

Cultural Identity

What is cultural identity?

When talking about cultural identity, we are referring to the identity of a group or a recognised culture, or the personal influence that one embodies from belonging to that group or culture. Generally speaking, a cultural group has shared values and goals.

A person's knowledge, beliefs and behaviour derive from their environment and through their social learning. There are common traits or identifiers that influence one's cultural identity. These include gender, race, history, nationality, language, religious beliefs and political beliefs.

With the immigration of many different cultures into Australia, society has become more and more multi-cultural, and one's cultural identity might be made up of various influences from many different cultures.

How do we explore or identify a group's cultural identity?

In order to explore the nature of a group's cultural identity, the following framework can be useful:

How does this cultural group's lifestyle define the following concepts?	
World View	How people interpret the world: what they believe in about life, the universe and how these beliefs give direction to living.
Cosmology	How they explain how Earth came to be.
Social Organisation	The protocols for social behaviour and consequences. This includes defining roles and responsibilities, e.g. family structure.
Meeting Needs	How both physical and spiritual needs are met.
Customs	The rituals and ceremonies that are important, e.g. story, song, dance, art.

Using this framework, we can attempt to explore the cultural identity of the Adnyamathanha people represented within the *Wadu Matyidi* animation and five Mini Docs.

Case Study: Adnyamathanha Cultural Identity

World View

The Dreaming is an important cultural element for all Indigenous Australians. It refers to a time when Ancestral Beings travelled across the land, creating life and key geographic features of the land. It is often told through story.

There is no single phrase in the English language that can begin to convey the complexity and the significance of The Dreaming, as each Indigenous group has its own distinct explanation.

The Dreaming contains many layers of knowledge, including:

- World View (cosmology, spiritual belief system)
- How to meet spiritual needs
- The Law (rules for living)
- Astronomical knowledge (mathematics related to seasons, cycles, etc.)
- Geographical knowledge
- Social organisation (kinships, moieties, relationship protocols)
- Survival needs (knowledge about how to meet basic human needs).

Cosmology

Akurra, an ancient serpent, is the ancestral spirit that shaped the landforms of the Flinders Ranges, the home of the Adnyamathanha people. Stories related to The Dreaming give direction to their living.

Social Organisation

The Adnyamathanha people traditionally have a complex system of social organisation. For example, 'moieties' called Matheri (the south wind) and Arraru (the north wind) underpinned the marriage system and all interactions in Adnyamathanha society. A person's moiety is inherited from their mother. For example, if the person's mother is Arraru, then that person is also Arraru. People have many responsibilities to their moiety.

Adnyamathanha people also have particular animals, considered their totems, which they should never hunt or eat.

The concept of family is connected to these traditional social structures and thus is quite different in nature to a non-Indigenous viewpoint. The Elders are the custodians of knowledge and possess ancient wisdom that has been handed down to them. They are to be respected.

Note: Terminology, for example 'kinship structures', often used to describe 'social and spiritual order', cannot adequately describe the complex, interwoven and 'layered' levels of understanding that is part of the Aboriginal psyche.

Meeting Needs

The Adnyamathanha people share a physical and spiritual connection with their Country in order to meet their needs.

- 'Physical' including:
 - Clothing (where there is a need to be protected from the elements)
 - Nourishment (food and water)
 - Transportation (the feet historically being the first form)
 - Shelter
 - Defence
 - Health and wellbeing.
- 'Spiritual' meaning:
 - To belong to, identify with and communicate within a social group (i.e. cultural connections)
 - Belief in superior Beings.

[The Adnyamathanha People](#), a Think Quest site project by students, provides a comprehensive study of the Adnyamathanha history, culture and lifestyle.

Customs, Ceremonies and Rituals

Respect, including respect for Country, respect for family and others, and respect for self is an important custom for the Adnyamathanha people.

Language is central to the identity of the Adnyamathanha people.

Many of the traditional ceremonies have been lost through dispossession of Country and their relocation.

The Rock Art of the area is essential to and helps define Adnyamathanha cultural identity.

Human Spiritual Needs - Howard Clinebell

Howard Clinebell, after years of pastoral care and psychological counselling, developed a list of seven common 'spiritual needs' that are considered to be part of human nature. These include:

- All people need love for it heals and gives people a sense of being strong
 - From others
 - From self
 - From a source greater than people, e.g. God, The Dreaming
- Everyone needs to experience knowing that there is a greater energy force than just what they are able to sense.
- Everyone needs to know what they believe in, what is important, and this provides them with a sense of meaning and hope when faced with sad events.
- Everyone needs to be aware of what they consider to be a moral way of living, e.g. what is ethical behaviour, how to act in a just way, how to ensure that they act with honesty and truthfulness.
- Each person needs to reflect upon their own personality, their creative nature, their inner spiritual self/wisdom.
- All people need to develop a sense of connection with other people, and all things natural.
- All people need to be in touch with their spirituality to help them in times of grief, self-doubt, when feeling a sense of guilt. People's spirituality increases the way that they can enjoy life, look forward to the future with hope and how they feel about themselves.

Clinebell feels that everybody must pay attention to these needs to feel whole and fulfilled, making spirituality central to human wellbeing¹.

¹ *Well Being: A Personal Plan for Exploring and Enriching the Seven Dimensions of Life: Mind, Body, Spirit, Love, Work, Play, the World*, Clinebell, H.J. (1992), Harper Collins.