

"This Could Have Been Mine": Scottish Gaelic Learners in North America

Michael Newton, University of Richmond

Abstract

The Scottish Gaelic learners' movement is a recent development in North America that parallels the mainstream Scottish heritage movement in some ways, but is strongly oppositional to it in others. This essay describes characteristics of this phenomenon by analyzing the range of people involved, their motivations for learning, their goals, the creation of community among learners, the interaction between language learning and discourses of ethnicity, and the interface between Gaelic learners in North America and native Gaelic communities in Scotland and Cape Breton Island.

Keywords

Scottish Gaelic, Celtic, Scottish-Americans, ethnic revival, minority languages, heritage languages.

1. Historical Background

Communities of Scottish Gaelic speakers began settling in North America in the 1730s (Newton 2001a: 67-72), particularly in Georgia, the Cape Fear Valley (of North and South Carolina), and upper New York Province. Large-scale settlement in Canada accelerated after the American Revolution, and continued long after migration to the States declined to the individual level.

These early settlements contained a high percentage of Gaelic monoglots, but several factors prevented Gaelic from remaining a community language for more than a generation or two. The first was that even in pre-migration Scotland, Anglophones established English as a high prestige language, the language of church, state, and school, and stigmatized Gaelic. The second was that the implicit aim of institutions in North America was to Anglicize immigrants -

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the church, for example, offered minimal services for those who would never learn English, but church and school ensured that rising generations would be educated in English rather than Gaelic. Although there is some evidence of intergenerational transmission of Gaelic in the United States (in a few small and isolated communities with reclusive religious traditions), on the whole Gaelic appears to have given way to English within a generation or two of immigration (see Newton 2001b for evidence in North Carolina).

English speakers (in England and in Lowland Scotland) have a long history of prejudice against Gaelic, and there appears to be a significant continuity of this ideology of contempt in the United States. This is not at all surprising, given the influence of English models of literature and culture in the nineteenth century. As such attitudes were dominant in Lowland Scotland at this time, the efforts of the Scottish immigrant (Lowland or Highland) to maintain ties with the homeland only kept this conduit of bigotry open. An example of a 'joke' from the *Scottish-American Journal* (11 April 1868) illustrates this:

As Easy As Learning Gaelic - A noted linguist says that the preliminary indispensables for acquiring Gaelic are, swallowing a neat assortment of nutmeal-graters, catching a chronic bronchitis, having one nostril hermetically sealed up, and submitting to a dislocation of the jaw.

The popularity of imaginative literature involving Gaels such as Macpherson's *Ossian* or Scott's *Rob Roy* did, of course, make an impression upon the literati of North America but this does not seem to have softened attitudes towards the living language. The Irish revivalist movement of the 1870s made the argument that Irish language and literature were worth preserving and developing, and this had an influence upon Scottish Gaels in North America (c.f. Newton 2003).

The relative isolation of the main Gaelic communities in Canada allowed the language to survive longer than in the United States, where the processes of economic and social integration accelerated cultural assimilation. Rural poverty and large-scale out-migration, however, were additional factors in the decline of Gaelic in Canada (Dembling 1997: 19-21). The only vestiges of a Gaelic-speaking community left in North America today are in Cape Breton Island (Nova Scotia), where there are believed to be several hundred native speakers, nearly all elderly.

There are only two instances of institutional support for Gaelic in the United States up to the end of the nineteenth century. *Comunn Gàilig New York* (The Gaelic Society of New York) was established in late 1894 when certain members of the pre-existing *Comunn Gàidhealach*

New York (The Highland Society of New York) grew dissatisfied with the society's lack of commitment to the Gaelic language. They established a Sunday school to teach Gaelic literacy to people who already spoke Gaelic, mostly immigrants who had been born in the Canadian Maritimes. The Scottish Highlanders Society of Chicago held a similar class (c.f. Newton 2003).

Gaelic was first taught at St. Francis Xavier University (Antigonish, Nova Scotia) in 1891, but lapsed until the Celtic Department was formed in 1958. The Gaelic College of Celtic Arts and Crafts in Cape Breton was established in 1938, although its founding principles were more influenced by "Tartanism" than by linguistic revitalization (Dembling 1997:50-4). Many of its courses, however, were initially taught through the medium of Gaelic. Gaelic was first offered as a subject for non-native speakers in the United States by the Department of Celtic Languages and Literatures of Harvard University in 1971.

There does not seem to have been a significant Gaelic learners' movement in North America until the 1970s, when Cape Breton tradition began to be popularized (Dembling 1997: 58-60). The Gaelic learners' movement matured on a larger scale with the establishment of *An Comunn Gàidhealach, Ameireaga* in 1981 (see Section 4 below), but seems to have quickened pace particularly as a side-effect of the efforts of Gaelic revitalization in Scotland in the 1990s and because of the appearance of "Celtic" and Scottish heritage (in derivative forms) in the mass media (films such as "Braveheart" and musical groups such as Clannad, Runrig, the Rankin Family, etc.).

The success of such artists is commonly claimed to have sparked a "Gaelic revival." While there is considerable overlap between Gaelic learners and the Gaelic revival, there are also important distinctions. The Gaelic revival is popularly understood to include traditional arts such as songs, fiddle music, and step-dancing; language is seldom given adequate attention (Dembling 1997). Especially because of the lack of linguistic criteria, people of different cultural backgrounds and proficiencies in Gaelic (from native speakers to interested non-speakers) are active in the Gaelic revival.

2. Research Methods

I have been involved in Scottish Gaelic learners' circles in North America since the late 1990s, having returned to the United States after a number of years as a Gaelic learner in Scotland. Since that time I have been to a number of Scottish Gaelic learners' events, usually as an organizer or teacher, giving me opportunities to observe the working of the Gaelic learners'

movement in North America while simultaneously working as an advocate within it.

In order to obtain quantifiable data, I created a questionnaire for Gaelic learners (given in full in Appendix A). I began to circulate the Gaelic learners survey questionnaire in February of 2002, especially via email groups on the Internet; replies came within days over email (65 of the 78 total were email responses). While the use of the Internet certainly proved expedient for research, it should be noted that that it is possible that the characteristics of this medium of communication have biased the data. The Internet seems to have penetrated North America significantly (especially the United States), but given that Internet users may include a disproportionately high cross-section of the affluent, young and well educated, the data sample may over-represent this group.¹

I made paper copies of the survey questionnaire available at two Gaelic learners' events in Richmond (one regional and the other national) and another in North Carolina, and sent about fifty others out to New Mexico, Toronto and Glengarry (Ontario). Thirteen of the total seventy-eight responses were submitted on paper.

Besides facilitating the collection of quantitative data, the questionnaire also encouraged participants to express their thoughts and feelings about their perceptions and identities as Gaelic learners. Many of the participants were articulate and insightful about their own experiences and those of others, and inserting their comments into the main text has brought a great deal of life to this article.²

Alasdair MacCaluim kindly provided me with portions of his forthcoming doctoral dissertation about Scottish Gaelic learners.³ He also conducted a survey of Gaelic learners (with 458 participants), international in scope but with a particular focus on Scotland. His analysis of his survey data has enabled me to compare some characteristics of Gaelic learners in Scotland with their counterparts in North America.

Another extremely important reference was the research conducted by Jonathan Dembling about the "Gaelic revival" in Nova Scotia. Dembling's work includes a survey (which yielded sixty-six responses) conducted at numerous Gaelic events throughout Nova Scotia and his thesis contains many critical observations about cultural and linguistic revitalization in that region.

3. A Profile of Gaelic Learners

Thirteen correspondents (16.66%) are resident in Canada. The ratio of the population size

of Canada to the United States (from official sources for 2001) is 31:284 (11%).⁴ The survey response numbers suggest that the percentage of Canadians involved in Gaelic is somewhat higher than the percentage of Americans, although the sample size of this data set is not large enough to be statistically conclusive.

Participants were asked to provide their age bracket (grouped in decades). I used a more exact number if they provided one; otherwise, I entered 25 into the database for someone in the twenties age bracket, 35 for someone in the thirties, and so on. The average age is 45 with a standard deviation of 12 years. The actual distribution of ages is shown in Figure 1 below:

