

The Family in Contemporary and Traditional *Stó:lō* Society

Brian Thom

Stó:lō Curriculum Consortium

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Introduction

The family is, quite possibly, the most important part of social life among people in all cultures of the world. We are born into a family, raised by a family, rely on our families for support and care, marry into new families, and are put to final rest by our family. However, in high-tech, fast-paced, late-twentieth century, industrialized, capitalist societies like Canada, family connections and ties have become increasingly obscure for many people. In many Euro-Canadian communities, family structures are simplifying - making way for more individualistic pursuits. *Stó:lō* society has for a long time had very important and unique family connections. Although *Stó:lō* society operates within the context of contemporary Canadian politics and economy, the people maintain their complex family structure in the face of many historical changes.

The family in *Stó:lō* society is important to understand because of how closely knit family members are. The family is the focus of many social relations. Family connections give the *Stó:lō* a sense of who they are, their connection to the land, and what their relations to other people in the community should be. Different families have separate histories, and rights and privileges to different cultural traditions. These traditions include the right to tell particular family stories, fish and gather plants in certain places, receive particular names, among other things. A number of changes in family relations due to the processes of European contact and subsequent assimilation. In many cases, these processes have had devastating impacts on the functioning of family relations. However, the structure of *Stó:lō* family relations continues to exist and shape the lives of the *Stó:lō* today.

This unit looks at the family in both a contemporary and an historical perspective. The information collected to write this unit comes from the teachings of contemporary *Stó:lō* and those given to anthropologists over the past 100 years. This unit explores the family in *Stó:lō* culture through examining role of the family as a social group, the importance of family ties for traditional inherited rights and privileges, and the changes in the relations of individuals within the family over the past 200 years of contact and assimilation.

Part 1: The Family as a Social Group

Nuclear and Extended Family

A social group is defined by a set of people who have some things in common. The family, then is the most basic social group, as a person has their relatives in common regardless of who else they are or what they do. In *Stó:lō* society, the family is not only the most basic social group, but forms the core of many social, political, economic and spiritual relations. Given that the family is such an important social group in *Stó:lō* society, "families" are made up of the extended family, in addition to the nuclear family.

In the Euro-Canadian terms, the nuclear family consists of the one's parents, siblings, and grandparents. In *Stó:lō* society one's nuclear family also often includes a parent's siblings

(aunts and uncles) and their children (first cousins). When the *Stó:lō* lived in longhouses (*lálém*) and pithouses (*skémél*) an extended family of several siblings, their children and their parents, lived under one roof. It is with these people - the extended family - that most major economic activities took place. When a family wanted to go out to fish at a weir, the extended family also worked together to take and process the fish. The extended family would also work together to conduct ceremonies and feasts. Today, few extended families all live together in a single household, European-style dwelling, but they do still work together for many of these kinds of activities.



Figure 1: In Paul Kane's sketch of the interior of a longhouse, he illustrates an extended family living under one roof (Paul Kane, Stark Foundation, Orange, Texas).

Family Networks

Traditional extended family connections go beyond the individual house. Villages are often made up of extended families who are related at some point in the past. Because so many relatives live together in a single village, the *Stó:lō* generally prefer to marry someone from outside one's own village or community. This preference of exogamy, ensures that relatives do not marry each other. Marriage is not permitted with anyone closer related than fourth cousin. The practice of village exogamy is still followed today.

As a result of establishing marriages with people from various villages, people often have relatives spread out through a number of communities in the region. The family tree of Simon Pierre from Katzie (located on the northern shore of the Fraser River above Fort Langley), illustrates how one person can have an entire family network extend throughout the Salish region. Wayne Suttles, an anthropologist who worked with Simon Pierre in the 1950's, commented on this tree.

