

“The Native American Indians, once a great people so in harmony with nature, have been devastated by alcoholism. What kind of stress can explain this epidemic? Why has this persisted? The Indian nations are strangers living in a strange land. Stress that leads to substance abuse comes from the sense of not belonging, of not feeling safe. Today, we have terms to define their alienation. Acculturation stress results from the demands to integrate into and identify with another more dominate culture that *looks* different. Deculturation stress is that resulting from the loss or devaluation of historical tradition. Both can be classified as chronic inescapable stress. The situation in which the Indians found themselves was described by L. A. Heib in his review of Native American Indians.

Two hundred years ago, several thousand Seneca Indians lived in the Southwest portion of New York State. The Seneca tribes had a social structure with gender roles well defined. Men hunted, went to war, and were diplomats to neighboring tribes. The women managed the village, supervised the growing of crops, and took care of the livestock. In this context, the stereotypes of the good hunter, the brave warrior, and the forest statesman were the images of masculine success. However, between 1754, when the French and Indian War began, and the treaty at Big Tree in 1797, the Seneca sold their hunting grounds and became largely confined to eleven tiny isolated reservations. A series of economic, political, and military disasters made the maintenance of these ideals virtually impossible. The good hunter could no longer hunt, game was scarce, and it was dangerous to venture off reservation lands into areas controlled by hostile white men. Without arms and allies, the brave warrior could no longer fight and considered his family to be threatened by the growing military might of the United States. The forest statesman, the third ideal image, became an object of contempt.

For nearly a century, the Iroquois chiefs, including the Seneca tribe, had been able to play the British off the French, and the Americans off the British. From both they were able to obtain presents (guns, traps, axes, food, and drink) and promises of territorial integrity. As a necessity they maintained an extensive system of alliances among surrounding tribal groups. After the treaty, they were divested of their powers. The league of the Iroquois, of which they were a member, was no longer respected. Their political and economic alliances with western Native Americans broke down and they were regarded as cowards for having made peace with the white man.

The Seneca response to what was viewed as the destruction of their culture was pathological. Many became drunkards, witchcraft accusations increased, factionalism made common policy impossible, the household unit became unstable, brawling and fighting were common.

The initial stress was a deculturation stress as they witnessed their culture being destroyed. This led to the abuse of alcohol. Identifying the Indian as a drunkard became popular. As a result, federal laws were passed to prohibit the sales of alcohol on Indian reservations. Since Native Americans looked different, they weren't of the same 'herd' as the white man. They couldn't fit in. This led to an acculturation stress when they attempted assimilation. These stresses persist to this day.”

“**The Craving Brain**” (1997) by Ronald A. Ruden, M.D., Ph.D.

Discuss these terms:

Enculturation, Deculturation, Acculturation.