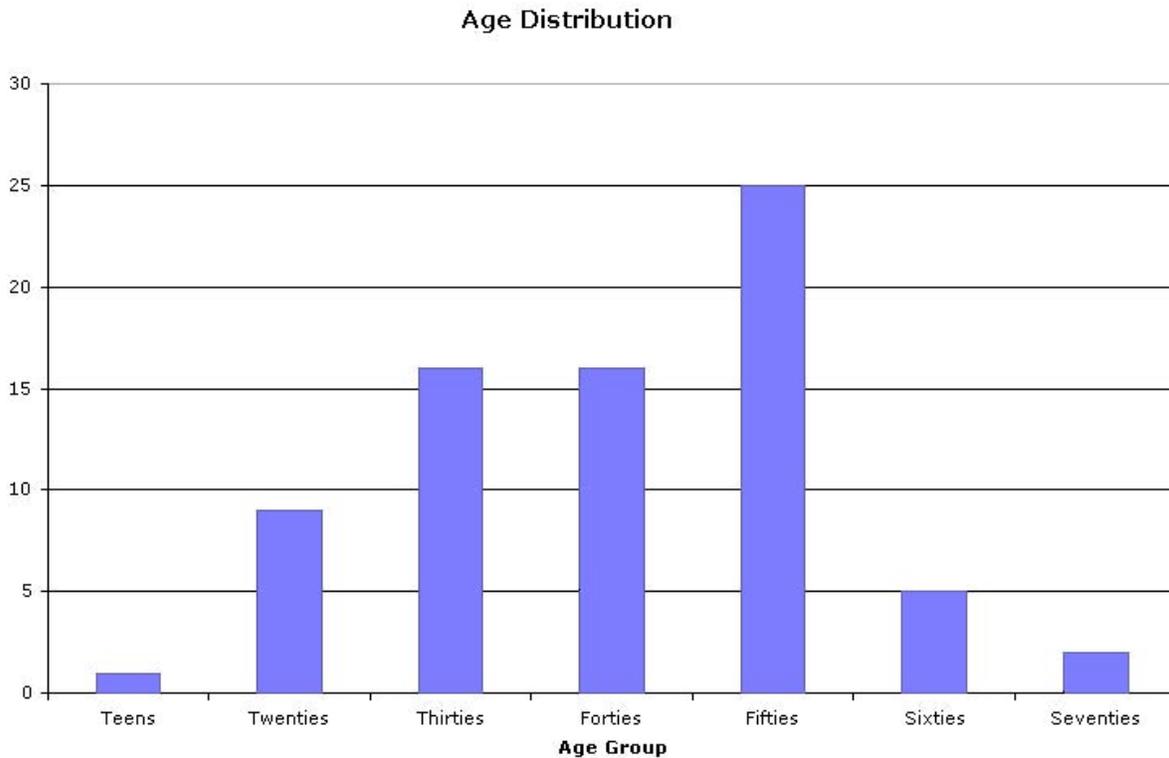


Figure 1. Participant Distribution by Age

This suggests, on the one hand, that those most likely to be involved in Gaelic are well past child-bearing age or even in retirement, a time when many people become involved in other heritage activities such as genealogy. On the other hand, the data does not indicate any direct correlation between age and being motivated by ancestry.

If reviving Gaelic were a serious goal in North America, the lack of interest among young people would make prospects rather dismal. On the other hand, the profile of the Gaelic learners' community in Nova Scotia is quite distinct from the rest of North America and as Dembling has

noted "there are reasons to believe that learning Gaelic is more popular with younger people in Nova Scotia" (1997: 107).

There is generally a greater acceptance of multilingualism in Canada than in the United States, but language learning is not a popular pastime among North American youth, especially a minority language without a youth culture, role models, or an institutional infrastructure. Despite these weaknesses, a number of Gaelic learners who are parents want their children to learn Gaelic as well. As one respondent put it,

I felt this very strongly when I realized my wife was pregnant with our first son and that I'd have someone to pass our culture along to. I would be thrilled if he'd be interested in our culture and learn to fluency.

Learning a language can be a serious challenge to an adult, and it should be no surprise that most active learners are well educated and multilingual. On the average, survey participants had at least one university degree, and spoke at least one other language besides English.⁵ MacCaluim similarly notes that his Scottish survey participants have as a whole a much higher level of education than the Scottish average. People with less advanced educational backgrounds sometimes find relations with erudite Gaelic learners a little stiff, as one native of Nova Scotia comments: "The unfortunate thing is that many in the Gaelic learners' family are far too scholarly - not a lot of fun."

There is probably no better illustration of the diversity of the backgrounds of Gaelic learners than religious affiliation (question 6 on the survey). Like the mainstream Scottish heritage movement, Scottish identity in the American South is strongly associated with the Presbyterian church (Ray 2001:46-9, 147-9, 200-2), but this clearly is not the case for Gaelic learners in North America. Answers with small totals included Buddhist, Quaker, Mormon, Wicca, Unitarian Universalist, and Celtic Traditionalist, but the diagram below indicates the most common responses.

Twenty-five survey participants (32%) answered that they have no religious affiliation. The considerable Catholic presence among survey participants is indicative of the general size of the Catholic Church in North America, as well as of the longstanding Catholic Gaelic communities in Nova Scotia and Ontario.

Survey respondents do not feel that religion is relevant to a Scottish-American/Canadian identity (see survey question 43). Two typical remarks are:

I think that for a language to survive, it cannot be seen as intertwined with a particular religious group. This would serve to alienate others. Anyone is welcome to learn Gàidhlig - whether Protestant, Catholic, Buddhist ...

It can be but probably should not be. Religions have caused untold harm and damage to the Scots and Irish.

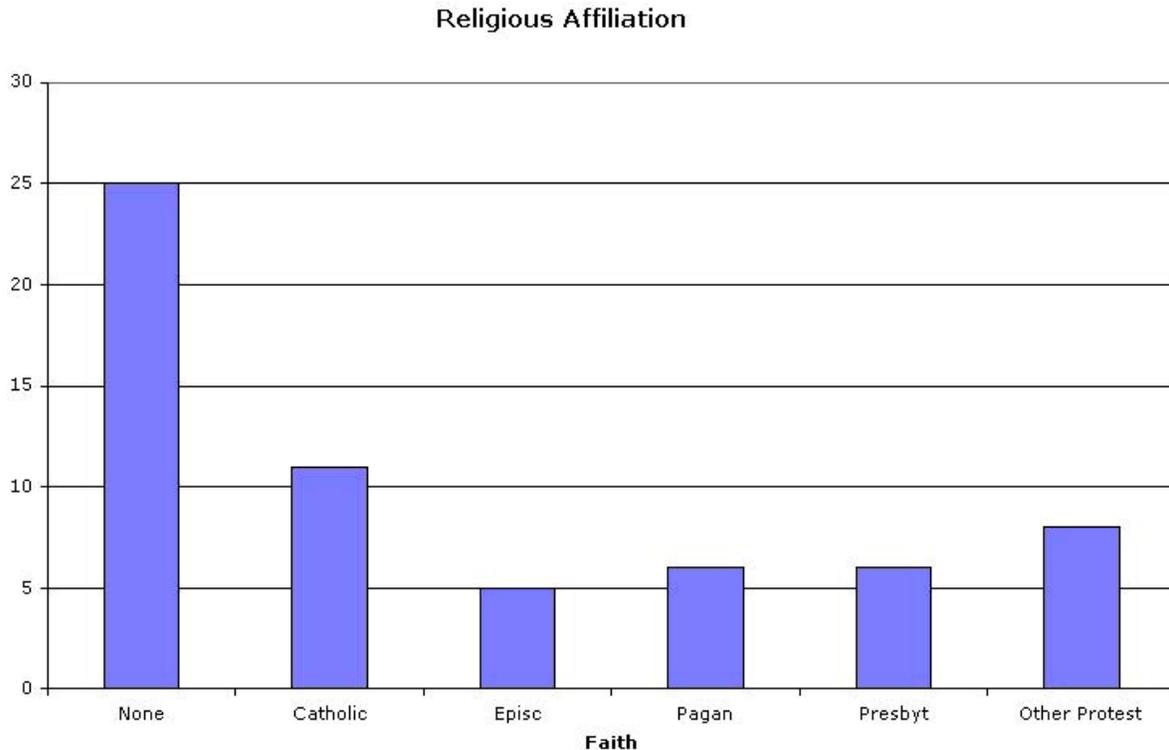


Figure 2. Religious Affiliations of Respondents

The only respondent who felt strongly that religion is essential to Scottish-American identity is a clergyman in the American South. Nonetheless, for Gaelic learners throughout North America religion is not essential to Highland identity but a personal choice, and often a highly creative one.

A few see Gaelic language and tradition as essential ingredients of their spiritual life, wishing to bypass the later accretions of Protestantism, Catholicism, or Christianity itself to connect to more primal wellsprings. This is one of a number of indications that the Gaelic learners' movement in North America is a post-modern phenomenon. By "post-modern" I mean in this case the conscious recognition that all traditions are ultimately socially constructed and valid from some perspective, and that, to a considerable extent, an individual can choose which group to identify with and which traditions to adapt, adopt, or follow.

Actual Gaelic communities have been conservative historically in their approach to religion (among other things), so the practitioners of newly constructed creeds are usually looked at askance by those in the native Gaelic community (and Gaelic learners sensitive to traditional aesthetics). As one survey participant wrote:

The Celtic Revival has also tended to bring some of the New Age Druid types out of the woodwork, which is sometimes difficult to contain [i.e., refrain from making comments].

This is one of a number of examples of the common tension between native norms and revivalist norms. There is an inevitable clash between honoring tradition as practiced and understood by native communities in the present, and the urge to tap tradition selectively, creatively and innovatively. Creative resurrection is sometimes done innocently by revivalists in the name of tradition, and at other times done to commoditize tradition for the global marketplace, particularly according to the aesthetics of Anglo-American society.⁶

On the other hand, native and revivalist are sometimes mutually engaged in reconstructing tradition. A Gaelic teacher recently confided to me that the aspects of her culture that she finds most interesting are usually those that were intentionally suppressed by the dogmatic religious elders of her community (where even the musical tradition was largely silenced), and her comment is not unusual. (I would never expect to see her or any other native Gaelic speaker I've ever known to offer workshops on Celtic Shamanism or the like, however.) Whether or not they are conscious of it, revivalists are playing a part in the reinterpretation and selective rejuvenation of particular aspects of Gaelic tradition simply by providing an audience and consumer base.

4. Motivations and Goals

Survey participants were asked how they became aware of Gaelic (question 7), and there were a wide variety of responses. Only a few survey participants had personal contact with Gaelic speakers at an early age, and most of these were from Canada. Only the learners in Nova Scotia have a local community of native speakers in which to contextualize their cultural activities.

Many people become aware of Gaelic because of hearing popular music adaptations of Gaelic songs by performers such as Mary Jane Lamond and Capercaillie, and for probably the majority of learners, Gaelic music remains an abiding passion. Others stumble across Gaelic in odd ways and are intrigued to learn more: reading the label on the back of a Drambuie Bottle; a

reference in a Nancy Drew story; a Gaelic dictionary in a school library; an interest in minority languages.