Something of the wide range of relationships that a Coast Salish community might have may be seen in Simon Pierre's own family ties... Thus Simon's father's father's father *nexne'xeleq*, a Pitt Lake man bearing a name identified with Pitt Lake since creation, married a Kwantlen woman who brought with her three Kwantlen names which she gave to their three sons. One of these sons, Simon's grandfather, married a *Samish* woman, probably renewing an older alliance, since his own mother, through Kwantlen, bore a *Samish* name. Through this marriage Simon traces his relationship with several *Samish* on the Swinomish Reservation, including Tommy Bobb, who is famous as the most active possessor of *skewedi'lich* in the Coast Salish area today. But this *Samish* grandmother had two brothers with names identified as *Skykomish*, and her mother was said to be the daughter of *wi'nipa*. Simon believes that *wi'nipa* was *swa'dabsh*, which he identifies as Colville. Actually *swa'dabsh* is the Puget Sound term for all the Interior Salish, but *wi'nipa* was more likely the Snohomish *wi'nipa*, whose Indian name was a corruption of the nickname given by the whites, "Bonaparte." Through his mother, Simon traces his relationship with people as the Saanich communities at Patricia Bay and Brentwood Bay and with people at Tsawwassen. Through the marriages of Simon's father's siblings, links have been established with the Scowlitz of Harrison River, with the Lillooet, and with the descendant of white settlers.

TABLE II.—GENEALOGY OF SIMON PIERRE

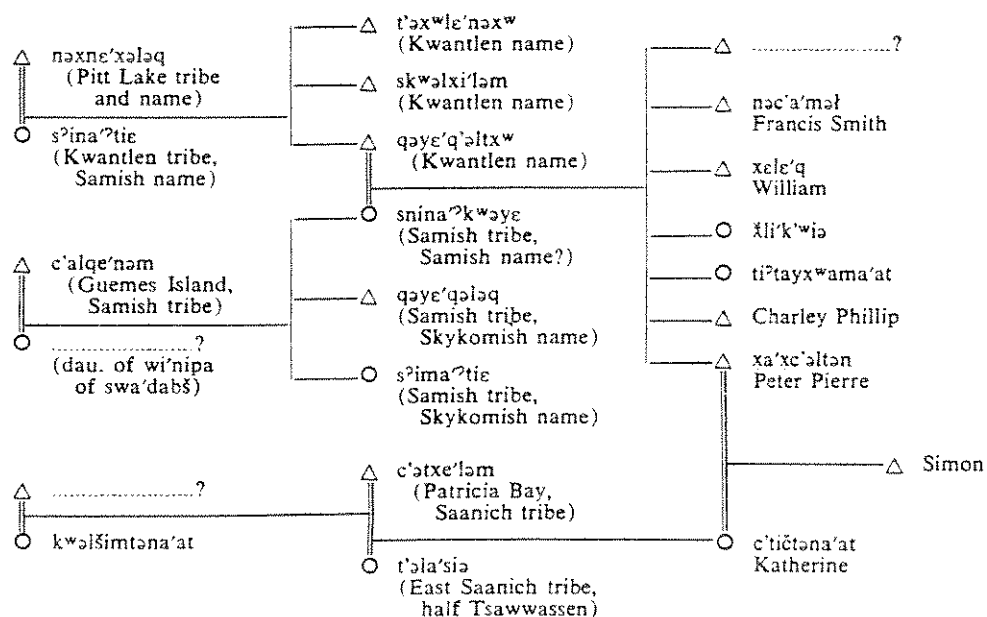


Figure 2: The family tree of Simon Pierre from Katzie (Suttles, 1955).

Thus, although Simon Pierre was from Katzie, he had relatives throughout the Coast Salish region, who he was able to immediately recognize. Given that the *Stó:lō* pay such close attention to who their relatives are, they have a broad social network of relatives in other communities that they can rely on, and from whom they may claim particular rights and privileges. These rights and privileges, which will be discussed in detail later, include access to fishing locations, ability to tell particular stories, use particular names among other things.

Local Kin Groups

Stó:lō people who have investigated their family history, will often be able to trace their lineage back to an ancestor who lived in the time of *Xexá:ls*, the siblings who transformed the world from a largely supernatural place to the way it is today. These ancestral people are often the original members of a community. They were often also transformed into important natural resources. Elder Bertha Peters told the following story about the origin of the red cedar to Wally Henry.

