals for males and females be the same?.

21) How does being a Mennonite affect your political ideas and practice?

- what are the attitudes toward participation in politics?
- political orientation, what party do they typically support? Why? - is politics a private affair or a communal concern?
- how is separation of church and state defined?
- should the church encourage political participation? Does it?
- are there certain political issues which should be discussed within the church? Are they any that are discussed?
- what are the feelings about Mennonite politicians (is it right, would they support them over other candidates)?
- is political organization, lobbying a valid way to attain Mennonite goals? [Note: Mennonites have a lobbying body in Ottawa.]

22) How does being a Mennonite Brethren affect the way you think and deal with economic or financial matters?

- is there a preference for dealing with Mennonites in business matters (to what degree does this occur)? Do respondents work for and/or with Mennonites? Have Mennonite connections ever resulted in employment or business opportunities?
- are certain occupations deemed better than others? Is it important to be your own boss?
- what are the attitudes towards materialism/the display of wealth, the importance and amount of charity (is the charity mainly for Mennonite organizations), importance placed on economic success?
- is it important to provide economic support to other Mennonite Brethren?

23) How important is being a Mennonite Brethren to your sense of identity? Why or why not is it important?

- How important is it compared to other possible identities (Canadian, evangelical Christian)
- are respondents proud of their Mennonite Brethren identity?.

24) Are there any psychological or emotional benefits gained by being part of the Mennonite Brethren community? Explain.

- is there a sense of belonging to a group?
- are there feelings of emotional security?
- is there a feeling of continuity with the past?
- how important is it to identify with Mennonite heritage?

25) Are there any other aspects of your life, that I have not listed, which your Mennonite Brethren identity is important for?

More Identity Questions

26) a) In your estimation, does Mennonite Brethren reflect more of an ethnic or religious identity? b) Can you be a Mennonite without being religious? Explain. c) Can you be a Mennonite Brethren without having an ethnic Mennonite heritage? Explain.

27) a) What parts of being a Mennonite Brethren are religious? b) What parts of being a Mennonite are ethnic?

28) a) Would you ever consider joining another religious group other than the Mennonite Brethren? Why or Why not? b) If yes, what group would it be and would you still consider yourself a Mennonite? Explain.

29) a) In what ways is being part of the Mennonite Brethren community an asset (material and psychological)? b) In what ways is being a Mennonite a liability?

30) Do you think it is important for the Mennonite Brethren to preserve their heritage?
a) If yes, why, and how is this best accomplished?
b) If no, why not?

31) Do you think there are any significant differences between your generation of Mennonite Brethren and other generations? What are the differences and why do you think they have occurred?

32) a) Do you consider Mennonite Brethren to be assimilated? For example, do you consider yourself to be an "ethnic" person. b) If not assimilated, what characteristics differentiate Mennonite Brethren from the rest of Canadian society? c) Do you think they will become assimilated in the near future?

Appendix 2

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

PARTICIPANT'S STATEMENT:

I have voluntarily agreed to participate in this research project which explores the importance and nature of Mennonite Brethren identity. I understand that participation in this research requires that I take part in in-depth tape recorded interviews with Doug Klassen. I understand that all information will remain confidential and anonymous. The tapes will be coded only with a pseudonym or a number and the researcher, Doug Klassen, will be the only person to listen to them. These tapes will be kept in a locked cabinet separate from my consent form and will be destroyed at the completion of the research.

I understand that I do not have to answer any questions that I do not wish to respond to. I also have the freedom to withdraw my participation from this research at any time after signing this form with no questions asked and no prejudice. I understand that if I have any questions now or at any time during the research process I am free to ask them.

_____ _____

Participant's Signature Date

RESEARCHER'S STATEMENT:

I, Doug Klassen, am the sole researcher conducting a study for my master's thesis to learn more about Mennonite Brethren identity. In accordance with ethical regulations for research involving humans, I will make every effort to protect the safety, welfare and rights of my research participants. To do so, all information that I obtain will be held in strictest confidentiality, and anonymity of participants is guaranteed. The information received from

research participants may be used for publication in a scholarly journal or Mennonite publication. The final copy of this thesis will be made available to the research participants if they so desire.

_____ _____

Researcher's Signature Date

VITA

Surname: Klassen Given Name: Doug

Place of Birth: Corvallis, Oregon, United States

Educational Institutions Attended:

University of Victoria	1989 to 1995
Fraser Valley College	1986 to 1988

Degrees Awarded:

B.A.	University of Victoria	1991

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Title of Thesis:

Ethnicity as Process: An Examination of the Mennonite Brethren in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia

Author 

Doug Klassen

December 15, 1995