A number of characteristics differentiate the North American Gaelic learner from the vast majority of North Americans involved in the Scottish heritage movement, most especially the issue of ancestry. While kinship is a centripetal force for most Scottish-Americans, few Gaelic learners place any great weight on kinship, and some do not have any Scottish ancestry at all. Similarly in Scotland, "many people without Gaelic ancestry or any connection with the Highlands are interested in Gaelic" (MacCaluim 1999: 29; see also Morgan 2000:129-130).

This inference is supported by the results of the survey: of the eight motivations for learning Gaelic listed in question 8, option (h) ("Some or all of my ancestors spoke Gaelic") had almost the lowest average, and by far the largest standard deviation. Issues concerning ancestry and ethnic identity will be addressed later, but let it suffice for the moment to say that fewer Gaelic learners are propelled by ancestral connections than one might expect, and that not all Gaelic learners have Scottish ancestry in their ethnic backgrounds.

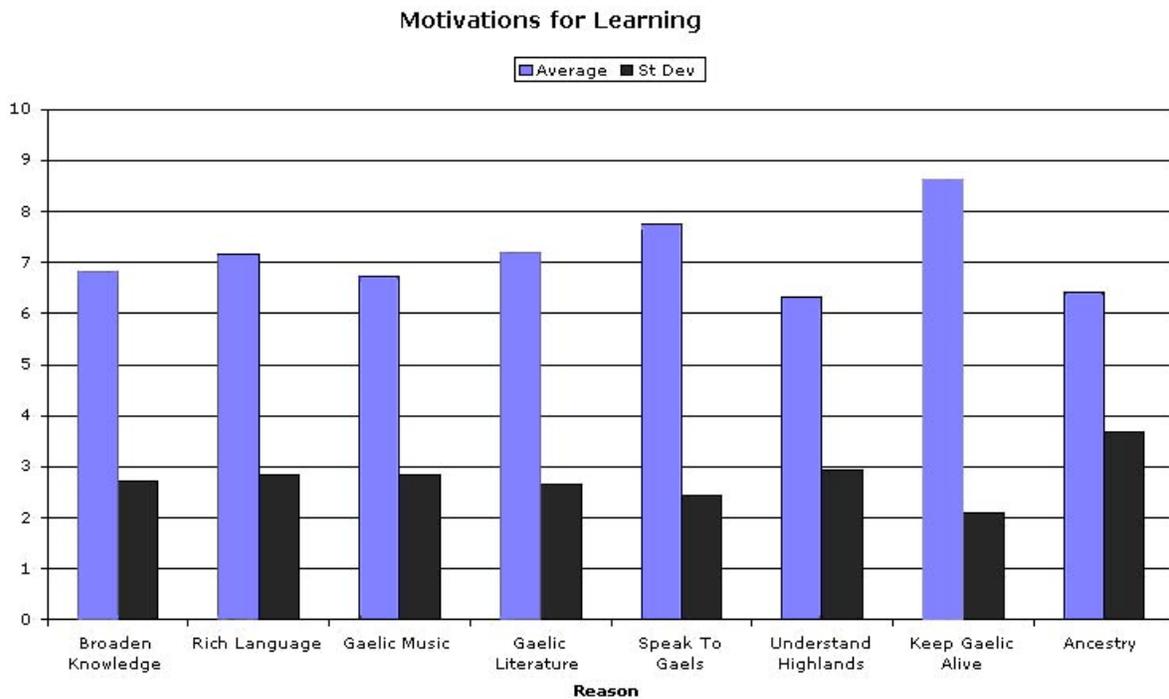


Figure 3. Respondent Motivations for Learning

Gaelic learners exhibit a great deal of idealism. According to survey results, the strongest motivation for Gaelic learners is option (g) ("I would be helping to keep Gaelic alive"). This

response had by far the highest average and the smallest standard deviation (MacCaluim [1999:30] shows that this is also the primary motivation for Gaelic learners in Scotland). The ideology of the contemporary Gaelic revival in North America is inspired by the anti-globalization movement, as is apparent in the periodicals created by and for the community, and in the comments of survey participants. One respondent answered that his goals for learning Gaelic were:

To understand and appreciate a unique and beautiful tradition that my family was once a part of. To do my miniscule, humble part in keeping that tradition, and the world's linguistic and cultural diversity as a whole, from going down the tubes (which would leave the planet a much duller place).

Most learners realize within a short time that Gaelic is in a highly precarious state. They tend to empathize with other minority cultures and endangered languages and, as one might expect, are critical of globalization. One survey respondent wrote that learning Gaelic "has strengthened my feeling that pop culture is bland and a dead end," and another that "I greatly desire to buck the worldwide trend towards Anglo-Americanization." This again is another sign that the Gaelic learners' movement is situated in the post-modern world.

Gaelic learners are not just interested in the language in the abstract: they seek contact with real people and participation in traditional Gaelic culture and communities. The second highest motivation for Gaelic learners on survey question 8 was option (e) ("I would be able to speak to native Gaels in their own language"). A survey participant wrote that her goals for learning Gaelic are:

To speak fluently and especially to be able to sing traditional songs in Gaelic, both solo and milling or waulking songs with others. I feel strongly about supporting the living language communities of Gaelic where they are found. And perhaps even to participate in learner groups/affiliate activities.

The highlight of learning Gaelic is being able to spend time among native speakers in Scotland or Cape Breton, and this provides the inspiration to continue alone until the next visit. "I love the language and the people who speak it and it is a privilege to interact with them." Many learners use vacation time to take classes at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig on the island of Skye in Scotland, or at the Gaelic College in Cape Breton. The enjoyment of the social environment and personal contact comes through many survey responses concerning their best learning experiences (question 12):

My week at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig. It was my first immersion situation. It occurred, I think, just as I was ready to make a breakthrough into actual conversation. It was an incredibly positive personal and social experience (partly because of my particular instructor and classmates), and it took me from really being hesitant about attempting to speak Gàidhlig to a genuine willingness to try.

It would definitely be attending the Gaelic College Immersion week two years ago. Hector and the teachers were so committed to teaching, I was impressed. One of the highlights was that native speakers from the Christmas Island area and North Shore were brought in and stayed with classes all week to offer comments, converse and bring a sense of the real community into the process. I was so impressed and moved by that. It wasn't just an evening concert kind of thing, but we were able to get to know them on a daily basis at lunch, etc. I almost learned to tap my feet in Gaelic!!!

Survey participants were not asked whether or not they were aiming for fluency in Gaelic, but it is significant that 52% mentioned that this is their goal (either on question 9 or 48). This suggests that most Gaelic learners are earnest in their efforts to become proficient in the language. Despite this common aim, only 7% reported that they had achieved levels of fluency from 8 to 10 (question 11). Learning Gaelic appears to be a meaningful experience and rewarding process in itself, regardless of the level of achievement: the average length of time spent learning Gaelic by those who responded to the survey is nearly six years, with a standard deviation of eight years. This indicates that there are many people who have undertaken Gaelic as a long-term endeavor.

Acquiring Gaelic requires a sustained effort and a commitment of time and energy, not to mention linguistic skills. Many people are attracted to Gaelic because of the appeal of traditional arts (particularly music), but become intimidated or exhausted by the lexical and grammatical struggle. It is common for the size of Gaelic classes to decline rapidly in the first several weeks when students realize that considerable effort is required and that their poor grasp of grammar has made them ill-equipped for the challenge. Only dedicated learners stick with it.

It should be pointed out that people's motivations change over time as they learn more Gaelic and more about Highland culture. What often starts out as a quest to understand ancestry or music opens up into a wider exploration of literature, history, linguistics, place names, or spirituality.

It is intriguing, for example, that while no survey respondent indicated that they became interested in Gaelic because of Gaelic literature, results indicate that Gaelic literature became a greater motivating factor to them than Gaelic music once they began their studies. Perhaps this is

indicative of the intellectual predisposition of many Gaelic learners, but it does suggest that people's motivations shift, and their understanding of Gaelic culture matures, as they learn.

5. A Continental Community with Regional Variations

Learning Gaelic tends to strengthen an international outlook. It is not unusual for Gaelic learners from the States to join together in singing the Gaelic version of the Canadian National Anthem, due to their familiarity with it in some of the Gaelic classes in Canadian universities. Learners are connected to what is happening in both Scotland and Nova Scotia, and frequently in other minority language communities (some Celtic, such as Ireland or Wales, others non-Celtic, such as the Basque country).

It is inevitable that Gaelic learners are influenced by their local culture and ethnic profile. Most fundamentally, the majority of respondents who had personal contact with Gaelic at an early age or within the family are from Canada. Canadians are more likely to have a sense of communal continuity of the language and culture than learners from the States.

There is a large, visible Native American presence in the American Southwest, and many Gaelic learners in New Mexico were eager to express to me their affinity to Native American culture and to relate their Native American ancestry. It is, in fact, not unusual for learners all over North America to come to Gaelic after an initial interest in Native America. Gaeldom is perceived as an indigenous culture with strong parallels to Native America for which "white people" can usually find some ancestral claim.

It is common for people in the American South to initially relate to Gaelic in terms of kith and kin, particularly because of the etiology of race dominant there. A quote from a survey respondent in the South, early in her study of Gaelic, is peppered with references to race:

Even though I am American, I still call the Gaels my "people," because 3500 miles away and generations of separation have not killed the call of my blood. There is something in the Gaelic culture that carries on in an unbroken thread, through our blood, that endures. [...] There seems to be an ingrained sense of duty and honor and family in the people I know that have Gaelic ancestry... for me, growing up in the South, I've seen that the Gaelic ways have been passed down to us in part through Southern hospitality, love of the land, and family loyalty.