There was a real good man who was always helping others. Whatever they needed, he had; when they wanted, he gave them food and clothing. When the Great Spirit [*Xá:ls*] saw this, he said, "That man has done his work; when he dies and where he is buried, a cedar tree will grow and be useful to the people - the roots for baskets, the bark for clothing, the wood for shelter.

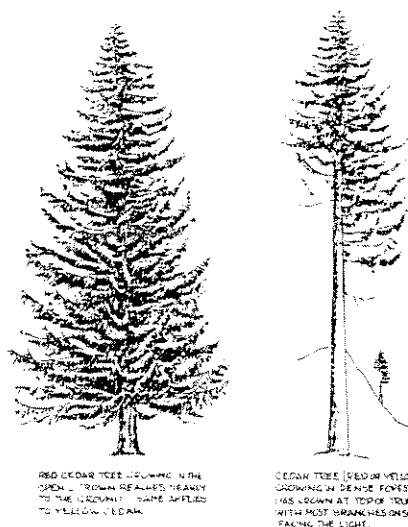
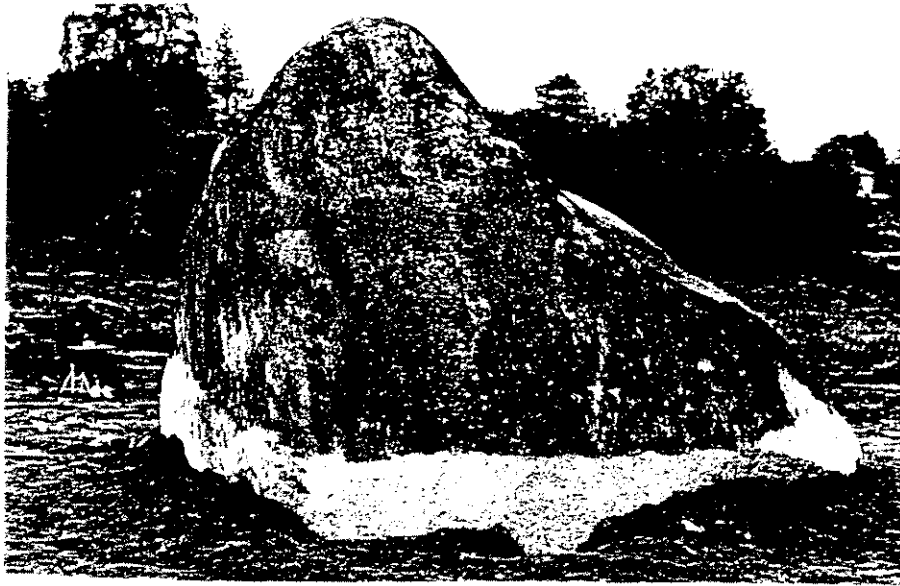


Figure 3: According to *Stó:lō* oral tradition, "a real good man" was transformed into the red cedar tree (Stewart, 1984).

Anthropologists have called the people who can trace their ancestry back to this ancient ancestor a local group or a local kin group. Thus, members of a local kin group do not only have a special family connection to each other, they often have a special connection to the land, plants and animals. In a very real way, these things are the ancestors of the *Stó:lō*. This important system was also described by anthropologist Franz Boas in 1890.

The inhabitants of each village are believed to be the descendants of one mythical personage. [...] The tribal traditions tell that *Xá'ls*, the deity, met the ancestors of all these tribes and transformed them into certain plants or animals which generally abound near the site of the winter village. [...] In many cases the ancestor is said to have been transformed into a rock of remarkable shape or size, which is found not far from the village.



*Figure 4: *Xá'ytem*, is a transformer site located near Mission in the Fraser Valley. It is the site where three *siya:m* were transformed into stone, for failing to teach everyone how to write their language (Photo courtesy G. Mohs).*

These local groups do not function like a "clan" as they do in northern Northwest Coast societies, but are a part of the shared history of a people. It effectively located members of an extended family to a particular place or region where the transformation originally occurred. This particular connection to place that comes from being a member of the local group, often carries with it rights to use the resources in that area. For example, people from the village at Cheam are sometimes referred to as "the mountain goat people." Their relationship to the ancestor who transformed into the mountain goat earned them this connection. Some of the families living at Cheam will then carry the proper ritual and technical knowledge needed to be successful at hunting mountain goats, giving them a particular right to that resource.

In a sense then, the family is traced beyond simply one's kin connections and into a more spiritual realm. The rocks, trees and animals are, in a special way, related to the *Stó:lō* living today.



Figure 5: Along the shores of the Fraser River, are numerous fishing sites that are shared by kin groups. Only members of the local group have access to these sites (RBCM).



Figure 6: The people from Cheam have an ancestor who was transformed into the mountain goat (Stó:lô Sitel Curriculum, 1986).

Family Leadership

The family is important in the realm of politics. Under the Department of Indian Affairs election system, community leaders are now voted into the position of Chief and Council of the Indian Band through a majority vote. Only registered members who live on the reserve may vote. Often, large families are able to stay in office for several terms because they have the most members who vote. This system, which was imposed by the federal government towards the end of the 19th century, does not always follow the traditional means of family-based leadership, particularly when many families now live off the reserve.

The traditional leadership system is family based. Each extended family would have a "head" or leader who looked after most family affairs. This person was usually the most respected member of the family. Such a respected person is called *siyá:m*. *Siyá:m* is not a title like "chief," but rather describes the qualities of respect and leadership an individual has.

Some *Stó:lō* Bands now operate on a system of leadership modeled after the traditional family-based system. In this system a leader or *yurwal siyá:m* is chosen by consensus from all the family heads. This person represents the families in all Band affairs.

Part 2: Family and Inherited Privileges

It was mentioned above some of the different kinds of inherited rights and privileges that are obtained through family ties. These rights and privileges are generally kept in the family and are an important part of a person's social status. The family names that are given to people links these rights and privileges to a particular person. How names are given and what kinds of rights and privileges they bear is discussed below.

Names and Naming

In *Stó:lō* culture, formal names are given to a person when they approach adulthood. These "Indian names" are single names which are held in one family and passed on through the generations. Many of these names are often connected with a respected and honourable ancestor. For example, the name *Th'eláchiyatel* was the name of one of the four brothers who were the first members of the Chilliwack people. Chief Richard Malloway received that name from his grandfather, who was a family leader during the early and mid 19th century. A few years after Richard Malloway died, the name was given to his grandson, who continues to carry it today. Names do not always follow every second generation like the example given here, but this is not uncommon, because the same name cannot be held by two people at the same time.

A name is also connected with a place. A well-respected person who is given a name in one community may also often receive a different name in another community. Having these names in different communities ties people to the rights of the resources they have in any given area. A person who is well respected in many communities will have several names.

This has been explained by Sonny McHalsie.

There are a couple ways of having a different name. An example of the main one is my great-great grandfather from Yale. He had a name in Yale and that was his Yale name. Attached to that name were certain rights, which would be his fishing rights, where he could go gather berries, and his status for going into the long house. The main emphasis was still on his access to resources. He also had a name down at Semiahmoo. He also had a name over in Duncan. So when ever he went to those places, there was no use for him using his Yale name, especially when he was trying to get access to resources, because he already had a local name at those places that people would recognize. And those names had to stay in a certain locality. When he wanted to move down from Yale to Ruby Creek, his family had a gathering to pass his name on to his younger son. So you see he couldn't take his name with him, because he wanted to move his residence to Ruby Creek.

When a person receives a name, their family will host a ceremony to present the name publically. Family members, friends and acquaintances are invited to these ceremonies to witness the event. At the turn of the last century, anthropologist Charles Hill-Tout recorded a traditional naming ceremony. The ceremony he describes here varies slightly from those which are practiced today.