Prolonged contact with Gaelic (and Gaelic-learning) communities tends to alter such views. More representative of seasoned Gaelic learners is the following response to question 41 from a participant in Cape Breton (where English, Gaelic, Mi'kmaq, and French have been

spoken for centuries): "Yes, I'm a Gael. Having said that I feel that Gaels are defined by language rather than race."

Regardless of region, Gaelic learners tend to live in feast or famine conditions. Many Gaelic learners work in isolation, rarely able to enjoy the support of others. Others are members of local groups that teach Gaelic, and sometimes other aspects of Highland culture as well.

The chart below illustrates the frequency of contact between fellow learners (light bars), and between learners and native speakers (dark bars). While the majority of learners have contact with other learners on a weekly or monthly basis, a significant number rarely, if ever,⁷ have support of this kind. The situation is more extreme where native speakers of Gaelic are concerned. Although a few learners are fortunate enough to be able to have regular contact with native speakers (often as local teachers or remote tutors), the majority of learners rarely have this sort of contact. A majority of responses to question 14 mentioned that exposure to native speakers would make it easier for them to learn Gaelic, so this is a deficit that frustrates many learners.

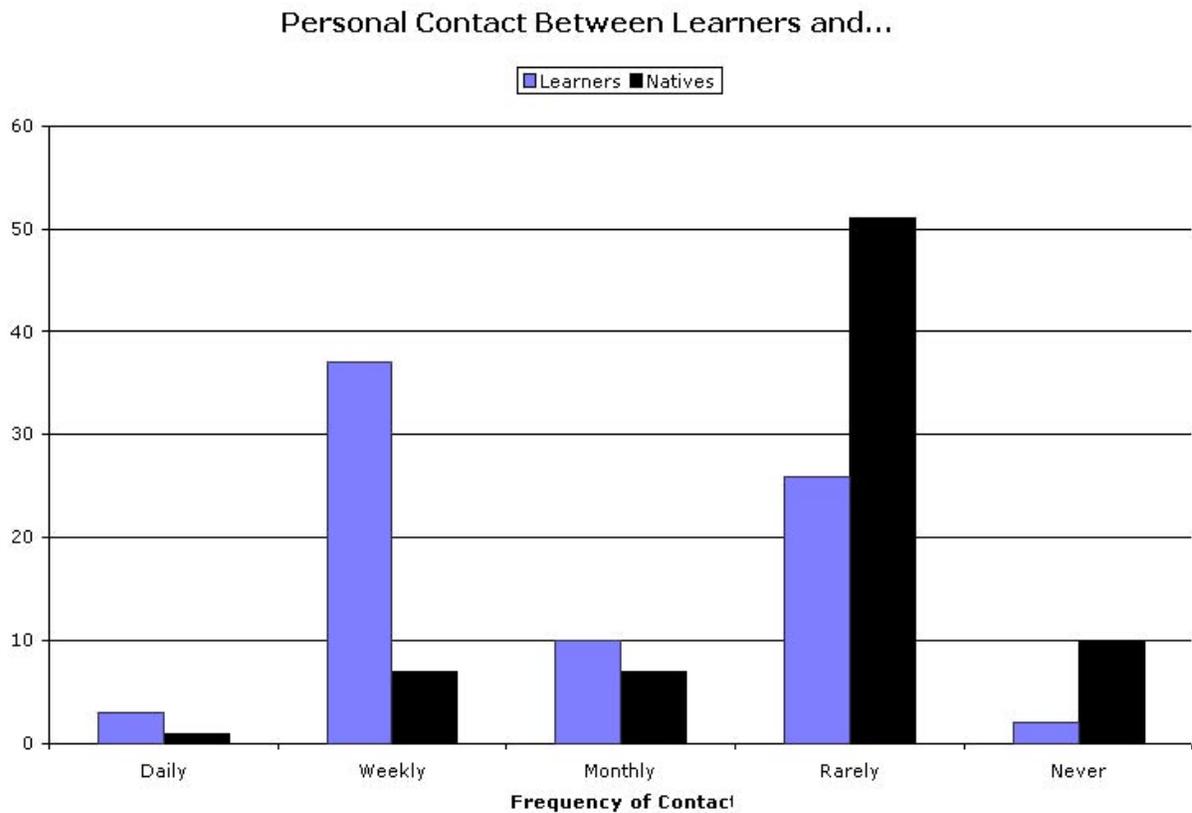


Figure 4. Contact Frequency b/w Learners and b/w Learners and Native Speakers

There are few people in North America with a knowledge of Gaelic, the ability to teach, and the initiative to organize learners in their area. Where there are sizable clusters of Gaelic learners, it is because of the evangelism of key figures who have taken up the mantle of leadership.

Large clusters of Gaelic learners (with twenty or more active participants) are located in the Washington D.C. area, Cape Breton, Toronto, Denver, Seattle and the San Francisco Bay area. Noticeably absent is any persistent large cluster in the American South, despite the common belief that the South is a reservoir of Celtic (and especially Highland) culture and the expectation that the many enthusiasts of Scottish Heritage in the South would be pulled in this direction. Despite my deliberate attempts to increase representation on my survey in the South, for example, I received only two responses from North Carolina and three from South Carolina.

An Comunn Gàidhealach, Ameireaga (ACGA) was established in 1981 by Dr. Ian Cameron, a native of Kingussie (Scotland). ACGA began in the greater Washington D.C. area and the core of its leadership and membership still remain in that region, but it is the only organization that attempts to extend its efforts over North America (rather than being simply local in focus). It acts as an umbrella organization, informing learners about Gaelic resources, and the teachers in their area, particularly through its web site.

ACGA publishes a quarterly newsletter, *Naidheachd*, which contains Gaelic learning materials and tips, book reviews, assorted news items, and information about Gaelic activities. ACGA's primary contribution to the Gaelic learners' community is the annual Immersion Weekend, the first of which was held in 1997. Many cannot afford the time or money for a trip to Scotland or Cape Breton to learn Gaelic, so an intensive immersion course during a weekend in accessible sites in North America has been a welcome development. Teachers are either native Gaelic speakers or accomplished learners who act as role models for aspiring students. Workshops (and late night *cèilidhs*) focus on other aspects of tradition, especially song.

The most recent information about ACGA's membership (*Naidheachd* Fall 2000) confirms that nearly a hundred of the organization's 345 members are in the greater Washington D.C. area, but that it has had a significant outreach in Colorado (29) and California (25). Its membership in the American South remains fairly small (fourteen members in North Carolina and four in South Carolina, for example). Twenty-one percent of survey participants mentioned being members of ACGA.

The organization *Clì* (formerly named *Comann an Luchd Ionnsachaidh*, "The Learners'

Association") is based in Scotland but caters to Gaelic learners, supporters, enthusiasts and scholars worldwide. About 5.2% of its membership is in the United States and 1.6% in Canada, and about 18% of survey participants indicated being members of *Clì*. Its quarterly journal *Cothrom* engages seriously in the ideology of cultural and linguistic revitalization, making frequent comparisons with efforts in other parts of the world.

Local groups in North America typically meet for a few hours on a weekly or monthly basis. A few (such as groups in Toronto and Richmond, VA) organize events once or twice a year that draw participants from a larger area for intensive study. Arguably the most ambitious of local Gaelic organizations in North America is *Slighe nan Gàidheal* ("The Path of the Gaels"), based in Seattle, Washington. The official web site explains that its remit is to nurture not only the language but also the other aspects of Gaelic culture of which it is intimately a part:

Each person who becomes a part of this organization does so because they have fallen in love, in love with the language, the music, the courage or the history of the Highlanders. We differ from similar organizations in America, in that we are intent on including as many different traditional art forms and other areas of study in our activities as possible. We believe that these practices inform each other in both obvious and subtle ways, and that they cannot truly be studied or practiced in isolation.

Slighe nan Gàidheal holds a Féis ("festival") every two years that brings together not only language teachers but recognized virtuosos of the Gaelic arts. This group and a few others have been courageous enough to send singers to compete against native Gaelic-speaking contestants in singing competitions in Scotland.

Given the fact that learners, and more importantly, teachers, are small in number and scattered over an enormous area, Gaelic learners form a "virtual" community. A number of Gaelic organizations, teachers, scholars, and enthusiasts have placed resources of various sorts on the Internet, the most popular of which is the live broadcast from Scotland of *BBC Radio nan Gàidheal*. Some Gaelic teachers have discovered how to tap the market of learners in North America by exploiting modern technology, making their services as language tutors available over web sites and telephone toll numbers.

Sixty-one percent of survey participants mentioned using resources on the Internet, especially email lists. A response to question 37 nicely explains these overlapping levels of community: "For me there are 3 communities: a small one locally, a larger one in Toronto, and an international group that I interact with on the Internet."

6. Celebrating Community

Gaelic learners in such organizations feel that they form an intentional community united not by a common ancestry, but by the common goal of keeping the language and tradition alive.

The editorial in the Summer 2001 issue of *Naidheachd* expresses this concisely:

"Cuimhnichibh gur sluagh sibh," Màiri Mhòr nan Òran urged Highlanders in the 19th century, "Remember that you are a people." Her words have meaning for those of us studying and promoting Gaelic in 21st century North America as well. We are not a people defined by locality or even ethnicity, but we are a "sluagh" who share an identity shaped by common purpose, by common goals, and, for some of us, common experience.

Such a view contrasts with popular perceptions of Scottish heritage (especially in the American South) that represent Scottish ethnicity as essential and biological: "Distinguishing the Scottish-American community from other imagined communities is an emphasis on presumed kinship" (Ray 2001: 69; see Chapter 3 for further analysis). Gaelic learners see their involvement as a personal choice born of love, idealism, passion, and a dedication to understanding authentic Highland culture through language. A few representative responses to question 37 will illustrate the nature of this intentional community:

Learning Gaelic is such a rare activity and so difficult without formal classes available that only the most dedicated even try. So knowing the degree of difficulty you have to admire the other learners and thus feel a kinship.

There is a definite sense of community, and within our little group there is an awareness that we enjoy Gaelic, the language, the music, the history and that it is something important that we share. We have and are becoming friends, celebrating birthdays, weddings etc. Our group encompasses many ages, from young high school/university students to older retired people and a mix of ages in between. I would say we feel connected to a greater whole as well; to people in Scotland, Cape Breton and others in North America.

Sort of a grass roots language and cultural reclamation.

Most of the learners I know personally are friends and supporters of each other. Some are only learning enough Gaelic to be able to sing; I relate more to those who are determined to learn the language and who support it both politically and financially and by promoting education. I don't feel part of the true Gaelic speaking community - yet...

This last quote indicates that learners perceive a distinction between Gaelic learners and native Gaelic speakers raised in traditional communities (whether in Scotland or Canada). This distinction is also projected by native Gaels themselves (c.f. Morgan 2000 and Kabel 2000 for

Scottish and Irish comparisons), and demonstrates a contrast between the belief in inherited racial essence (ala "Scottish heritage") and the criterion of language (and associated cultural knowledge) for ethnic inclusion.

Many Gaelic learners trust that their efforts will aid the struggle to keep the language alive in Scotland. Although few have tried to articulate how their presence will make a difference to the survival of the language, there is a common assumption that they will help to stimulate the Gaelic economy in Scotland.

I think the most realistic hope is that learners in America will keep buying Gaelic materials, and so keep money flowing into publishing those materials. I don't think the future of Gaelic lies in the US. I can't comment on Nova Scotia; I don't know enough about it. I think the future of Gaelic will be decided in Scotland.

Others see Gaelic as belonging to the people of North America, especially Cape Breton, just as much as to the people of Scotland. The most spirited of such assertions come from *Slighe nan Gàidheal*. A member who responded to the survey, for example, states:

To a larger extent, we Seattleites feel a part of a North American Gàidhealtachd - there's been Gaelic in North America as long as there's been Europeans here, so even as people coming to the language out of love (not blood heritage), we feel like this is part of our North American heritage, and we feel like we should all "stick together" to some extent.

One of the group's texts, *A Brief History of Gaelic in Seattle*, available on its web site, carries the hypothesis further and anticipates a second chance for Gaeldom to develop independently in America:

We have begun to see all this as a North American movement, but deeply rooted in and respectful of the traditional idiomatic language and culture of the Highlands. Many of us feel a strong connection with the North American Gaels in Cape Breton. We have used the analogy of a sapling from the Mother Tree transplanted far away. If our energy, enthusiasm and love for all things Gaelic can help to generate a New Forest, we will all be overjoyed.

More than anything else, Highland music signifies the rooting of Gaelic culture in North America. Gatherings that last long enough inevitably turn into song sessions, mostly songs that have group choruses. Given that traditional songs form a common literary corpus, language classes frequently use songs in learning material, as is common in the teaching of many languages. Many learners' groups, such as the following group in Ohio, begin, or punctuate, their classes with songs:

We use *Teach Yourself Gaelic* with occasional exercises, readings, and lessons from

other primers, and we constantly share song lyrics to learn correct pronunciations [...] On a typical evening, the singers meet early for an hour to practice, then we have tea and chat as the rest of the group arrives. An intensive hour of *TYG* comes next as we work through the text, punctuated with Dwelly-thumbings [searching through Dwelly's Gaelic dictionary] and digressions into grammar. (*Naidheachd* Spring 2001: 13).

Choral song allows not only singers to join in union with one another, but to temporarily assume the voices of Gaels separated from them by hundreds of years and thousands of miles. Although the degree to which Gaelic learners in North America are able to reproduce traditional singing styles and aesthetics is variable, nonetheless, group song affirms the persistence of tradition.

7. Tartanism Deposed

Scottish heritage is celebrated generally in North America with the conspicuous display of symbolic ethnicity, most especially tartan. The exaggerated form of Scottish identity which relies on these visual markers is generally referred to as "Tartanism" (c.f. Celeste Ray 2001). Although many Gaelic learners have some interaction with the mainstream Scottish heritage movement, most view it with dissatisfaction if not downright disgust. There were many caustic responses to question 47 ("What do you think of the way that Scottish heritage is generally represented and celebrated in North America?"), but a small selection will summarize the perspectives of most Gaelic learners:

It's a grotesque and abominable caricature.

Kitsch. It is all show and no substance. Things such as the [name omitted] Highland Games, for example, are ridiculous, superficial crap. I would much rather sit around a large wooden table in a run-down cottage in Nova Scotia with some older Cape Breton Gaels and learn songs while pounding tweed. That, the day-to-day folk interaction, is what culture is. It is not showboating with tartans, pipes, and caber tossing.

It is generally not well understood by many, even the members of the many clan societies. After 15 years as an officer in several capacities in Clan Donald, USA it still surprises me how many people have "Hollywood" perceptions of Scotland and "Mel Gibson" ideas of Scottish history.

The "Tartan Monster" takes the lion's share of money and attention in North America but Gaelic learners feel that the Scottish heritage movement does not adequately represent the heritage of the Highlands. A survey participant's anecdote about how she was initiated into Gaelic symbolizes this conflict:

I had picked up a copy of Morag MacNeil's *Everyday Gaelic* at the 1997 Flora MacDonald Games [in North Carolina], in order to see if learning Gaelic was possible for me. While I was perusing the book, a fellow in a kilt no less, said "No one can speak that anymore and it was unintelligible when they did." Well, I bristled at that and promptly bought the book. Almost immediately, I started recognizing phrases that my grandmother and grandfather had used and became a learner.

At the same time, some participants reflect (in a rather post-modern manner) that the "invented traditions" of Highlandism cannot be wished away or even educated away, despite the belief that Gaelic provides more authentic ways of understanding and celebrating Highland culture:

Tends to be something of an ersatz, ahistorical identity - more attention needs to be paid to language. At the same time, people have the right to take from traditions whatever they find most amenable to their own self-understanding, and even if what they appropriate is not "true" in some sense they should not be criticized for it.

Mostly a travesty, but it does provide otherwise rootless people with something to cling to and make them happy. I wish more people could turn their time and energy to the more interesting and more genuine Gaelic culture but I recognize that this is entirely out of my power to change and not worth worrying about.

The illusion of a static and homogeneous Scottish heritage and identity (Ray 2001: 46-52, 86-7) is quickly shattered by exposure to Gaelic oral tradition. Articulate participants did not hesitate to slaughter sacred cows when explaining how learning Gaelic has changed their perceptions of Scottish heritage (question 38):

I am less a tartan-and-bagpipe fan (though I still wear the kilt and listen to the pipes); I am aware that I am descended from crofters, farmers, ordinary soldiers, about whom little is recorded; I am jaundiced by the Bonnie Prince; I regret the loss of our land to economic and other interests that paid little heed to those who loved the land.

Associated reading has shown me the differences between the Lowlands and Highlands, and how in many ways Lowlanders were more hostile to Gaelic culture than the English.

It should be little surprise that those who expend considerable effort in learning Gaelic and understanding primary sources in the language (songs, folktales, and so on) become critical of Highlandism and less invested in the popular iconography of Scottish heritage:

I have a little more of a sense of what the culture is in terms of its own language, its own way of expressing itself, as opposed to English interpretations of it and Anglicised versions of it.

I have happily dropped all my preconceived notions of what it means to have Scottish

heritage, and all the material trappings that surround those notions.

In North America, those symbols are very important markers of being Scottish, the most public references to that ethnicity. I don't attend highland games in this country for the reason that they take on too much importance. They are the least important to me, with the exception of the old music for the pipes, the pibroch and dance music for the pipes. The military/parade connection is of no interest to me. Gaelic seems to be disjunct from all the public display, hidden, if not nearly lost in the noisy confusion.

I am developing a strong aversion to Scottish Kitsch and tartanism.

Similarly in Nova Scotia, "most learners who achieve proficiency in Gaelic will shed many of the tartanist notions they may have, or otherwise compartmentalize them as separate from their Gaelic identity" (Dembling 1997: 117).

Tartan is the badge of identity for those in the Scottish heritage movement, but tartan is notably absent during most of the course of Gaelic learners' events. Gaelic communities in both Scotland and Nova Scotia (in particular) have long since become estranged from tartan and kilts (see Dembling [1997: 35-9] for discussion of Nova Scotia). Given the self-conscious rejection of Highlandism by Gaelic learners, many people shun the display of Highland costume at Gaelic language events. If clothing is worn to send a message, it is more likely to be a T-shirt commemorating a past Gaelic learners' weekend or a Gaelic college or concert (or the Irish or Welsh equivalent) than a piece of tartan.

I wear a kilt and dress up for Highland games, and will continue to do so, but I'm becoming increasingly embarrassed at the artificiality of this environment.

I think that the language is a more integral part of the culture; after all, I doubt that many of my Scottish ancestors played the pipes or wore kilts, but I'm sure that most of them spoke Gaelic. I belong to two clan societies and it always surprises me that there's never a peep of Gaelic in any of their newsletters.