Titular names were bestowed upon their bearers only when they had reached and passed the age of puberty. To show the way in which this was generally done let us suppose a nobleman of standing has a son fifteen or sixteen years of age, on whom he desires to bestow one of the family names or titles. He first goes to the chief of his commune, informs him of his desire and secures his acquiescence and promise of assistance. A date is then fixed for the event and invitations are sent to the neighbouring tribes. On the day appointed for the ceremony great numbers of guests come in from the friendly villages around, some also coming from distant settlements if the giver of the feast is well known and of distinguished rank. Preparations have been going on for days past to receive and entertain these visitors. Large quantities of food have been brought together by the host and his kinsfolk; the family treasure-chests have been opened and their contents set in order for distribution at the feast. When all is ready the father of the boy who is to receive the name, the boy himself, and his immediate sponsors, friends and kinsfolk all ascend the roof of the house - the pitch of the roofs always being low and convenient for the purpose - and from this vantage point the proceedings take place. These vary a little from tribe to tribe and from district to district. Commonly the ceremony is opened by the father of the boy dancing one of his family dances - to dance meaning

also to sing at the same time. This song dance is probably a more or less dramatic representation of some event, fancied or real, in the life or history of his ancestors, perhaps that which gave rise to the name he is going to bestow upon his son. When this is over a distribution of blankets - the measure of wealth of the coast tribes - is made to honour the names and spirits of his family, it being held dishonourable to speak of or even mention an ancestral name publicly without making gifts. The father now calls about him some thirty or forty of the leading noblemen among his guests to act as sponsors or witnesses of the rank his son will acquire by the name he is about to receive. Two elder men, or preferably two aged chiefs, who know his lineage and ancestry, now bring the youth forward and standing one on either side of him the elder of the two proclaims in a loud voice to the assembled audience that it is the wish and intention of the father of the youth to bestow upon him his paternal grandfather's name or title. At this the people express their assent and pleasure by clapping of hand and shouting. The name is then given to the youth after which another distribution of blankets takes place, special care being taken to give at least one each to all the formal witnesses of the ceremony and to the officiating elders. If the father is wealthy he will throw other blankets among the common-folk to be scrambled for. When this part of the ceremony is over the feasting begins.

After the naming ceremony is over the youth is known by his newly-acquired name though, according to their customs, he is never called by it except on special and ceremonial occasions.

Today many people spend a great deal of effort listening to their elders and going through archival records to learn what names are in the family and what their ancestor's names were. These names continue to be used at ceremonies and in the longhouse. Many of the rights and privileges that come with these names - or with family associations - continue to be important today. Some of these rights and privileges include access to fishing locations or gathering spots for berries and plants, rights to tell particular stories, sing particular songs and use particular carvings in ceremonies.

Fishing Spots

Every *Stó:lō* person has the right to fish on the river. This right is one of the Aboriginal Rights enshrined in the Canadian Constitution. However, not everybody can fish anywhere at anytime. Particular fishing spots - both gill netting and dip netting - are controlled by the family and access to them is regulated by the family head. There are, of course, a limited number of excellent fishing spots along the Fraser Canyon and lower Fraser River, several fairly decent locations, and a great number of poor places to fish. Each year during the fishing season, people who have access to one of these fishing spots through their hereditary family

rights, go there to catch fish.

Since the family network described above is so large, there are frequently disputes about who has the right to fish in that spot. These disputes are not about ownership of property, but rather about rights to access a family controlled fishing location. Detailed information about one's genealogy is needed to justify a claim to a traditional fishing location.

Inherited Rights to Non-material Things

Like the rights that families have to use particular names, so do families have particular rights to use sacred masks and costumes, and to perform certain rituals. Also connected with this are the rights to tell some of the stories, particularly the story of the origin of the *sxwó:yxwey*. These rights are passed along the mother's side. This ceremony is the most sacred of ceremonies in *Stó:lō* culture and these practices continue to be strictly adhered to. Finally, your family also determines where you can sit in the longhouse during a gathering. Higher status families will often have better seats in the longhouse than those families who are not as well respected.