It is unusual for tartan or kilts to be worn during the course of normal Gaelic learners' events. When things become more "formal," such as during the official *céilidh* of the ACGA Immersion Weekend, however, a few people choose to don tartan or kilts (which are, after all, rather expensive items of clothing). The social atmosphere provides the freedom to indulge in such attire, but it is highly unusual for people to ask each other about their tartan or clan; they are far more likely to ask about their last visit to Cape Breton, how to find an unusual Gaelic book, or where to find the words of a song they were heard singing.

Responses to question 39 further illustrate that Gaelic learners perceive tartans and kilts to be inauthentic sublimations for Scottish heritage:

Kilts and tartans are more or less modern, even fake, and take no effort. The pipes do take a great deal of effort and knowledge, but are rather limited in comparison to the breadth of culture contained in language (and lost with it). The language is in danger of disappearing which the other aspects mentioned are not.

Gàidhlig is the heart and soul of the culture, whereas things such as kilts and bagpipes are only superficial amenities. A language reflects a way of thinking and viewing the world, and it is the mind of a people that makes them "a people."

[Gaelic is] more important, I think, because Gaelic predates all those things and will likely post-date them too. In Nova Scotia tartanism and military-style bagpiping tend to move in to areas where Gaelic has died out but where the people still feel a need to connect to something they are told is Scottish (e.g. Antigonish).

Especially in the US, the kilt and tartan are tossed about as examples of Scottishness with little concern over accuracy or chronology. Gaelic, to me, comes across as the "genuine article" as compared to the contrived tartan/shortbread/Victorian version of the Highlands.

8. Constructing Ethnicity and Identity

We should not assume, of course, that all Gaelic learners have the scholarly apparatus to come to all of these conclusions by themselves. Several periodicals help to inform the ideology of the Gaelic revival, especially Cape Breton's *Am Bràighe*. Twenty-eight percent of survey participants mentioned (in response to question 29) that they subscribe to *Am Bràighe*. Although a glance through any issue will bear relevant material, the first two paragraphs from the Editorial of the Winter 2002 issue are particularly appropriate to the subject at hand:

It is inarguable that adult Gaelic second language learners have become crucial to Gaelic development both in Nova Scotia and in Scotland. Once the process of learning a new language has begun, new insights emerge that allow you to see yourself, your community and even the world differently. Adult learners are often passionate advocates for their newly acquired language and culture and can offer perspectives and skills that benefit the traditional community.

This issue of *Am Bràighe* offers several examples of individuals for whom learning Gaelic has been an inspiration to work on behalf of the larger Gaelic community and even the global community of minority language speakers.

Am Bràighe currently devotes two to three pages of each issue to language revitalization developments in the larger world, especially Scotland, but sometimes also Ireland, the Isle of

Man, and other nations.

Another feature that distinguishes the Gaelic learners' movement from the Scottish heritage movement is the high degree of consciousness of the historical relationship between Scotland and Ireland and their common heritage. The vast majority of survey participants indicated that they understand Irish heritage to be related to Scottish Gaelic heritage (question 45), as a few sample responses will demonstrate:

I think that it is important for people studying Scottish Gaelic to be aware of the cultural commonality that existed/exists (?) between the two countries.

The connections between Irish and Scottish Gaelic are obvious and important, and I think that it would be advantageous for those associated with the languages to forge and continue links between the two. I think this is especially important given the problems facing Irish and Scottish Gaelic today.

Scottish Gaelic finds its roots in Irish, and Irish culture is a significant source for Scottish Gaelic culture. The same way I think British culture has had primary influence on American culture to date. They are not one and the same, but there's no mistaking the relationship.

The relationship between Scottish and Irish Gaeldom has been quite complex throughout history, and even Gaelic enthusiasts in Scotland tend to oversimplify the picture. The divergent destiny of each country in the British Empire has made the relationship particularly fraught. The Scottish heritage movement, while sometimes acknowledging the similarity between Highland and Irish names and languages (Ray 2001: 96), has generally underplayed the common origins of the two peoples because of the overwhelming influence of the ideology of "Britishness."

It is notable that the only negative reaction to the query about Irish culture (not quoted here) came from a person born in Scotland and now resident in Canada. A few other Gaelic learners are tangibly uneasy that the Irish have an unfairly large proportion of the "Celtic pie" and that the Scots are too commonly subsumed within Irish identity.

I'd rather disregard Ireland and Irish culture altogether not because it isn't related but because it gets too much play in this area to the detriment and misunderstanding of Scottish culture. Evidence: the leprechaun and clover (only barely modified) on our [Scottish event] t-shirts because the designer didn't know the difference.

Related but not always the SAME!

Language has a highly political role in forming identity and in relations between individuals and institutions. In recent years we have seen the growth of an English-only lobby in

the United States, a Gullah movement in the American South, numerous Native American language revitalization efforts and the politicization of French in Canada, to cite only a few examples. In such cases, language can be used as a symbolic statement about identity, rights, obligations, and a myriad of political issues. It is relevant to ask questions such as: Are Gaelic learners part of a movement of "white people" who are reacting to the ethnic assertions of people of color by emphasizing their own non-Anglo heritage? Do Gaelic learners feel a sense of competition or envy with other ethnicities?

The replies about Ireland quoted above show that there are some signs of competitiveness. A few other responses display some despair about the poor state of and support for Gaelic in North America, especially in relation to other immigrant groups:

It would be appropriate to be recognized as the invisible minority we are and to have more access to our culture, as I saw so many Chinese, Arabic, and E[ast] Indian books present in the Toronto Public Libraries.

I think it is generally ignored in the USA. Only Hispanic-, African-, [and] Native Americans are represented and celebrated, except for the activities of Clan and Scottish societies. The Press and Government do not represent us.

I'm not sure if we stand much of a chance in North America - I feel that multi-culturalism and political correctness lumps us in with the "Imperialists" and we are now somehow irrelevant.

Survey respondents reported a very low level of such feelings. As discussed previously, Gaelic learners tend to be multilingual and to approach the language with an idealism and sympathy that they feel for other minority cultures. For one survey participant (on question 42), for example, since learning Gaelic her sense of identity...

...has grown stronger and I have become more aware of other Celtic languages and the struggle to preserve them. It also causes me to encourage other minority people to try and learn their language.

It is difficult to find a single, unifying pattern to the interaction between the development of Gaelic learners' sense of ethnicity and their experience with Gaelic, given that they have differing goals, come from different backgrounds, and operate within different regional contexts. However, many people believe that they can internalize a Gaelic sensibility and forge a bond with Gaels that allows them to feel in some way a part of the wider Gaelic community. This, by extension, has ethnic implications:

While I don't call myself a Gael or Celt, I identify with Gaelic culture, feel a sense of loyalty to Gaelic culture, and tend to prefer and try to uphold traditional Gaelic values over the values of my own culture.

A sense of "Scottishness" has resulted from my study of the language.

How do Gaelic learners define their ethnicity? There was a range of responses to question 41, without any clear emergent pattern. This is due, in part at least, to the ambiguity of the term "ethnicity" in English. It is not clear in normal parlance if it refers to genetics (i.e., "race"), national citizenship, language, traditions, or some other means of identification. This ambiguity in the survey question was intended to discover how people defined the term. Responses varied, in part, based on the region and background of the person. People with closer family ties to the language are less likely to identify with the label "Scottish" but rather with the more specific ethnonym "Gael":

I can't think of anyone I know who places any importance on being Scottish-American or Scottish-Canadian (as opposed to Gaelic Canadian, say).

I am a Canadian living in Ontario who deeply identifies with my Cape Breton connections and through Cape Breton have always had a knowledge of my ties to Scotland. I am of Scottish descent but I am not Scottish. I am Canadian.

My goal is to strengthen my sense of identity; I identify with the concept of Gàidhealtachd [Gaeldom] and I feel Gàidhlig is an essential link to this identity.

While "clanship ideology" (c.f. Ray 2001: Chapter Three) is not a common bond between most Gaelic learners, it retains a strong hold on some learners that is hard for Gaelic to shake. It may be that people learn to maintain differing conceptions of ethnicity and identity:

Yes, I now feel a stronger affinity with my Scottish background. Why, I even went out and bought a kilt last year!

It has connected me with a past and a people who are part of me and who I am!

People in the United States were slightly more likely than Canadians to form hyphenated identity terms, which no doubt is due to the strong precedent of numerous other double-barreled ethnonyms and the rhetoric of racial essentialism:

Scots-German-Swede, i.e. American Northern European mutt.

Scots-English-Irish.

I am 1/2 German, and the rest is Scottish, Irish, English, French and Cherokee Indian.

Probably Scottish/Irish/Celtic-American if that can be called a specific ethnic identity. I wouldn't want to be particularly exclusive about it.

Even so, "Scottish," "Scottish-Canadian" or "Scottish-American" was not a dominant answer in any region and many people did not assert that they had any specific ethnicity. Some gave replies as unexpected as "Yiddish-American," "Italian," "New Englander," or "Southern white boy," while others explain that despite a variety of ancestral origins, they have chosen to identify with their Scottish connections:

I have identified with my Scottish heritage since I was a child, even though I have just as many Dutch ancestors as Scottish.

My background is such a hodge-podge of cultures (Scottish / German / English / Native American) that I can't really identify myself with any of them. However I feel strongest about (and the proudest of) my Scottish and Native American ties.

Regardless of the complexity of ethnic labels, everybody needs a personal label, that is, a name. Most learners generally use a Gaelic-friendly name. There are a number of reasons for this, including the phonological characteristics of Gaelic (which don't work well with many non-Gaelic names) and the ability of a Gaelic name to help a learner form a Gaelic identity.

There are Gaelic equivalents for all of the saints' names and Biblical characters, and since many learners have a name of this sort, most people use rather straightforward transliterations of their names. Michael, for example, becomes *Micheal*, Mary *Màiri*, John *Iain* (or *Eòin*), and so on. Some whose names have no corresponding Gaelic match have selected middle or family names. Others have adopted or coined names that describe their personalities, aspirations or values, or display their knowledge of Gaelic tradition. For example, one person chose the name *Giolla Brìde* [servant of Bridget] "because I am a poet, and Brìde is said to oversee poetry." Another took the name *Mòrag* because "I like the name, it is close to my (Welsh) middle name Morgan, and I have found references to it in folklore."

Others adopted names suggested by a teacher, or had one assigned to them because of a memorable event or trait. It should be noted that nicknames are extremely common in the Gaelic world (some quite comic, others rather insulting) and acquiring one could be considered a normal part of socialization in a Gaelic environment.

Cìobar (The Keeper) is a nickname, as I keep house, keep the books, keep organized,

keep my husband motivated... you get the idea.

Peitean [Vest] was given to me by an expatriate Gael living in [placename] on the occasion of my receipt of a vest made of hand-woven and waulked tweed from my students.

The farther a Gaelic learner goes in the learning process, the more they feel that their identity and their perceptions change in the process. This does not allow many, however, to entertain the possibility that they have actually become "Gael," and, indeed, the Gaelic community in Scotland has shown signs of resisting any such claim.

9. Belonging: People, Language, and Place

In Gaelic communities in both Scotland and Cape Breton, the mother tongue invokes a spectrum of emotions, but most poignant of these are guilt, shame, regret, and loss. Teachers punished schoolchildren for speaking Gaelic into the twentieth century, and this encouraged internalizing messages about the inferiority of the language. These feelings can usually stay safely submerged, but encountering a Gaelic learner who may be positively gushing with excitement (and perhaps naiveté and high expectations) can cause a Scot (or Cape Bretoner) to feel a sense of cognitive dissonance.

Fluent Gaelic speakers who were not born to Gaelic-speaking parents in traditional communities are a very recent development in Scotland; the Gaelic world is still trying to accommodate this new identity, currently labeled *Gàidheil Ùra* "new (or nouveau) Gaels" (McLeod 2001: 19-21; Morgan 2000; *Cothrom* 31:37-9). The development of Gaelic medium education open to children whose parents speak no Gaelic, and the increasing presence of Gaelic learners who have taken up important roles in the Gaelic world, has opened up debate about who the language "belongs to."

Gaelic learners make pilgrimages to Scotland and Nova Scotia in search of native speakers, language courses, and contact with the traditional community. A visitor's experience in a *Gàidhealtachd* will naturally vary according to expectations, personality, what they do, how long they stay, and the people with whom they come into contact. Many people who interact with the local community to any great extent get the impression that most native Gaels find it bewildering (if not absurd) that anyone rational would want to learn Gaelic:

Most of the native speakers at the college were supportive, but somewhat baffled as to why I wanted to learn Gaelic.

I get the overall feeling that they think that you must be nuts to want to learn Gaelic, but they are happy and proud that you are doing so at the same time.

They were polite, but thought I was crazy.

The few people I mentioned it to thought it was rather strange.

A few others related more antagonistic reactions in Scotland:

I have been approached by non-Gaelic speaking Scots who have felt quite strongly that Gaelic studies, and their funding, are a huge waste of time and money.

I've found that most people from Scotland that I run into think I'm crazy to "learn a dead language." It isn't respected as a language and certainly not one worthy of surviving.

According to several respondents, Nova Scotians generally appear to be more welcoming and supportive of learners than people in Scotland:

[I felt] surprised, encouraged, discouraged and embarrassed. Some Scottish Gaels seem to think it's a good thing; others seem to think it's strange or even wrong ("It's ours and you shouldn't have it."). I've had nothing but positive reactions from people from Nova Scotia.

People in Nova Scotia seem more tolerant and more likely to encourage you and more likely to admit that while they didn't grow up with it, they have studied it a bit. One man from Nova Scotia that I know really resents his fluent father for not teaching him the language.

It is easy for Gaels in traditional communities to maintain a cautious psychological distance from the casual tourist interested in genealogy, but the Gaelic learner is probing into unresolved and perhaps irresolvable issues of cultural discontinuity. The mixed emotional signals confuse many learners, who reported a wide variety of emotional responses to their social encounters on survey question 34.

Moreover, there are subtle differences in social mores and protocols that can complicate the intercourse between Gaelic learners and native speakers (particularly in Scotland). As one person noted:

Americans, with our abrupt and boisterous ways, seem to occasionally overwhelm the Scottish native speakers. More specifically, while at [event] on [place] I have seen Americans be very pushy about getting things the way they want them (i.e., demanding that a teacher provide written lyrics before teaching a song, though she believes her students learn best by ear and provides the written lyrics only at the end of a lesson). The Scots seem a bit distressed with this behavior [...] they pointed out that a native Gael might just as strongly want to get things his/her way, but island manners would cause

them to approach it in a less direct and forceful way.

Barriers such as these can prevent a simple and total identification with Scotland, and help to keep allegiances closer to home. Just as Gaelic learners typically characterize their language community as consisting of layers radiating outward (local, regional, national, and global), so too do many identify with a number of ancestral homelands as their kin made a progressive migration (question 44):

The once Gaelic speaking region of Bruce County in Ontario - my father's people settled there in the mid-nineteenth century.

I know where my people came from and I am familiar with some parts of those lands, especially Jura where my grandmother came from. I am less familiar with my grandfather's people and where they came from. I am somewhat familiar with areas in eastern North Carolina and Alabama where my more recent ancestors lived. I am very interested in researching any connections between Gaelic speaking communities/families in North Carolina and in Canada.

Parish of Sleat, Isle of Skye; Moore County, North Carolina.

I identify strongly with North Carolina because my grandfather who I was named after was born there. My favorite part of Scotland is Kintail where the MacRaes came from.

Rugadh agus thugadh mi ann an ["I was born and raised in"] Louisiana. I feel a strong connection to the woods, the fields, the rivers and wetlands there. I also feel a connection to North Carolina because my grandfather was born there, and to Nova Scotia, having been there and knowing some of the people there and because it is the most prominent remaining place the language is spoken in North America. I would like to visit the lands where the MacAoidh clan lived in Scotland some day.

As the last informant explained, however, many people have bonded with Cape Breton Island as the Gaelic homeland that corresponds to their identity as North Americans. Not only are the differences in cultural norms less pronounced, the traditions that have survived are often seen to be more "authentic" and less fragmented than those that have survived in Scotland (question 46).

I haven't been to Scotland. From what little I know, it seems that Cape Breton may have continued a more "pure" lineage of various musical, poetic and storytelling traditions. I am somehow more drawn to Cape Breton than to Scotland, personally.

It has lived on and flourished in areas outside Scotland while dwindling within Scotland itself. From talking to others, I gather the culture, songs, stories and legends are being brought back to areas of Scotland where they had been forgotten.

I think that the Cape Breton Gaelic community has nurtured its culture in a remarkable way, in music, language, literature, and social tradition. It appears more difficult in Scotland, due to the fact that much of Scotland is, and was, non-Gaelic. Plus, I think Gaelic culture in Scotland dealt with long-term marginalization in the greater national culture, and has not yet been identified as a common unifying factor for the Scottish nation. Expatriates tend to identify more heavily with their ancestral roots, because they are separated from them. Maybe that is why most modern Scots are amused at American, Canadian, Australian, etc., fascination with Scottish culture.

[Cape Breton] escaped the fate of Scottish Gaeldom's subordination into a Victorian/British Empire consciousness. However much North American Gaels may have been influenced by North America-Anglo culture (or other cultures in North America), they weren't beaten down and defeated by it as they were in Scotland. So the change was more organic and more on the Gaels' own terms.

In Scotland Gaelic seems to be presented in a formal way and in Cape Breton it is more about having fun. In Scotland there is a lot of competition around Gaelic such as what happens at the Mòd. That never occurs in Cape Breton.

North Americans go in search of their roots precisely because they are, on the whole, members of a rootless society. An article discussing the development of Celtic departments in Canadian universities makes relevant observations:

Some of those pursuing Celtic studies are mature students looking to enrich their lives and answer questions about their roots. For many of the younger students, it's part of a growing dissatisfaction with a shallow and homogeneous popular culture. They're looking to the culture of their grandparents. [...] Celtic studies students seem to grasp, as do a growing number of people from all backgrounds, that by keeping these ancient languages and cultures alive, they're preserving something priceless for future generations. (Fitzpatrick 2002: 15, 17).

The consciousness of the rapid rate of cultural and linguistic shift in the modern age, and the construction of personal identity as a matter of free will, has facilitated movements to "reclaim" many aspects of bygone societies. There are organizations reviving dead languages, neo-Pagans reclaiming (or at least creatively constructing) primal religions, and so on.

It should be no surprise that many people who did not have the opportunity to learn Gaelic from their family are now looking to reconnect to this culture and reconstitute a fragmented inheritance.

The sad thing is that my parents were bilingual and I didn't realize what that meant for them until recently and I am proud of them and what they could do: converse in two languages. I agree with one of my classmates who said, "This could have been mine" and this saddens me as well. It also motivates me because it is mine; I just have to work at

making it so.

10. Conclusions

Gaelic-learners take advantage of the post-modern freedom to choose one's own identity (within certain parameters) according to personal criteria, rather than inheritance. At the same time they strive to support and understand the vestiges of a traditional (and often conservative) ethnic community, and hope, in doing so, to gain a more authentic understanding of Highland culture than is offered by Tartanism.