Figure 7: A family controlled fishing spot along the Fraser River (RBCM).

Part 3: The Individual and the Family

In the day-to-day life of the *Stó:lō*, the family plays an every-present role. However, these roles are ever changing in the context of contemporary Canadian society. This section provides an overview of how the family plays a role in the everyday life of individual people in *Stó:lō* society, and points to many of the historical processes that have had adverse effects on the

operation of the family and family functions. Many of these adverse affects that the processes of disease and assimilation help explain some of the social ills which maylay contemporary Aboriginal communities. Providing this kind of historical context helps address the many issues which so many negative stereotypes about Aboriginal people originate.

Many families who follow their cultural traditions have family roles which are organized in the way same way that their grandparents and great-grand parents had. An adult couple who have children are often both usually involved in day-to-day economic or subsistence activities, and the grandparents provid child care. Grandparents are the children's teachers, sharing with them the stories, traditions and teaching of *Stó:lō* culture. As children get older, they often join their parents in their economic activities. Joining in these activities provides a place for the learning of important skills such as fishing, hunting, preparing food and meals, making tools, baskets, blankets and so on. These skills are the ones that people will need in their adult life.

Parents are gentle with their children and the *Stó:lō* family home is generally a happy one. Parents lead by example and tend not to scold their children. Voices are rarely raised. Children are generally treated like small adults and given responsibilities from a very early age. Even a baby is supposed to hold his or her milk bottle without help. Most elderly people, on the other hand, are taken into their children's homes and cared for in their old age. Only in some cases are temperamental or difficult elderly people relegated to their own home separated from the rest of the community.

A person's bonds with their extended family are reinforced during visits to these people who live in other communities. These visits often involve sharing food, cooperating in labour for some kind of economic activity, or as a part of their cerimonial and spiritual life. The parents of your children's spouses play a particularly important role in these extended family relations.

Throughout the past 200 years, many unique challenges to family life have been presented to the Aboriginal people living on the Pacific Coast of North America. These challenges have made it difficult for the family relations described above, to function successfully all the time. The most devistating of these were the succession of infectious diseases - particularly smallpox - which took the lives of so many *Stó:lō*.

Smallpox and other epidemics disrupted family life through the death of large numbers of people. During the height of the epidemics, as many as 67% of the population in the community were sick or dying. This death rate left an enormous generation gap, wiping out entire family lines. In many cases, children and elderly people were the worst affected. It is difficult to imagine how horrible this would have been for so many families during these times of disease. The individual cases of the disease usually ran for the course of a winter and returned every few generations for almost 100 years. This kind of recurrence of death in *Stó:lō* communities was the first and possibly most important disruption of family life over the past 200 years.

Although the smallpox epidemics were horrible, they did not change the way families related to each other. Many people would have been orphaned or lost their families, but the social structure remained largely unchanged. The assimilation policies of the colonial, provincial and federal governments also made a very direct impact on the structure of family life. The foremost of these were the Residential Schools which were set up in Chilliwack, Mission, Lytton, Kamloops, Port Alberni, Kuper Island, and Sechelt. *Stó:lō* children were taken from their families and put in these schools all around the province. At school, they were not allowed to speak their language or practice their culture. Only English was allowed to be spoken in the schools, students were treated very harshly if they spoke their first language. Contact with their families outside the schools were minimal. In this way, many of the important family bonds and teachings were drastically changed with the children no longer participating in their traditional roles in the family. Grand Chief Clarence Pennier commented that residential school "... has basically taken away the family experiences that I should have enjoyed and where I could have passed it on more to my kids..." By the time he attended residential school the people of his parents generation had already stopped speaking the *Halq'eméylem* language at home.

I don't think it was as bad as earlier times for people speaking their language. Most of us spoke English, since some of us weren't raised with the language from our parents probably because they weren't allowed to speak the language. Even though they spoke among themselves, they wouldn't talk to us in the language.