The Gaelic learners' movement has the potential to change considerably the interpretation of Scottish history and heritage by stripping away the layers of Highlandism and by providing an alternative perspective, that of the Highlanders themselves. It will be difficult to realize this potential, however, given the lack of an institutional framework and the shortage of "missionaries" with the proper skills.

Perhaps the most limiting factor is the significant intellectual requirements for full participation. One must not only have the necessary linguistic skills, but also cultural sensitivity and the ability to negotiate between the aesthetics and literary corpus of the traditional Gaelic community, on the one hand, and the all-pervasive Tartan Monster, on the other. The enormous task of deconstructing the myths of Highlandism that have become systemic in the representation and celebration of Scottish heritage, even in the way that Scotland promotes itself, is likely an intractable problem.

The Gaelic revitalization movement in Scotland essentially kick-started the corresponding enthusiasm in North America. The difficulty in accessing Scotland's limited resources, and the ambivalent (and sometimes unreceptive) reaction of Scots to Gaelic learners in North America, diminishes the potential impact of North Americans in the larger picture. Regardless of this, it should be noted that Gaelic learners from North America have made significant contributions to Gaelic revitalization efforts both in North America and in Scotland itself.

Gaelic learners and the native Gaelic community share the same cultural canon but do not always agree on how that corpus is to be interpreted, revitalized, and kept alive. As revivalists making selective use of Gaelic language and tradition (sometimes dialects and customs that are for all practical purposes now extinct), Gaelic learners may find a degree of mutual

misunderstanding between themselves and the traditional Gaelic communities. This is to be expected in revivalist movements, and demonstrates the post-modern quality of the Gaelic learners' movement.

Regardless of such complications, Gaelic learners ally themselves with the native Gaelic community and perceive themselves in contradistinction to the mainstream Scottish heritage movement. In an article in a newspaper primarily addressed to the inhabitants of the Hebrides and Western Highlands of Scotland, Bill MacAskill (2002) remarks, in the wake of a massive "Tartan Day" celebration in New York:

The irony of it all is the aping of our true history with the kilt and bagpipes froth of today. However, a visit to any of the larger North American Highland Games shows a culture which is now entirely their own. The symbols are recognisable but the beliefs are based on myth. But they are happy with it and fiercely proud of their perceived heritage, and why not? Similarly we cannot complain if these mythical symbols of tartan, bagpipes, shortbread and the kilt are hijacked by the marketing men to create jobs for our people. We know the real history.

Gaelic learners feel that they too come to know the reality behind the Tartan veil, and would argue that they have discovered the best antidote to the Tartanism that causes so many Scots to cringe.

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Endnotes

¹ A future survey might restrict itself to events and memberships of Gaelic organizations to prevent bias from electronic forms of communication.

² I have corrected spelling and punctuation and expanded abbreviations in some of these texts.

³ Some preliminary results from his research were printed in MacCaluim 1999.

⁴ Census results for overall population were taken from the CIA World Factbook website, but can be found on <http://www.statcan.ca/english/Estat/guide/cen-info.htm> and <http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/01statab/stat-ab01.html>

⁵ The questionnaire unfortunately only asked how many "other" languages the participant speaks. It did not specify whether English counted as one of those languages, and it is clear that some people did not count it. Thus, the actual average may be slightly higher than the results shown here.

⁶ c.f. Meek 2000, especially Chapters One through Three, for a relevant deconstruction of "Celtic Christianity."

⁷ I unfortunately did not offer the option "Never" on my survey, although some participants gave that response. Thus, "Never" might have been chosen by more participants had it been available.

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Appendix A The Survey Questionnaire

Note that while in the original questionnaire the questions were grouped together in sections that had titles and Roman numerals, the questions were not numbered originally.

I. Background

- (1) Country of Origin
- (2) Current Residence
- (3) What is your age range? (1-9, 10-19, 20-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-69, 70+)
- (4) How many other languages do you speak, read, or write?
- (5) What is your highest level of education?
- (6) What is your religious affiliation?

II. Motivations

- (7) How did you first become aware of Gaelic?
- (8) Please rate from 0 (no relevance at all) to 10 (crucial) your reasons for learning Gaelic:
 - (a) Learning languages broadens one's knowledge: ____
 - (b) Gaelic is a rich and expressive language: ____
 - (c) I would be able to enjoy Gaelic music better: ____
 - (d) I would be able to read Gaelic literature: ____
 - (e) I would be able to speak to native Gaels in their own language: ____
 - (f) No one can understand the Highlands without knowing Gaelic: ____
 - (g) I would be helping to keep Gaelic alive: ____
 - (h) Some or all of my ancestors spoke Gaelic: ____
 - (i) Any other reasons:
- (9) What are your goals for learning Gaelic?
- (10) How long have you been learning Gaelic?
- (11) What level of fluency have you reached? (1= just starting, 10 = totally fluent)

III. Gaelic Study

- (12) What is the best Gaelic learning experience that you have had? Why?
- (13) What books, tapes, videos, or computer resources have you used?
- (14) What would make it easier for you to learn Gaelic?

- (15) How many Gaelic learners do you know of in your local area?
- (16) How often do you speak Gaelic with other learners? Daily; weekly; monthly; rarely.
- (17) How often do you speak Gaelic with native speakers? Daily; weekly; monthly; rarely.
- (18) Do you interact with other Gaelic learners in North America? Y/N If so, how?
- (19) Did, or will, you compete in the North American Mòd? Y/N
- (20) Do you wish to adopt a particular dialect? Y/N/Undecided Which one, and why?
- (21) Do you use a name other than your given name in Gaelic classes, or in Gaelic correspondence? Y/N If yes, what is that name?
- (22) (If yes,) How and why did you choose the name? If not, why not?

IV. Engagement in Tradition

- (23) What aspects of Gaelic oral tradition interests you the most? Select two at most: Song; Poetry; Children's Rhymes; Folktales; Legends; Proverbs; Charms; Prayers.
- (24) Have you memorized any Gaelic texts (songs, poems, Bible verses, prayers, stories/tales, other)? Y/N About how many minutes' worth?
- (25) Do you perform these piece(s) for other people? Y/N If so, where and on what occasion(s)?
- (26) Would you like more opportunities to perform your memorized piece(s)? Y/N

V. Literacy

- (27) Do you read Gaelic texts other than textbooks? Select all that apply: children's books; short stories; novels; poetry collections; newspapers; songbooks.
- (28) Why do you use them?
- (29) Which Gaelic periodicals do you subscribe to?

VI. Relationship to Scotland & Nova Scotia

- (30) Have you traveled to Scotland or Nova Scotia? How long have you spent there in total?
- (31) Did you go to Scotland or Nova Scotia before or after you started learning Gaelic?
- (32) Did you do any "Gaelic activities" while you were in Scotland or Nova Scotia? (Gaelic courses, concerts, milling frolics, ceilidhs, dances, other)
- (33) How did people that you met react to you as a Gaelic learner from North America?

(34) How did you feel about their reactions? (indifferent, surprised, encouraged, discouraged, proud, embarrassed, other)

(35) What do people in Scotland or Nova Scotia appear to think in general about Gaelic learners from North America?

(36) Do you have any future plans to study Gaelic in Scotland or Cape Breton? Why/Why not?

VII. Related Heritage Activities & Perceptions

(37) As a Gaelic learner, do you feel yourself to be part of a community or movement? Y/N How would you define it?

(38) Has your experience as a Gaelic learner changed your perceptions of Scottish heritage? Y/N How?

(39) How do you think that Gaelic as an aspect of Highland heritage compares with other aspects, such as the kilt, and tartan, and bagpipes?

(40) Which of these Scottish heritage activities do you participate in? Clan societies, Pipe bands, Scottish Societies (e.g., St. Andrews), Highland Games, Highland dancing, Scottish Country Dancing, Musical groups, Burns Nights, re-enactment societies?

(41) Do you feel that you have a specific ethnic identity or identities? Y/N What is it?

(42) Has this sense of identity changed since you have been involved in Gaelic? Y/N How?

(43) Do you feel that religious affiliation is relevant to a Scottish-American/Canadian identity? Y/N How?

(44) Do you identify with any particular geographical communities or ancestral lands in Scotland or North America? Y/N Where and why?

(45) Do you regard Ireland, or Irish culture and history, as relevant or related to Scottish Gaelic heritage? Y/N How?

(46) What do you think of Gaelic tradition as it has survived in North America (esp. Cape Breton) as compared to Scotland?

(47) What do you think of the way that Scottish heritage is generally represented and celebrated in North America?

(48) What are your hopes for Gaelic in North America, and in your life?

Appendix B Some Statistics

The following are statistics (averages and standard deviation), rounded to the nearest tenth, for some of the questions on the survey.

(3) Age.	Average 45, StDev 13.
(4) Languages.	Average 2.3, StDev 1.2.
(8) (a) Language broadens one's knowledge.	Average 6.8, StDev 2.7.
(b) Rich language.	Average 7.2, StDev 2.8.
(c) Gaelic music.	Average 6.7, StDev 2.8.
(d) Gaelic literature.	Average 7.2, StDev 2.7.
(e) Speak to native Gaels.	Average 7.7, StDev 2.4.
(f) Can't understand Highlands without Gaelic.	Average 6.3, StDev 2.9.
(g) Keeping Gaelic alive.	Average 8.6, StDev 2.1.
(h) Ancestors spoke Gaelic.	Average 6.4, StDev 3.7.
(10) How long have you been learning Gaelic?	Average 5.9 years, StDev 8.
(11) Level of fluency.	Average 3.8, StDev 2.0.
(15) Other Gaelic learners in area.	Average 11.2, StDev 15.
(24) Minutes of memorized Gaelic texts.	Average 20, StDev 36.