The Federal Government also passed a series of laws in the Indian Act which intended to aid the assimilation of the Aboriginal people of British Columbia. Such laws included the banning of the potlatch and Aboriginal ceremonies and gatherings, not allowing Aboriginal people to hire a lawyer to argue for their Aboriginal Rights, not being allowed to vote provincially until 1949, and federally until 1960. Indian Reserves and Indian Bands were imposed on Aboriginal communities throughout British Columbia with no regard for the traditional political system. Family leaders were in many cases not given the opportunity to play leadership roles in the Bands, as other "progressive" people were selected by Indian Agents to be Chief.

One of the most harsh symptoms of the disease and oppression that the *Stó:lō* have faced is the alcoholism that reaches some of the families. Alcoholic individuals disrupt and abuse family relations. Many families have seen generation after generation of cyclical alcohol abuse. However it must be remembered that not all families suffer from alcoholism and many lead happy, healthy lives. It is likely that much of this alcohol abuse began to escape the horrors of the great disease epidemics and the oppression that resulted from these assimilation laws and policies. Taken over several generations, this pattern multiplied into a sort of "cultural depression," these symptoms which include alcoholism, loss of self-respect and pride, and lack of teaching of traditional "proper" behaviour and attitudes.



Figure 8: The emotional, psychological, and spiritual effects of alcoholism, disease epidemics and the oppression from assimilation laws and politics, resulted in a form of "cultural depression" (RBCM).

Since 1921, the population of the *Stó:lō* has been on the rise. Although many communities continue to face the problems of cultural depression, there is a strong current of positive, healthy family leadership and reassertion of cultural values. The process of re-establishing self-government continues to be a challenging but rewarding effort. Many of the family traditions and values are being revived with members of the present generation and the Elders. The basic organization of the family has adapted successfully to the ever-changing, contemporary capitalist society. The importance of the *Stó:lō* family will continue to be evident as communities continue become healthier, re-establish self-government and re-assert their cultural traditions.





*Figure 9: Family is very important to the *Stó:lō* (Photo courtesy S. McHalsie, 1991).*

Appendix I

Family Terms in *Halq'eméylem*¹

husband	<i>swáqeth</i>	son	<i>te méle</i>
wife	<i>stó:les</i>	daughter	<i>the méle</i>
father	<i>má:l</i>	brother	<i>te álex</i>
mother	<i>tá:l</i>	sister	<i>the álex</i>
grandfather, brother or male cousin of grandparent	<i>te sí:le</i>	half-brother	<i>te slets'óweyelh</i>
grandmother, sister or female cousin of grandparent	<i>the sí:le</i>	half-sister	<i>the slets'óweyelh</i>
great-grandmother, great-grandchild, sister or female cousin of great-grandparent or great-grandchild	<i>the sts'ó:meqw</i>	uncle or aunt	<i>kwiyo:s</i>
great-grandfather, great-grandchild, brother or male cousin of great-grandparent or great-grandchild	<i>te sts'ó:meqw</i>	nephew, niece, child of parent's brother or sister or cousin	<i>stí:wel</i>
great-great-grandparent or great-great-grandchild, sibling or cousin of above	<i>ékwiyeqw</i>	child's spouse, son-in- law, daughter-in-law	<i>schirwtá:lh</i>
great-great-great grand- parent or great-great- great grandchild, sibling or cousin of above	<i>th'ép'oyeqw</i>	grandparent-in-law, spouse's grand-parent grandchild	<i>sexwsi:le</i>
great-great-great-great grandparent or great- great-great-great grandchild	<i>tómiyeqw</i>	in-law, in-law's relative spouse's brother or sister, brother's wife, sister's husband	<i>í:meth</i> <i>skw'élwés</i> <i>smátexwtel</i>
parent's brother, sister or cousin	<i>shxwemli:kw</i>		


ENDNOTES

1. Brent Galloway and Coqualeetza Elders' Group *Wisdom of the Elders*. (Sardis: Coqualeetza Education Training Centre, 1980.) Pp. 97-100.
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Suggested Further Readings

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